The Philosophy and Practice of *Yasashii-Nihongo*

Isao IORI (Hitotsubashi University)

Abstract

In this paper I overview the overall picture of the *Yasashii-Nihongo* (YN) research that is currently being developed in various fields.

First, considering the background of the demand for YN, this paper states that Japanese society 30 years from now should be built jointly by "Japanese" and "foreigners," and defines YN as a language policy necessary for the realization of such a sustainable multicultural society.

Next, I considered "YN for minorities" and "YN for the majority". For the former, "YN to create a place to stay" for adults and "YN as a bypass" for children with foreign roots and deaf children were discussed. As for the latter, "YN as an intermediary language" to coordinate the provision of information from specialists to non-specialists, and "Plain Japanese" a further development of the former, as Japanese expressions that native speakers of Japanese should master.

Keywords: Taxpayer, *Yasashii-Nihongo* (YN) for creating a place to stay, YN for a bypass, YN as an intermediary language, Plain Japanese

【キーワード】納税者（タックスペイヤー），居場所作りのための「やさしい日本語」,バイパスとしての「やさしい日本語」，中間言語としての「やさしい日本語」，プレイン・ジャパニーズ

1 Introduction: the increasing number of foreigners[1]

Many of you may have noticed an increase in the number of foreign residents in Japan in recent years. Even in Tokyo, not a day goes by without seeing a foreigner working at a convenience store. There is already a large number of foreigners living in Japan today, and economic activities in both urban and rural areas would not be possible without them.

2 Accepting foreigners: what will Japan look like 30 years from now?

As described above, Japanese society has already become unfeasible without foreigners.

In April 2019, the Immigration Control Act was amended to create a new visa category called *Tokuteiginou* (Specified Technical Skills), which allows Japan to accept foreigners for "simple labor," a category that has not been officially recognized by the government.

This policy shift can be said to have effectively steered Japan toward accepting "immigrants" (although the Japanese government does not use the word "immigrants"), and what should be considered in this context is what it means to accept foreigners. Below, we will consider this point briefly.

2.1 Population Decline and Foreigners

The most important reason why the acceptance of foreigners is inevitable is Japan's declining population. According to future projections (estimated in 2017) by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan's population will be approximately 24 million fewer in 2050 than it was in 2020 (medium birth/medium death projection)[2]. Furthermore, the population as a whole will not decline in the same way; the elderly population will remain almost the same, and it is the working-age population (15-64 years old) and younger children that will decline. A decline in population is likely to be a devastating blow, especially in rural areas. This is because there is an increasing risk of a negative spiral: population decline → loss of work opportunities → outflow of young people to urban areas → aging population → deterioration of local government finances → elimination of public services such as bus services → difficulties for the elderly in their daily lives. In this sense, it is absolutely necessary, especially for rural areas, to accept foreign nationals in order to escape from this spiral. In urban areas as well, it is inevitable to accept foreign nationals because of the growing labor shortage.

2.2 Foreigners as Taxpayers

It may not be correct to say that acceptance of foreigners is inevitable as the population declines if the manner of acceptance is not appropriate. This is because it is not enough to consider foreigners as

a tool for "making up the numbers".

The Swiss writer Max Frisch is often quoted in immigration literature as saying, "We called for labor, but what came was human". This is an explicit reference to the idea of using foreigners only as "labor power," and the current Japanese way of acceptance of foreigners, as it stands, is in great danger of following in the footsteps of these Western failures of 50 years ago.

These "failures" are not merely a humanitarian problem. Equally problematic is the fact that even if the number of foreigners increases in such a way, they will only work for low wages and will not increase the number of taxpayers, which will not lead to an improvement in the negative spiral that local regions are facing. Furthermore, if Japan as a whole cannot increase its taxpayers, it will not be able to improve its enormous budget deficit, and it will be difficult to avoid the fact that Japan's public finances will eventually reach a critical state.

In light of the above, it can be said that the acceptance of foreign nationals must be based on the principle that Japan 30 years from now will be built not only by "Japanese" but also by "foreigners". In other words, it is not a question of nationality, i.e., "Japanese" or "foreigner," but of creating a society in which people living in Japan are guaranteed a place to play an active role on an equal footing, and as a result, the problems of taxes and social security are improved.

3 The enterprise of *Yasashii-Nihongo* (YN)

As described above, the acceptance of foreign nationals is inevitable for the future of Japanese society. In accepting foreigners, it is necessary to consider various issues, and our research group is considering this issue from the perspective of language among others. The concept of *Yasashii-Nihongo*(YN) plays a central role in this process.

4 Prehistory of YN

The concept of YN discussed in this paper is not something that has suddenly emerged; similar ideas have existed in the past (Iwata 2013). This section will take a very brief look at such ideas.

Many people were affected by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, including foreigners. Among them, there were many who were inhibited from various information needed in the process

of recovery because they could not understand information in either Japanese or English. For example, the following posting is believed to have been actually used during the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake:

(1) 容器をご持参の上、中央公園にご参集ください

(Please bring your own containers and gather at the Central Park.)

(1) is an appeal to those who need water and food, but non-Kanji-using people whose mother tongue does not contain Kanji, especially those whose Japanese language skills are still at the beginner level, will probably not understand anything other than "中央公園 (Chuo Park)"[3]. Even people from Kanji-using countries may not be able to understand it if they hear it by sound because the sound of Kanji in their language and Japanese often differs. The difficulty for non-Kanji-using people remains the same even with *furigana* because Chinese-origin words, which are composed of Kanji, are difficult for such people:

(2) 容器(ようき)をご持参(じさん)の上(うえ)、中央公園(ちゅうおうこうえん)にご参集(さんしゅう)ください

In order for non-Kanji-using people to understand, it is necessary to rephrase as follows, in accordance with the concept described below:

(3) 入(い)れるものを持(じ)って、中央公園(ちゅうおうこうえん)に来(き)てください[4]

In response to the situation described above, linguists and broadcasters have jointly conducted research on the use of simplified Japanese as a means of providing information to foreigners in times of disaster (Sato 2004). The Japanese language used for this purpose was named *Yasashii-Nihongo*(YN). We call this YN specialized for providing information in times of disaster "YN for disaster mitigation". This was the first time *Yasashii-Nihongo* was used as a technical term. Matsuda et al. (2000) specifically demonstrated the effectiveness of YN.

In this paper, it is reported that by rewriting the following news report A into B, the listening comprehension rate increased from 30% (A) to 90% (B) (in the case of B, it is also important to pause the reading with a reading mark)[5].

A けさ 5 時 46 分ごろ、兵庫県の淡路島付近を震源とするマグニチュード 7.2 の

直下型の大きな地震があり、神戸と洲本で震度 6 を記録するなど、近畿地方を中心に広い範囲で、強い揺れに見舞われました。(At around 5:46 a.m. this morning, a major earthquake of magnitude 7.2 on the Richter scale struck near Awaji Island in Hyogo Prefecture, causing strong tremors in a wide area centering on the Kinki region, with Kobe and Sumoto recording an intensity of 6.)

B　今日、朝、5 時 46 分ごろ、兵庫、大阪、などで、とても大きい、強い地震がありました。地震の中心は、兵庫県の淡路島の近くです。地震の強さは、神戸市、洲本市で、震度が 6 でした。(Today, at around 5:46 in the morning, there was a very large and strong earthquake in Hyogo, Osaka, and other areas. The quake was centered near Awaji Island in Hyogo Prefecture. The strength of the quake was 6 on the Japanese seismic scale in Kobe and Sumoto.)　(A and B are cited from Matsuda et al. (2000))

The following devices can be found in B: the word 今朝 (this morning), which is considered difficult for beginner-level learners of Japanese, is made easier to understand by replacing it with the known words 今日 (today) and 朝 (morning)[6].

The part ～を震源とするマグニチュード 7.2 の直下型の (of a magnitude 7.2 epicenter in the vicinity) should be deleted because it is unnecessary for foreigners who want to know what happened at the moment.

The phrases ～を記録する (to record) and 大きなゆれに見舞われました (hit by a strong tremor) should be deleted because the amount of information does not change even if they are rephrased as でした (was).

Looking at B from a different angle, it can be said that what native speakers actually take in as information when they hear A is about the content of B. Then, providing information in the form of B is not a problem for native speakers, and since B is clearly more beneficial to beginner-level learners of Japanese, with limited comprehension ability of Japanese, they should actively provide information in the form of B.

As described above, providing information in times of disaster is an important issue, but foreigners spend most of the time in a daily life. With this in mind, our research group has focused on the

provision of information to foreigners during daily life. In this sense, the term *Yasashii-Nihongo* is used hereafter to refer to the research targets of our research group[7].

5 Overview of *Yasashii-Nihongo* Research[8]

The *Yasashii-Nihongo* research started with a study of information provision methods for foreign residents in Japan, but the scope of the research has been expanded up to the present. The overall research is as follows.

Yasashii-Nihongo (YN)

a. YN for minorities

YN for creating a place to live (for adults)

YN as an object of public guarantee for initial Japanese language education

YN as a common language for the local community.

YN as a grammatical syllabus for local Japanese language education

YN as a bypass (for children)

Japanese language education for children with foreign roots

Japanese language education for deaf children

b. YN for the majority

YN as a mirror of Japanese language expression

YN as a standard for Japanese language expression

Fig. 1: Scope of *Yasashii-Nihongo* research

6 YN for creating a place to stay

As described above, research on YN began with the provision of information to foreign residents in Japan, which is now expanding into various other areas. There are two types of YNs.

The first type is called "YN for creating a place to stay," which targets adult foreign residents and aims to help them feel at home in Japanese society.

The second is "YN as a bypass" for children with foreign roots, which considers what kind of

Japanese language education is necessary for children to enter high school and, at the latest, to graduate from high school with Japanese language skills almost equal to those of Japanese children.

First, we consider "YN for creating a place to stay". One of the most important things for foreign residents to lead a mentally stable life in Japanese society is to feel that Japanese society is their *ibasho* (place to stay), and it is important for them to be able to say in Japanese what they can say in their native language (Iori 2016). This can be understood by imagining how different your psychological sense of security would be if, for some reason, you were to live abroad for an extended period of time and were able to say what you wanted to say in your mother tongue in the language of the country where you lived, as opposed to what you would be able to say in your mother language. The "YN for creating a place to stay" has the following three aspects:

a. YN as an object of public guarantee for initial Japanese language education

b. YN as a common language of the local community

c. YN as a community-based elementary Japanese course

6.1 YN as an object of public guarantee for initial Japanese language education

The first is the aspect of initial Japanese language education as an object of public guarantee. If the Japanese government formally adopts an immigration policy, it is expected that it will require a certain level of Japanese language proficiency as an obligation to be imposed on foreigners. This will guarantee foreigners the right to live in Japan, and for this purpose, a certain amount of Japanese language education must be provided at public expense (i.e., tax) by professional Japanese language teachers when foreigners enter Japan for the purpose of settling down. The content must be practical and cost-effective. The first aspect of YN is to theoretically examine the content of such Japanese language education.

6.2 YN as a common language of the local community

The second aspect is as a common language for the local community. The increase in the number of foreign residents means that they will be living in the local community. This requires some kind of common language, and the results of Iwata (2010) and other studies have shown that English is not

useful for this purpose.

The second candidate is Japanese to which native Japanese speakers make no adjustments for non-native speakers to understand better, but this too is not possible. This is because such a position would mean judging foreigners solely on the basis of their language ability, which is not in line with the concept of *tabunkakyōseishakai* (sustainable multicultural society[9]) (Cf. Iori 2016b). As mentioned above, how would you feel if, for some reason, you had to live abroad and your ability was judged solely on whether you could speak well the language of the country where you lived?

Then, logically[10], if a common language for the local community is to be created, it can only be Japanese with certain adjustments made by native Japanese speakers, i.e., *Yasashii-Nihongo*. In this case, the model would be as in Figure 2.

However, that is not something that will happen on its own. Whether or not this model will be realized depends on the awareness of native speakers of Japanese.

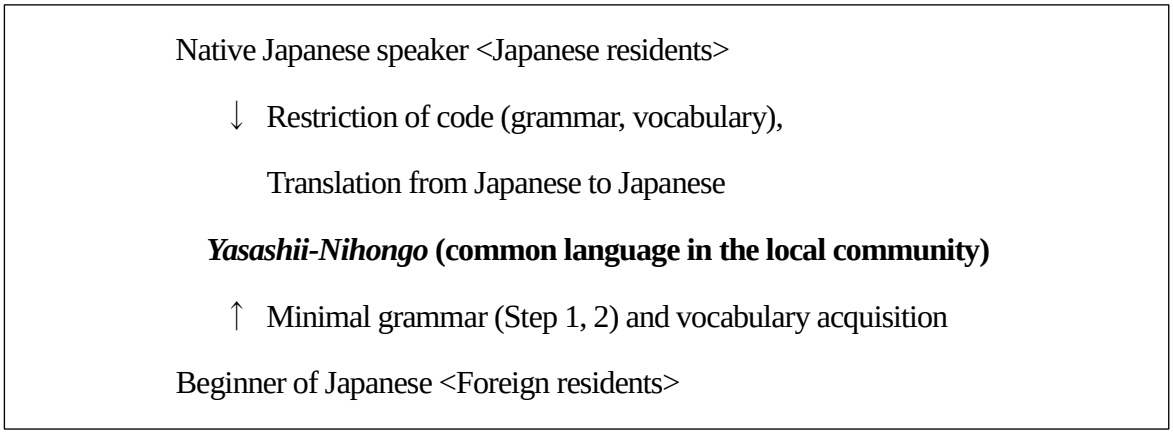

Figure 2: Common language and *Yasashii-Nihongo* in the local community

6.3 YN as a community-based elementary course

The third aspect is a beginner's grammar syllabus (designed with the types of grammar items and the order in which they are submitted) that is suited to the actual conditions of Japanese language education conducted in local Japanese language classes (community-type Japanese language education).

To give a very brief overview of the flow of Japanese language education in the postwar period, Japanese language education at universities and other institutions of higher education began in

earnest in the 1960s, and at first, Japanese language education was offered exclusively at university special courses for international students and private Japanese language schools, but since the 1990s, however, Japanese language classes have also been increasingly taught at local Japanese language schools (Ozaki 2004).

The former type of Japanese language education is called school-type Japanese language education, and the latter type is called community-type Japanese language education. The differences between the two can be summarized as follows.

Table 1: School-based and community-based language education

	School-type	Community-type
Relationship between participants	Teacher-student Teaching is professional	Learning is mutual Teaching is volunteer
Purpose of stay	Study abroad	Skills training, employment, marriage, etc.
Standard class hours (Beginner-level)	20 hours per week	2 hours per week (per class)

As shown above, the two differ in character in many ways, but the most explicit difference is the amount of time spent on learning. It is estimated that approximately 300 hours are required to complete the elementary level (the level required to pass level 3 of the former Japanese Language Proficiency Test), and in intensive school-based Japanese language education (school-type), this can be achieved with 20 hours per week (2 sessions per day x 5 days) x 15 weeks, which is not a difficult goal. However, if the same method is used in the regional Japanese language education (community-type), where the standard study time is 2 hours per week, it would take 3 years to complete 300 hours (2 hours per session x 50 weeks x 3 years).

This indicates that a unique elementary grammar syllabus different from that of the school system is necessary for the community-type. Such a grammar syllabus is called a "grammar for

community-type beginner's class" (Iori 2015).

What must be taken into consideration when considering the specifics of the community-type beginner's class is to ensure that students can say in Japanese what they can say in their native language, which is required by the official guarantee of initial Japanese language education. A grammatical syllabus that guarantees this and is in line with the actual conditions of regional Japanese language education is called "minimal grammar". Minimum grammar consists of Step 1 for the first half of the elementary level and Step 2 for the second half of the elementary level (Cf. Iori ed. 2010, 2011).

7 YN as a bypass

Next, we will consider language issues for children with foreign roots and deaf children.

7.1 Reasons to focus on children with foreign roots

There are two main reasons why we should focus on the problems of children with foreign roots.

The first is the reason for their arrival in Japan. While the parents of children come to Japan of their own volition, children are usually forced to live in Japan. Therefore, it is important from the perspective of Japanese language education to make efforts to ensure that these children have opportunities for self-realization in Japan.

Second, it is necessary to view children as the human resources who will build Japan in the future. As mentioned above, when considering the state of Japanese society 30 years from now, it will be difficult for the "Japanese" alone to build Japan, and it is important from both a "humanistic" and an "economic (or pragmatic)" perspective that the "Japanese" and "foreigners" work together to support Japan. It is important from both a humanitarian and an economic (or pragmatic) standpoint.

From this standpoint, it is children who are the most important. In other words, whether or not children with foreign roots can compete with native Japanese speakers on an equal footing in Japanese society and whether or not they will always be relegated to a lower position in terms of their career choices is a major key to how Japanese society can develop in the future.

7.2 What is Needed for "Equal Competition"

What is needed for children with foreign roots to be able to compete on an equal footing with native Japanese speakers?

There is the concept of relative poverty. Relative poverty is defined as a situation in which the average annual income of a country's citizens is less than half of the national income of the country. The relative poverty rate in Japan is 15.6% (2016)[11], and for children it is 13.9% (2015), slightly recovering, but still above the OECD average. In particular, the rate for single-parent households is extremely high at 50.8% (2015). Such parental poverty has a strong impact on children's education (Abe 2008, 2014).

While this is the case for native Japanese speakers, the situation is considered even more serious for children with foreign roots. Specifically, it is necessary to improve the low enrollment rate in high school. As much as possible, it is necessary for them to acquire the ability to compete on an equal footing with native Japanese-speaking children when they enter high school, or at the latest, when they graduate from high school. This is because, unless this is achieved, the range of occupational choices will be (extremely) limited considering the current situation in Japanese society.

On the other hand, if children with foreign roots can have the same potential for success as native Japanese-speaking children if they make an honest effort, and if having foreign roots can be positively evaluated in Japanese society, the following effects can be expected to occur.

One is the formation of a diverse culture within Japan. Furthermore, since these children carry at least two cultures with them, if their cultural backgrounds and linguistic abilities can be utilized, new business opportunities may open up for companies with countries and regions with which they have no previous relationship, and this may also revitalize local economies, which are facing a crisis due to the declining population. It is also likely to be a catalyst for the revitalization of local economies, which are facing a crisis due to population decline. From these points of view, it is important to guarantee the linguistic conditions that enable them to compete on an equal footing with native Japanese-speaking children.

However, it is clear that children with foreign roots are at a great disadvantage in terms of Japanese language ability compared to native Japanese speakers. If this is the case, it is also clear that

a "bypass" is necessary for children with foreign roots to learn Japanese.

7.3 The Problem of Kanji

Based on the above, we will consider the issue of Japanese language education for children with foreign roots, where the most significant problem is kanji (Iori 2016a, 2018).

7.3.1 *Signifiant* and *signifié*

F. Saussure had a great influence on modern linguistics, and one of the important properties of language that Saussure pointed out is the “arbitrariness of language” (Iori 2012).

For example, in Figure 1, the relationship between the sound (≒word) (what it refers to, or *signifiant* in Saussure’s terminology) and the object (what it is referred to, or *signifié* in Saussure’s term) is arbitrary. There is no causal relationship between the sound (*signifiant*) and the indicated object (*signifié*).

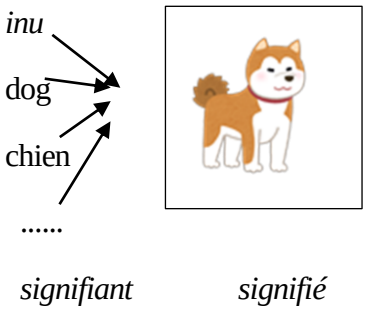

Figure 3 Arbitrariness of language

7.3.2 Differences from Japanese native speakers

In order to acquire a language, whether it is a native language (first language; L1) or a second language (L2), it is necessary to acquire the following at a minimum.

a. Sound forms (*signifiant*)

b. Indicated objects (*signifié*)

c. Written forms (≒characters)

In the case of Japanese, (c) is hardly a problem as long as one expects to write in hiragana (which

is not the case for English). In this sense, Japanese is an easy language to learn as long as kanji is not a problem. In reality, however, kanji is a major barrier for non-kanji-using learners.

Children of native Japanese speakers enter elementary school with the ability to write in hiragana, having learned the relationship between *signifiant* and *signifié* through many interactions with the adults around them. Therefore, the only thing they need to learn about kanji is to be able to read and write in kanji what they can write in hiragana. Even under such conditions, the number of kanji that are supposed to be learned in six years of elementary school is about 1,000 (1,026).

For children with foreign roots, they must learn all of (a) through (c) from scratch, and then learn kanji in the same process as native Japanese speakers. Moreover, in many cases, time is (extremely) limited. In light of the above, a "bypass" is also necessary with respect to kanji (Iori & Hayakawa 2017, Kaiser 2018).

7.4 BICS and CALP

Furthermore, a major issue for children's language acquisition is the difference between everyday language (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, hereafter BICS) and language for learning (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, hereafter CALP). Let me explain the difference between the two using the example of demonstratives[12].

(4) *Sono hon tor-te*. (Deixis)

That book get-IMP

Get me that book.

(5) *Senzitu yuuzin kara hon o mor-atta*. (Anaphora)

The other day friend from book ACC receive-PST

Sono hon wa tetsugakukanren no mono da.

The book TOP about philosophy of one is

I got a book from a friend the other day. The book is about philosophy.

A demonstrative "refers" to something, and its content can be understood only when what it refers to (the referent) is determined. There are two main ways of determining the referent: 1) deixis, which refers to something that is present in speech, as in (4), and 2) anaphora, which refers to something

that appears in speech (whether spoken or written), as in (5). Of these, deixis can be understood as referring to what is being said if one is present at the scene of the utterance. In fact, it is the pointing gesture rather than the sign *sono* (that) that is necessary to understand what *sono hon* (that book) in (4) refers to. Thus, while deixis is highly dependent on the utterance situation, the same is true for BICS, where the content is understood from the utterance situation rather than the actual form of the utterance.

Anaphora, on the other hand, does not depend on such situations and requires the retrieval of the referent of the demonstratives purely from the signs, the same is true for CALP. Learning in school (subject learning) is strongly related to the ability to manipulate language[13]. In the case of children with foreign roots, if they have acquired CALP-related abilities in their native language, they can use these cognitive abilities in Japanese as a foreign language. Deaf children are among the subjects who, like children with foreign roots, need "YN as a bypass" (Iori & Oka 2015, Iori 2021).

8 YN for Native Speakers of Japanese

So far, we have looked at YN for minorities. While language security for minorities is an extremely important function, YN also has an important meaning for the majority of native speakers of Japanese. This section looks at this point.

8.1 YN as a mirror of Japanese expression

For native speakers of Japanese, the most important linguistic activity performed using Japanese is considered to be "telling others what you (and only you) know and getting them to agree with your ideas".

In the academic world, this is equivalent to academic papers and oral presentations, in the corporate world, to job interviews and business negotiations, and in everyday life to community association activities, etc. In the school education in Japan, although there are many activities in which students express their own opinions in the form of opinion essays, it is not possible to do these activities in an interactive manner with others. And there are not many activities in which students accept the opinions of others and have their own recognized in the context of interactions with

others.

Practicing such activities in the form of roleplays with foreigners is helpful in nurturing these skills (Usami 2013). This is because native Japanese speakers are not sure whether or not they were able to persuade their counterparts through the language itself, whereas foreigners clearly point out what they do not understand, thus enhancing the authenticity of the roleplay.

This indicates that YN can play a role in enhancing communication skills as a "mirror of Japanese expressions" and the significance of YN for native speakers of Japanese.

8.2 Necessity of "Impartial ears"

As we saw in 6.2, if there is to be a common language between the majority of native Japanese speakers and the minority of foreign residents, it can only be YN. The creation of such a common language itself is not an easy task, but in the process, it is expected that a Japanese language different in many respects from the one used only by Japanese native speakers until now will be used.

One of the important principles in this situation is the "Impartial ear" pointed out by Toki (1994). Please see the following quotation:

> When the plant manager of a major Japanese automobile company met technical trainees from Thailand, he heard them talking about "wata*chi*...jidou*cha*..." and said to the Japanese person who was leading them, with concern, "Can these people really do their jobs?" This is a reaction that was based on the fact that the way "wata*chi*(I)" and "jidou*cha*(car)" are pronounced in Japanese is similar to the way infants speak in Japanese and was therefore a judgment of their personalities and abilities[14]. (Toki 1994)

The problem here is that Thai language does not distinguish between *shi* [ʃi] and *chi* [tʃi], while Japanese does. Even though the objective fact is that this is all there is to it, in reality it has led to discrimination.

However, we can easily find examples of the "opposite" of this. There is no *shi* [si] in the *sa*-line in Japanese, and *shi* is [ʃi] in the *sha*-line (Iori 2012). Thus, the [s] [ʃ] distinction disappears in front of the [i], so an unconscious pronunciation of "She sees a sea." would be [ʃi:ʃi:zəʃi:], which would sound extremely unnatural to English speakers.

The same discrimination against "foreigners" has historically continued against "dialect" speakers (Mainichi Shimbun Chihōbutokuhōban 1998, Iori 2013). Toki's (1994) point is that in order to eliminate such discriminatory attitudes, it is necessary to have an "Impartial ear" that can equally hear various forms of Japanese, including "dialects," as variations of the Japanese language.

9 The Meaning of YN for Japanese Expression

In this section, we consider YN for native speakers of Japanese from a different perspective from that of the previous.

9.1 Criticisms against YN

There are several types of criticism against YN.

One is that YN is a form of reverse discrimination against foreigners because it forces them to use "second-rate Japanese" that is different from that of native speakers of Japanese.

The second criticism, which will be discussed in this section, is that the use of YN reduces the Japanese proficiency of native Japanese speakers.

The first is that YN in the sense discussed in section 2 is used by native Japanese speakers for non-native speakers (who do not yet have sufficient Japanese language ability) and is not used when native speakers talk to each other, in other words, this type of YN is another language code which is used when native Japanese speakers talk to non-native speakers and therefore its use does not affect the Japanese ability of native speakers. Therefore, its use does not affect the ability of native speakers to use Japanese[15].

9.2 Belief in Difficulty

The second point is the belief in difficulty among native speakers of Japanese, which can be seen in criticism against YN as shown in the following. For example, there may be a latent feeling, not only on the senders side (such as writers of official documents), but also on the receivers side (such as local residents), that if official documents by local government are not written with *kango* (Chinese-origin words), they do not "look like it". It seems that this kind of reader's mindset is one of

the reasons why official documents have not become easier to read (see Iwata 2016).

9.3 The Adverse Effects of "Belief in Difficulty"

As described above, the "belief in difficulty" in Japanese people's consciousness makes some Japanese texts (both written and spoken text) unnecessarily difficult to understand. This can be a problem not only for foreigners but also for Japanese.

One of these problems is the explanation of medical treatment to patients (informed consent). Although this is important, it is still not fully implemented. For example, there are only a few sufficient explanations of what tests are being performed, why they are necessary, and the risks involved, which can lead to anxiety and distrust of doctors for foreigners (Hatomi 2023, forthcoming).

These problems are more apparent in cases that have a significant impact on the patient's life, such as cancer notification. In such cases, "easy-to-understand explanations" are required regardless of whether the patient is Japanese or foreigners, and simply waving arcane jargon around does not remove the patient's emotional anxiety.

A similar problem exists with court interpretation. The question of what charges one has been arrested on, what one is being asked during interrogation and trial, and whether one's arguments are being accurately translated are extremely important issues for foreigners who are on trial in Japan. However, the original legal texts are difficult even for native speakers of Japanese, then there are concerns about whether they have been accurately translated into foreign languages.

9.4 How Information is Provided from Specialists to Non-Specialists

Administrative documents, informed consent, and court interpretation, which have been pointed out so far as those in which "belief in difficulty" often exists, have one thing in common: they are information conveyed by specialists to non-specialists.

When specialists speak with each other, there is nothing wrong with speaking in technical terms. It is often considered preferable to do so because it eliminates ambiguity.

The question is whether the same approach should be used when specialists talk to non-specialists.

Such belief should be discarded from the viewpoint of providing appropriate information to non-specialists. From now on, when specialists convey information and knowledge to non-specialists, it is necessary to consider "understandability" as a criterion. Such a paradigm shift needs to occur.

This is already happening in each of the places mentioned above. With regard to administrative documents, there are quite a few municipalities, such as Yokohama City, that provide information in YN. Of course, there are still many aspects of informed consent alone that are inadequate (see Hatomi 2023, forthcoming), but it is a clear fact that professionals can no longer continue to adopt the "know nothing, do nothing" attitude of the past.

9.5 Another *Yasashii-Nihongo*

From the previous contents of this section, it is clear that there are two types of *Yasashii-Nihongo* as follows (for more details on this point, see Iori 2023 forthcoming).

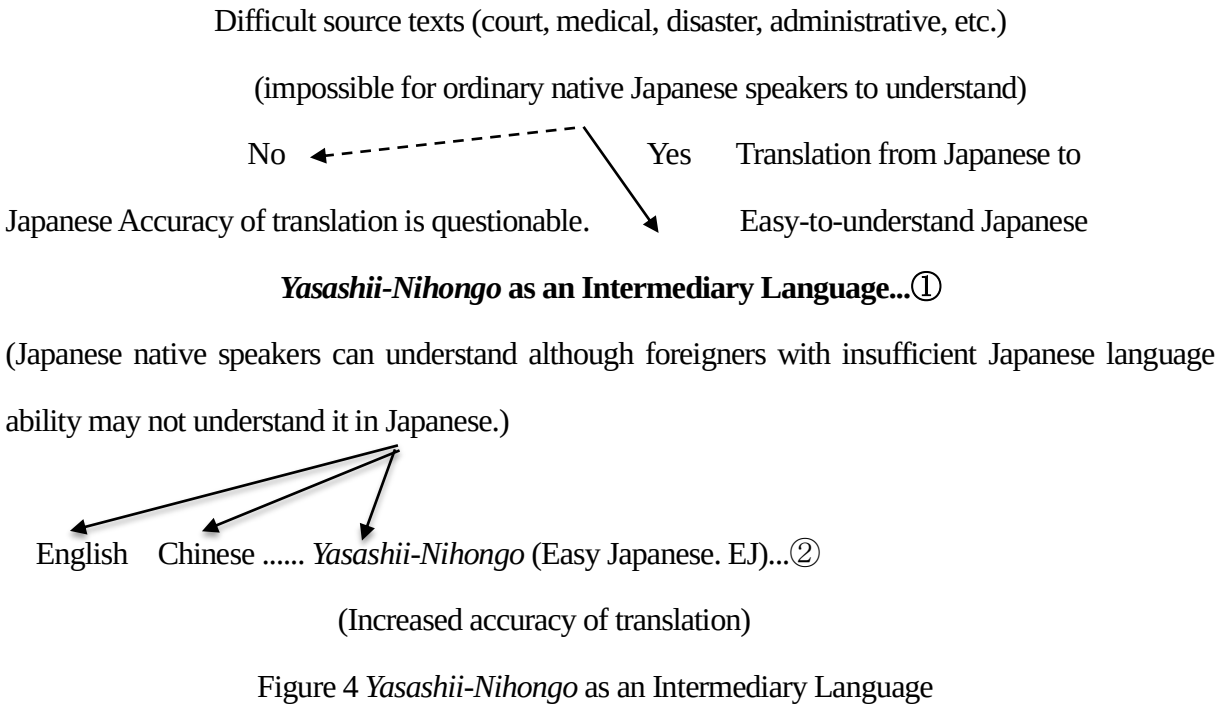

Figure 4 *Yasashii-Nihongo* as an Intermediary Language

In the administrative, medical, judicial, and other fields mentioned above, the source texts are often difficult to understand even for native speakers of Japanese. If one tries to translate such source

texts as they are, there is a high possibility of misunderstanding. As a first step, it is necessary for specialists to paraphrase (or in some cases, rewrite) such difficult source texts to a level that can be understood by ordinary native speakers of Japanese.

The Japanese expressions thus paraphrased (rewritten) are called "YN as an intermediary language" at a level that can be understood by ordinary native speakers of Japanese (Fig. 4, ①). There are at least two advantages to converting to this level.

The first advantage is that native Japanese speakers will be able to understand these specialized concepts. For example, if a cancer patient can accurately understand his or her own life expectancy, this will enhance the patient's own quality of life (QOL).

The second benefit is that the level of difficulty of the Japanese language will be lowered, so that translation/interpretation, which until then could only be done by native Japanese speakers, will become possible for native speakers of the language in question with intermediate to advanced Japanese language skills, thereby increasing the number of people who can engage in translation/interpretation.

If such "YN as an intermediary language" is established, non-native speakers of Japanese with a certain level of Japanese proficiency can obtain information from it, but for those who cannot, it will be necessary to translate the information into YN (Figure 4, ②) just as now. Note that YN in this sense is the same target language as foreign languages such as English and Chinese, as can be seen in Figure 4. In this sense, YN and multilingual support are not antithetical in any way.

9.6 Japanese Expressions Required of Native Speakers of Japanese: Plain Japanese

In the previous subsection, I pointed out that two types of YN should be recognized from the perspective of "information provision from specialists to non-specialists," and called them "YN as an intermediary language" and "*Yasashii-Nihongo* (Easy Japanese, hereafter EJ)," respectively.

The latter basically corresponds to the "YN for minorities" discussed in section 2, and it is fair to say that what is generally understood today as *Yasashii-Nihongo* corresponds to EJ.

In the next section, this concept of "YN as an intermediary language" will not be limited to the context of "provision of information from specialists to non-specialists," but will be considered more

generally as "expressions which should be required by native speakers of Japanese for a better command of Japanese," which we call Plain Japanese (PJ). PJ is positioned as "YN for native speakers of Japanese" from the perspective of YN[16].

10 Japan and Europe as Migrant Societies: From the Perspective of *Yasashii-Nihongo*

In this paper, I first described the philosophy of YN research and outlined the overall picture of the study.

As we saw in section 2, Japanese society is no longer viable without a foreign labor force, and the government has effectively taken the helm in accepting immigrants. In response to this situation, YN is a study of the language policy necessary for Japan to appropriately welcome a multilingual multicultural society in the future.

From the perspective of the YN philosophy, the language policy needed must (at least) satisfy the following three points.

The first is to accept foreigners as taxpayers. This means, in other words, that Japan should aim to become a "country to be chosen" by foreigners in the future.

The second, related to the first point, is to provide linguistic support so that children with foreign roots can compete on an equal footing with native Japanese-speaking children.

The third is to make plain Japanese the common language of Japanese society, assuming that the Japanese language itself will be transformed as a result of linguistic contact with several types of Japanese.

I will continue to examine and practice these points, and in the future, I would like to make comparisons with cases in Europe, an advanced area for accepting immigrants.

Notes

1. “Japanese people” cannot be defined uniquely. Some Korean-rooted people born and living in Japan whose mother tongue is Japanese are not Japanese because their nationality is not Japan, while those who are nationalized in Japan are Japanese from the viewpoint of nationality even if their Japanese language ability is at a beginner level. The same applies to the term “foreigners”. These facts show that “Japanese people” cannot

be defined without exception (Cf. Iori ed. 2020). I use, keeping these in mind, the term “Japanese people” and “native speakers of Japanese” and “foreigners” and “non-native speakers of Japanese” interchangeably.

2. https://www.ipss.go.jp/pp-zenkoku/j/zenkoku2017/pp29_ReportALL.pdf.

3. “中央公園(Chuo Park)” is understandable for non-Kanji-using people because it is a proper noun and can be heard in a daily life.

4. (3) is the easiest in the three examples for non-Kanji-using people because it does not contain Chinese-origin words, which are difficult for them, except for “中央公園(Chuo Park)”.

5. It is the listening comprehension that Matsuda et al. (2000) discusses not reading, so the difficulty of Kanji’s is irrelevant.

6. “今日(きょう)(today)” and “朝(あさ)(morning)” are beginner-level words while “今朝(けさ)(this morning)” is not.

7. *Yasashii* has two meanings: one is “easy” 易しい, the other is “kind” or “gentle” 優しい, and we use *Yasashii* やさしい to show the two at the same time.

8. For more detailed discussion on *Yasashii-Nihongo* and some related issues, see Iori (2016a), Iori (ed.)(2020: Part 1), Iori et al.(eds.)(2013, 2019), Iori(ed.)(2022, 2023 forthcoming) among others.

9. Following Iori (2016b), we translate *tabunkakyōseishakai* into “sustainable multicultural society”.

10. Since the number of the official languages of foreign residents in Japan is more than twenty (Iori 2016) and some common language is needed, the two of the most probable candidates for the common language in the present Japanese society are English (the most influential foreign language) and Japanese with few adjustments by native speakers for foreigners. So, if either of the two candidates cannot be a common language and if a common language is still needed, the only candidate is a kind of Japanese which contains some adjustments by native speakers for foreigners, i.e. *Yasashii-Nihongo* (YN).

11. https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/k-tyosa/k-tyosa16/dl/03.pdf

12. The abbreviations used here are the following: ACC: Accusative, IMP: Imperative, PST: Past

13. For more detailed discussion on BICS and CALP, see Butler (2011).

14. Original is written in Japanese, but for the clarity, almost all parts are translated in English, except for the points concerning the accented pronunciation by the Thai worker.

15 YN is another language code just as a dialect is another code which most Japanese can use. So,

using YN does not affect the Japanese language ability of native Japanese speakers just as using dialect does not affect it.

16. For more detailed discussion on PJ, see Iori 2022.

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