

# The *Issei* Lag and Other Wonders

Jack Chambers

*University of Toronto*

Among the professional interests that Junko Hibiya and I share, one of our closest bonds comes from the sociolinguistics of immigration. We met when Junko came to Toronto on a research junket to gather data on *Issei* variation among Japanese immigrants in Canada. Her subjects were elders living at the Momiji seniors residence, a friendly gathering place for Japanese immigrants who had settled in Canada years earlier. Junko was intent on discovering how their move to Canada affected their use of their mother tongue, and equally interested, as a disciple of William Labov, in how their mother tongue affected their second language (Hibiya 2005).

My interest in the sociolinguistics of immigration started with an historical angle: the origins of Canadian English are rooted in eighteenth century Great Britain when the first European settlers began occupying North America. Those roots are the same for all varieties of English on the vast continent, but the region that became Canada also had a massive incursion of immigrants from Great Britain and Ireland a century later, which the United States missed. Many of the differences between Canadian English and American English came about through the influence of these later immigrants to Canada, who tended to fill positions of influence as teachers, manufacturers and politicians. My sociolinguistic research on Canadian English a century *after* their arrival showed a remarkable result: many of the variants overlaid on the native dialect by these late-arriving Britishers were disappearing in favour of the older North American variants. After almost a century of non-contentious variation (*either* with British [aj] or native [ij], *schedule* with British [ʃ] or native [sk], *tomato* with British [ɑ] or native [ej], to cite a few obvious examples) the British variants were dropping out of use.

At the same time, Canada was (and still is) receiving immigrants from around the globe at a record rate, transforming Canada's old Anglo-Celtic hegemony into one of the most multilingual and multicultural societies in the world. Obviously, that is what made it an attractive site for Junko Hibiya's study of *Issei*-variation. For sociolinguists, Canada presented a living laboratory for the social and linguistic dynamics of immigration.

## 1 Four Sociolinguistic Themes

In studies of immigrant enclaves, four sources of variation seem to me to emerge as indicators of the social and linguistic dynamics (Chambers 2003):

- The Language Gap
- The Literacy Gap
- The Integration Gap
- Inverse Assimilation

The Language Gap makes an essential distinction between immigrants who arrive speaking a variety of the national language and those who do not. The distinction splits them into dialect/accent (D/A) immigrants and second-language (SL) immigrants. Both D/A immigrants and SL immigrants are "audible minorities," because the former speak with an accent that is different from the natives (in Canada, varieties of Jamaican, Indian, Australian, and other Englishes) and the S/L immigrants speak interlanguages (in Canada, ESL or FSL varieties). For centuries, native-born children of both D/A and SL immigrants were expected to lose any trace of the parental accent, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century linguists are discovering a new phenomenon as the influence of D/A varieties in large cities sometimes leads to the preservation and spread of some D/A features to form new "multicultural" varieties (Cheshire et al. 2011).

The Literacy Gap measures the discrepancy in learnable skills such as reading and writing between the native population and SL immigrants. In rare circumstances it might apply to D/A immigrants if they come from educationally disadvantaged circumstances. The Literacy Gap has been studied on a global scale (Chambers 2003). The gap exists in every nation, but it is significantly lower in some nations than in others, showing that educational initiatives can effectively narrow the gap. In contemporary societies literacy proficiency is essential for success, and providing the means for reducing the literacy gap should be viewed as a civil right, and a political priority.

The Integration Gap is mainly a function of national and communal policies. The main dimensions form a graded scale between the poles of what sociologists identify as assimilation at one end and integration at the other. Assimilation decrees that immigrants must conform to what are seen as norms and conventions of their new society, a model sometimes described as the "melting pot"; when official sanctions are stringently enforced it is called a "pressure cooker." It is a model that has met with limited success and sometimes social unrest. Under

extreme conditions, immigrants who resist assimilation in cultures that require it become marginalized. Integration has been adopted (in Canada and elsewhere) as a more viable alternative, with supporting policies that encourage immigrant groups to preserve customs, maintain their native languages beyond the first generation and generally maintain their diversity. It is a model sometimes described as a “cultural mosaic.” In Canada, the mechanisms for promoting integration rather than assimilation have proven largely unobtrusive, consisting of simple devices such as multilingual notices in public places such as hospitals and government bureaus; street signs in the language of the neighbourhood as well as the official language, and subsidized instruction for children in the language of their parents or grandparents.

Inverse Assimilation occurs when enclave features become markers of the integrated immigrant community. One of the desired results of integration is retention of the immigrant language beyond the second generation. Bilingualism in the immigrant language and the national language then becomes a marker of the community. Another is the rare occurrence in which variants of the second-language variety are retained in native varieties so that they come to be recognized not as SL markers but as features of local or urban accents. “Multiethnolects” in London, England, and other diverse cities may indicate that variant retention is not as rare nowadays as in former generations, but we are awaiting real-time studies for evidence that the retentions are permanent rather than ephemeral. The suspicion that adolescents in London may affect Jamaican features merely as fads is labeled “Jafaican,” a portmanteau of ‘fake Jamaican’. Time will tell if the speakers retain the D/A features beyond adolescence, and if they are passed down to their offspring.

These four sociolinguistic themes are embedded in the social fabric with different temporal consequences. The first two, Language Gap and Literacy Gap, under normal circumstances are transient. They are expected to disappear with the emergence of the first native-born generation. Under normal circumstances, the children of immigrants, both D/A and SL immigrants, will speak with the same accent and dialect features as their non-immigrant schoolmates and playmates. The other two themes, the Integration Gap and Inverse Assimilation, are likely to be longer-lasting, perhaps permanent, though not necessarily, as we shall see in the case studies I discuss below.

In what follows, I am going to look at specific studies that involve the latter two themes, the Integration Gap and Inverse Assimilation, and develop a couple of Japanese examples that were not in the first instance viewed in the framework of the sociolinguistics of immigration.

## **2 The Integration Gap and Japanese Students Abroad**

The Integration Gap is a continuum, and the gap can widen under many social circumstances. Most of those circumstances, possibly all of them, involve the isolation of an individual or group from the mainstream of the new society. The paradigmatic example two or three generations ago centred on housebound women. In the middle of the twentieth century, many immigrants came from countries where it was strange or rare (or sometimes forbidden) for women to work outside the home. If the families settled in an established ethnic enclave, as did many Italian families in Toronto, it was not uncommon or unexpected for the matriarch to master few or no skills in the official language. The integration gap was in many cases a veritable gulf. It was an accident of the domestic situation, perhaps an unfortunate one but not generally viewed (at the time) as a deprivation.

The Integration Gap can be widened deliberately as well, as the result of political policy. Chinese immigrants in Hungary are in their unanimous opinions made to feel unwelcome. Government policy enforces monthly visa checks, deports immigrants who are momentarily out of work or show signs of health risk, and denies them citizenship (Langman 1995/96). Not surprisingly, Chinese immigrants do not set down roots in the country. They live in ghettos, and work mainly in restaurants or markets alongside fellow immigrants. Many do not learn to speak Hungarian, and very few attain literacy skills in it. Those who can speak Hungarian generally speak a rudimentary variety learned “in the context of the marketplace” (Langman 1995/96: 326). Under these circumstances, the Integration Gap is almost absolute, and deliberate.

An interesting and perhaps special case of the Integration Gap comes from a study of the types of schools attended by Japanese children overseas (cited by Sanada and Long 1998, based on a report by Kyôko Yashiro). The gap is a continuum but, as we shall see, it correlates significantly with geography.

Table 1 shows the results of a survey of Japanese children enrolled in schools outside of Japan. The schoolchildren are grouped according to the continent or region where they attend school. They are further grouped according to the school they are attending, with three types: (1) local schools in the country they are living in, or (2) local schools but with supplemental classes in Japanese, or (3) Japanese schools. These “immigrants” are, of course, a rarefied population—privileged, dependent, probably temporary. The choice of school almost certainly reflects the attitudes of their parents, but the global spread of the fine-tuned data make it revealing.

Perhaps the most obvious observation from the table is the discrepancy in the places where the students study: 90 percent of those who study abroad are found in Asia, Europe or North America. The reason for the popularity of these three regions is presumably that they offer greater opportunities for parents to take up commercial

transfers and professional practices. The number of students in each region presumably differs (neither the raw numbers nor the ages are available in my sources) but the trends indicated by the percentages seem to present a coherent pattern.

	local schools	supplemental classes	Japanese schools	percent of total
Asia	8.2	0.8	91.0	23.2%
C & S America	19.2	7.9	72.8	4.4%
Middle East	17.6	12.7	69.7	1.2%
Africa	27.1	16.9	56.0	1.2%
Australia, NZ	45.1	15.2	39.7	3.3%
Europe	30.4	31.6	38.0	24.1%
N. America	18.5	77.6	3.9	42.6%

Table 1 — Types of schools attended by Japanese children overseas, either local (vernacular) schools, with additional Japanese classes, or special Japanese schools, by continents, with relative proportions in each continent (Yashiro 1991, cited in Sanada and Long 1998: 192-93).

The preference pattern for school choices varies according to region. In Asia, Central & South America, the Middle East and Africa the majority of children attend Japanese schools. In Australia & New Zealand, Europe and North America the majority attend local schools and take supplemental Japanese classes. Of these, the greatest variability is found in Europe with an almost even split between local schools alone (30 percent) and local schools with supplemental classes (32 percent), and a small advantage for Japanese schools (38 percent).

The reason for both these trends is the same. Parents are choosing local schools for their children when the language of instruction is English. In Australia/New Zealand and North America, English is almost inevitably the language of instruction (except for the province of Quebec in Canada). Thus the school choice overwhelmingly includes local schools (60 percent in Australia/New Zealand, 96 percent in North America). In Europe, English is the language of instruction in Great Britain and Ireland but not elsewhere unless parents choose a private English-language institution. So Japanese parents in Europe apparently tend to choose local schools in English-speaking countries (62 percent) and Japanese schools elsewhere (38 percent). Parental preference for English-language instruction is the recognition of its function as the global lingua franca, a fact that would certainly loom large for this cosmopolitan coterie.

Another trend becomes abundantly clear when Yashiro's table is transliterated into a bar graph as in Figure 1. Obviously the choice of school type is highly variable: across the graph, the expanse of each shade in the bars makes a diverse pattern. But the diversity forms a pattern when one isolates Japanese-language maintenance as a factor. It is represented by the bars from the bottom up, excluding the top shade, that is, excluding local schools only (*without* extra Japanese classes). The bars for Japanese-language maintenance (combining black and light grey) range from 70 to 90 percent except in Australia/New Zealand (56 percent), where presumably Japanese schools and Japanese tutors are harder to find). Out of this observation comes an overriding parental rule for their children studying abroad: the children can learn English but not at the expense of Japanese.

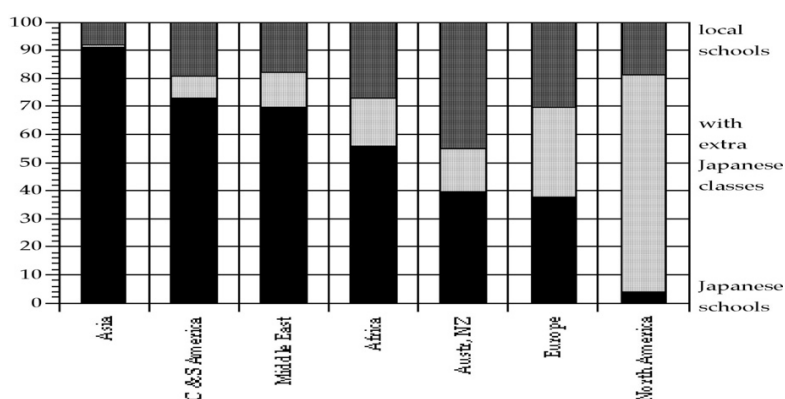


Figure 1 — School choices for Japanese children abroad: local schools (charcoal grey at top of bar), local schools with extra Japanese classes (grey), and Japanese schools (black at bottom). Based on Table 1 above.

I find these observations so interesting that they led me to postpone the real point of this discussion, which is the Integration Gap. (I should note in passing that the data I am citing here are almost 30 years old; if the study could be replicated today it would undoubtedly make a newsworthy comparison.) School choices for children abroad have implications not only for the children’s exposure to languages but also for their exposure to the vernacular culture and, most influentially, to local children who are their age-mates. That is, Japanese children whose schooling puts them into local schools mingle with children who belong to the local culture. Exposure by itself is no guarantee that the child will be more integrated into the local culture because personality and other social factors enter into the matter, but exposure at least brings the opportunity for integration. Looking again at Figure 1, the black bar represents the proportion of children abroad who are enrolled in Japanese schools, that is, children who spend their schooldays among other Japanese children with Japanese teachers or teachers conversant with Japanese culture. Their exposure to children from the vernacular culture must take place outside of the school day if it takes place at all, whereas children in local schools, with or without supplemental Japanese classes, share their days—and perhaps their desks, their pens, their iPads, maybe even their lunch, and so much more—with those children.

The figure shows a clear tendency for parents to limit their children’s exposure to vernacular cultures in other Asian countries and a strong tendency to limit it in Central & South America and the Middle East. In North America, the tendency is just the opposite: parents choose local schools almost unanimously, and with them exposure to local children and local culture.

The Integration Gap will vary from one child to the next, as it does for adults regardless of circumstances, but the choice of schools for Japanese children studying abroad makes the opportunity for integration readily available for some and more difficult for others.

### 3 Inverse Assimilation and the *Issei* Lag

In an earlier era, it was common for philologists to discuss what they called “colonial lag,” a tendency for languages transplanted from the homeland to a new colony to preserve some conservative features no longer found (or heard) in the home varieties. If those features come to represent the speech in an enclave or a neighborhood or a region, they became markers of the dialect in those places. Though the phenomenon took on a kind of mystical quality when the philologists talked about it, it became demystified with the advent of sociolinguistics. Instead of viewing language at two historical stages and noting ‘exotic’ retentions in the transplanted variety, sociolinguists look at who is doing the retaining and who is doing the innovating, and the differences usually find a fairly likely, perhaps even an obvious, explanation.

Here is a case study in Japanese from Shigeo Okamoto illustrating “colonial lag” or, in this Japanese context, *Issei* lag, and its sociolinguistic explanation. The data come from women’s language (*onna rashii*) involving gendered sentence-final forms. These forms have undergone many changes in Japan since the 1970s, and Okamoto’s examples will already be outdated by further changes since she presented her data. I offer it here not for its contemporary relevance but for its simple clarity as an example of *Issei*-lag with a sensible sociolinguistic explanation.

Okamoto (1995) categorized sentence-final forms according to their gender-sensitivity according to prescriptive Japanese grammars. The specific forms are not relevant to the point I am interested in here, but they may be interesting to some readers, especially younger ones, for whom this phenomenon might be unfamiliar. Okamoto classifies the sentence-final forms as feminine strong (*iku wa* ‘I am going’), feminine moderate (*iku no* ‘it’s that I am going’), neutral (*iku* ‘I’m going’), masculine strong (*iku ze* ‘I’m going, I tell you’), and masculine moderate (*iku yo* ‘I’m going, I tell you’). She interviewed women in two age groups, young (18-20) and middle-aged (45-57), and calculated the percentage of sentence-final forms for each of the categories.. Her results are shown in Table 2.

Sentence-final forms	women 18-20	women 45-57	45-57 Tokyo	45-57 US immigrant
feminine	12.3	50	24	70
masculine	18.9	6	15	1
neutral	68.8	44	61	29

Table 2— Use of gendered sentence-final forms by Japanese women in two age groups (18-20 and 45-57), and results for two individuals (identified as “Tokyo” and “US immigrant”) in the older group (Okamoto 1995, Table 12.3)

Columns 2 and 3 illustrate the dramatic shift in women’s use of gender-sensitive forms in the roughly thirty years that separate the two age groups. The younger women use many fewer of the markedly feminine endings (12 percent compared to 50 percent for the middle-aged women) and ramp up their use of both neutral forms and the forms considered to be markedly masculine. These differences are especially dramatic considering that the

two age groups are generationally contiguous, that is, they could (and in some cases do) represent mothers and daughters. This shift has taken place in one generation.

For our purposes, the relevant result is the one shown in columns 4 and 5. As it happened, Okamoto was studying in the United States when she undertook this research. Her subjects were mainly from Tokyo but she also found a few closer at hand, that is, Tokyo natives who had immigrated to the United States. One of them, identified in the table as “45-57 US immigrant,” differed noticeably from all the others in her use of gendered sentence-final forms. In the table I have shown her results alongside another individual, identified as “45-57 Tokyo” in order to illustrate the difference with the U.S. immigrant. (The difference can also be seen by comparing her to the mean of her age group in column 3, but that mean includes, of course, “45-57 US immigrant” as one of the subjects, and her scores skew the mean.) The difference between these middle-aged women is remarkable. The U.S. immigrant uses feminine forms 70 percent of the time (compared to 24 percent for the Tokyo woman); she uses them in preference to neutral forms, and she avoids masculine forms almost completely.

Among the 45-57 year old women, the U.S. immigrant is the most conservative by far. As Okamoto says, “One would rarely encounter such a stereotypically feminine speech style among contemporary women.” Socially, she matches the other subjects perfectly— like the others, she is upper middle class, born and raised in Tokyo, and the graduate of a prestigious university. How does she differ from them? Okamoto tells us “she has been living in the United States for more than 12 years, having very little contact with other Japanese.”

The U.S. immigrant speaks Japanese the way Japanese women spoke a decade or two earlier, in her formative years before she emigrated to the United States. One of the linguistic consequences of her immigration to the United States was a decisive break from the vernacular norms that were taking place. Her retention of old-fashioned gendered sentence-final forms would be viewed by philologists as a conservative colonial variety and attributed to the mysterious colonial lag. But it is hardly mysterious when we know who the speaker is and how she lost touch with the vernacular norms after immigrating. Sociolinguistically, her *Issei* dialect simply seems inevitable.

One of the fundamental tenets of sociolinguistics, as stated by Weinreich, Labov and Herzog in their seminal article (1968: 99), is that “a model of language which accommodates the facts of variable usage and its social and stylistic determinants not only leads to more adequate descriptions of linguistic competence, but also naturally yields a theory of language change that bypasses the fruitless paradoxes with which historical linguistics has been struggling for half a century.” That is a tenet that Junko Hibiya learned at first-hand as a student of William Labov, and one that has now been corroborated in countless studies. One of those “fruitless paradoxes” was the so-called colonial lag. It is not mysterious in any way when we recognize it as an *Issei* lag. Not every immigrant loses touch with the vernacular culture they leave behind, but many do. If so, the lag is one of the inevitable social consequences of immigration.

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