

Shogo Sakurai
Nanyang Technological University

REVIEW ESSAY:
**THE COMMON MYTH OF MONOLINGUAL /
MONOCULTURAL JAPAN**

*The Making of Monolingual Japan: Language Ideology and
Japanese Modernity*

By Patrick Heinrich

Multilingual Matters, 2012. 204 pages.

Language ideology is an ever-present component in every society, and Japan is no exception. In *The Making of Monolingual Japan*, the author skillfully unravels the common myth of Japan as a monocultural / monolingual society, revealing past and present gaps in the myth amid Japan's sociolinguistic realities and modernist language ideology. Though the book consists of nine chapters and each chapter is essential in its own right, in order to convey the present state of Japan's sociolinguistic realities concisely, I will only highlight selected portions as follows.

In Chapter 1, Heinrich succinctly summarizes how Japan transformed into a monolingual nation by way of deliberate efforts to modernize through introducing and disseminating a unitary language (*kokugo*) based on Western models. Then, he surveys various approaches to language ideology widely used in the fields of linguistic anthropology and critical linguistics. Since none of these approaches suffices for the study at hand, the author offers his own definition of language ideology (18), introducing the terms

Sakurai, Shogo. "The Common Myth of Monolingual / Monocultural Japan: Review of *The Making of Monolingual Japan*, by Patrick Heinrich." *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 3:1 (2015): pp. 141-143. ISSN 2325-2871.

‘language ideology broker’ and ‘linguistic margin,’ borrowing from Bourdieu (1991). The author’s thorough and descriptive discussion of ideology studies in general and language ideologies in particular are essential for orienting oneself in the ensuing chapters.

The author’s extensive research on archival documents (both English and Japanese) strengthens the analytical validity and interpretative accuracy of the study. This is apparent in the abundance of direct data citations (often English translations by the author) included particularly in Chapters 2 and 6. In these chapters, controversial proposals to replace the Japanese language with English in the Meiji Restoration period (proposed by Arinori Mori, Japan’s ambassador in Washington and, later, the first Minister of Education) and then after World War II with French (proposed by Naoya Shiga, an influential novelist at the time) are discussed based on direct accounts from letters and journals. By examining the original documents / translations closely, Heinrich points out that inasmuch as these language ideology brokers (i.e., Arinori Mori and Naoya Shiga) seemingly promoted similar arguments to replace Japanese, in actuality, they came from different ideological perspectives. This latter proposal by Naoya Shiga (i.e., the idea of replacing Japanese with French as a national language after WWII) has attracted little attention in Japanese history and linguistics. The inclusion of this chapter thus reaffirms the existence of multiple perspectives and the evolving nature of modern language ideology in Japan, which is not so well-known in the West.

The author also devotes a great portion of the book to minority language issues (Chapters 5, 7, 8), namely the languages spoken by the Ryukyans, the Ainu, residents of the Ogasawara and Hachijoji islands, Japanese sign language users, and allochthonous minorities living in Japan (i.e., Korean and Chinese descendants, Chinese war orphans, and Japanese descendants from South America). A common thread among these minority language speakers is that they were victims of a modernist language ideology that was “in search of homogeneity” (123) and that viewed “multilingualism among ethnolinguistic minorities not as an asset, but as a sign of ‘backwardness’, a barrier to assimilation and the total membership to the ideological construct of the nation that assimilation would grant them” (122-123). The majority of these chapters discussed the Ryukyans particularly in regards to how standard Japanese was enforced among these people in both public and private places—since, at the time, the Ryukyuan languages were perceived as ‘dialects’ of the Japanese language by the mainland officials.

What I find particularly interesting in these chapters are 1) the discrepancies in the historical treatments of the Ryukyuans and the Ainu, and 2) the discussions on the linguistic history of the Ogasawara and Hachijoji residents. As for the Ryukyuans and the Ainu, there is a plethora of literature in each minority issue. Nevertheless, a side-by-side analysis of both minority groups from a perspective of the modernist language ideology illuminates clear contrasts in how they were treated. The Ogasawara and Hachijoji residents' changing linguistic history in view of modernist language ideology is infrequently discussed in the literature. For this reason, Chapter 7 will be of interest to many readers.

In the last chapter, the author efficaciously discusses the impact and consequences of modernist language ideology and the differences between claiming and practicing language equality. After surveying some of the major milestones Japan underwent in order to enforce the Japanese language as a unitary nation language (*kokugo*), the impact, consequences, and imbalance of powers which the aforementioned minority language speakers experienced are clearly outlined in this Chapter.

Although the topics dealt in the book are highly relevant not only for researchers of linguistics, history, and philosophy but also for lay people, the language and theories used in the book are highly technical. As is often the case with manuscripts dealing with Japanese-English translations, there were several misspelled Japanese phonetic words, i.e., *konkōbun* for *kongōbun* (43), *jiken* for *jikken* (73), *naji* for *nanji* (75), *najira* for *nanjira* (75), *moshiageru* for *mōshiageru* (79), *hyojungo* for *hyōjungo* (91), *satsuon* for *zatsuon* (130), *shimakutuba* for *shimakotoba* (156, 157, 159, 160, 161), and *orudokamā* for *ōrudokamā* (162). Ultimately, however, this book is a major addition to the field of critical multilingual studies.

Reference

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Edited by John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Polity Press.