

## REVIEW

*Multilingual Japan*. John C. Maher and Kyoko Yashiro, editors. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters. 1995.

*Multilingual Japan*, a special issue of *the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Matters*, edited by John C. Maher and Kyoko Yashiro, is an excellent book from which to learn more about the language and cultural history and status of Japan. The stereotype that Japan is a unique monolingual/ monocultural country is one that refuses to go away. All countries are unique and, as they make clear, Japan has never been monolingual and monocultural. We need more such serious empirical studies like that conducted by Maher and Yashiro to help change the rather resistant attitudes of the government and a segment of the population at large.

On the more than 3000 islands which stretch from Hokkaido almost to Taiwan, the languages which are present in identifiable numbers include Japanese, Ainu, the various types of Ryukyuan languages, Korean, Chinese, English, and some languages from Southeast Asia. Maher and Yashiro note that required English courses have produced millions of Japanese with some level of bilingual ability and that the large number of Japanese families which have returned after lengthy stays abroad means that there is a large number of bilinguals involving several of the world's languages. Japan is and has been a multilingual country with a large number of bilinguals in the mainstream of society.

Matsumori's chapter covers Ryukyuan, a cover term for a group of languages which are spoken in the southern islands of Japan and which have a close relation to the Japanese language. Of the 1.3 million Ryukyuan, those under age 40 are less and less fluent in the local variety of Ryukyuan. Much research needs to be done now or the varieties may be lost to history.

Honna's chapter on English in Japanese society documents the more than 30,000 English words in Japanese and the statistics on daily use of these loanwords. The national commitment to English language education has resulted in the use of English vocabulary for 13% of words produced in daily Japanese conversations, including several sophisticated types of uses of the loans. Some claim a high use of loanwords is "corruption" of the language, but the flexibility to absorb new ideas/words helps adaptation to new technology in a fast changing world.

Yamamoto's chapter extends the study of bilingualism in Japan to some of the 42 nationalities represented in Japan in international families. Several studies are being done on the topic, such as retention of Japanese and/or Korean in their marriages. The intermarriage of Japanese and Koreans represents the largest number of international families, e.g. 9635 marriages in 1991 compared with 4660 Japanese/Chinese and 1535 Japanese/USA. More research needs to be done here, but there is a good foundation on which to build.

Mahe's chapter goes in depth into the situation of Koreans in Japan. Historically Koreans were expected to merge completely into Japanese society, but there is now a movement in some schools and groups to maintain the Korean language and culture. The emergence of more distinct "Koreatowns" parallel to "Chinatowns" helps focus attention on this "kokusaika" (internationalism) development. Of the people of Korean descent who are in Japan, only the oldest generation is highly proficient in Korean, with a proficiency decline through the succeeding generations. The Japanese government has not yet accredited Korean schools, so 86% of Korean students attend Japanese schools. Since 1993, the younger generation of Japanese has recognized the importance of Korean and perhaps the government practice will change for the better in time.

DeChicchis' chapter on Ainu language considers the new political situation and the current language revival. Substantial numbers of people of Ainu descent are in Japan – primarily on Hokkaido, the northernmost island – and all those that retain some proficiency in the Ainu language are also bilingual in Japanese. Although the Ainu have been in Japan throughout recorded history and there currently is a resurgence of interest, the Japanese government has yet to grant them minority recognition. The interest of younger Japanese in their country's history and cultures may help the rather active language and cultural revival of this interesting language.

The next chapter by Mahe deals with Chinese, through which the heritage of Asia was transmitted to Japan. Study of Chinese as a modern language began in the 19th century and every Japanese child learns *kanbun*, the Chinese classics. Given its rich history and current status, Chinese should be on the standard college entrance examination, as are major European languages. The situation may change, partly because the booming prosperity of the Chinatown areas (billions of yen per year) has caused a reevaluation of the value of multiculturalism.

Yashiro's closing chapter on "returnees" - the person back from a prolonged stay abroad - discusses the re-acculturation process needed by some of the children, especially in language development. The returnees are also a national asset, especially in education and business, with valuable language and cultural competence in African and Asian languages, as well as European languages. A governmental dilemma is the maintenance of this valuable competence, since it requires a large commitment of educational funding. As Yashiro notes, Japan drew on foreign cultures for many centuries before the Edo period (1600-1867). Japan will again be a country that accepts the expertise of its population of multilingual and multicultural citizens.

Mahe and Yashiro's pioneering studies on multilingualism and language variety in Japan first appeared in 1991 in Japanese. This new set of studies continues their careful efforts to bring about a paradigm shift in the study of language in Japan.

Bates L. Hoffer, Trinity University