

# JAPANESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY – POLICY, LEARNERS AND NATIVE SPEAKERS

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## ABSTRACT

Japanese as a Foreign Language is expanding both in terms of numbers of learners and teachers and of the number of countries where it is taught. Between 1979 and 2003, the number of people learning Japanese worldwide grew from 127,000 to 2.35 million, and the language is now being learnt in at least 127 different countries and regions. What implications do these developments have for policy on JFL teaching? How might the broadening range of learners affect teaching approaches? What impact might they have on the language itself? How are Japanese people responding to greater numbers of people interacting with them in their own language, and to the different communities of learners? How would Japan's language planners like the public to respond? Is Japanese becoming more of an international language? This paper explores some of the many issues raised by the expansion of Japanese as a Foreign Language at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Six years into the twenty-first century, Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) is expanding, in terms both of numbers of learners and teachers and of the number of countries where it is taught. This paper explores some of the many issues raised by the expansion of Japanese as JFL a century and a half on from the country opening up to the rest of the world. In trying to provide a broad overview of what is happening in JFL from the different perspectives of policy, learners and native speakers, I am often raising more questions that I am answering.

## 2. EXPANSION: THE FIGURES

A useful starting point is to analyse data on JFL gathered over the last two-and-a-half decades by the Japan Foundation, which has been conducting regular surveys of overseas educational institutions teaching Japanese language since 1979. The number of people learning Japanese worldwide grew enormously between 1979 and 2003, from 127,000 to 2.35 million. Between the surveys conducted in 1998 and 2003, the numbers of institutions, teachers, and learners had increased by 11.8 percent, 20.0 percent, and 12.1 percent respectively (Japan Foundation 2003a). These increases over a five-year period are all the more noteworthy given that this was at a time when the Japanese economy was still stagnating. The “surge of Japanese” described in Florian Coulmas’ (1989) paper has continued unabated.

As one might expect, the largest numbers of learners, 60 percent, are concentrated in Japan’s neighbouring countries in East Asia. Next comes Oceania with 17.6 percent, followed by Southeast Asia (8.7 percent), and North America (6.8 percent). Together, the Asia and Oceania region covers about 90 percent of all the learners. South Korea has the largest number of learners, about 890,000 people, or 37.9 percent of the world’s Japanese-language learners. China is in second place (about 390,000), followed by Australia (about 380,000). These three countries cover approximately 70 percent of the world’s learners of Japanese (Japan Foundation 2003a). It is interesting to note that Korea has over twice as many people learning Japanese as does China, despite the latter’s vastly greater population. China is focusing instead on English, with an explosion of provision of English teaching in public and private institutions over the past decade or so (Quiang and Wolff, n. d.). Nevertheless, Japanese is still the second most widely taught foreign language in China (Coulmas 1989: 125).

Japanese is being studied in more and more countries. According to the Japan Foundation’s 2003 survey, the language is now taught in at least 127 different countries and regions, and in 16 new countries since the 1998 survey. Expansion is particularly noticeable in the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe (Japan Foundation 2003a).<sup>1</sup>

Japanese teaching is concentrated at different levels of education in different countries. In Korea, Australia, Indonesia, and New Zealand, the majority of the learners are in primary and secondary schools, whereas in

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of new countries is: the Maldives, Samoa, Vanuatu, Palau, Iceland, Andorra, Luxembourg, Tajikistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Yemen, Kuwait, Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Benin, and Botswana.

China and Taiwan, more than 50 percent of learners belong to higher educational institutions. In Brazil, nearly 80 percent of learners study Japanese in non-school institutions (Japan Foundation 2003a). The differences reflect the educational structures, language policies, and linguistic backgrounds of the respective countries. Australia and New Zealand have enjoyed large-scale promotion of Japanese as a major foreign language at school and university levels over the last couple of decades, for example, after the National Policy on Languages was introduced in 1987 in Australia. Japanese is now one of the most popular foreign languages in both countries. The 2003 Japan Foundation survey recorded 369,157 pupils at primary and secondary school level learning Japanese in Australia, and 26,012 in New Zealand (Japan Foundation 2003a). Japanese takes far longer for native speakers of English to acquire than European languages, so it is more effective for it to be introduced early in the education system. In Korea, Japanese is the first foreign language, relatively easy to learn because of similarities in grammar (Kurokawa 1992: 98). China has chosen to make English the main foreign language at school level, because of its role as the international language of commerce; in other words, promoting English is part of economic policy. The dominance of non-school institutions in Brazil is almost certainly a reflection of the Japanese government's policy of allowing immigration by the large numbers of *nikkeijin* [people of Japanese descent] from that country, as discussed later in this paper.

Although these students have a range of motivations, three major reasons are common to all educational levels and all countries: "interest in Japanese culture", "desire to communicate using Japanese" and "interest in the Japanese language". At the primary and secondary educational level, "understanding different cultures" and "preparation for examinations" are the key factors. In institutions of higher education, "finding employment" and "study abroad" are considered important. Non-school institutions have comparatively higher numbers of people citing broadly instrumental motivations: "finding employment", "need in present occupation", "study abroad", and "preparation for examinations". (Japan Foundation 2003a). These motivations therefore feature prominently in Brazil, where 80 percent of Japanese learners are in such non-school institutions. As mentioned above, for these learners, "finding employment" is likely to mean going to Japan.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS FOR JFL TEACHING POLICY

#### 3.1. TEACHING APPROACHES

How might the broadening range of learners – from primary schools through to higher education and non-school institutions, and from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds – affect teaching approaches?

One aspect to be considered is the dominance of non-native speaker teachers: 70 percent of Japanese-language teachers worldwide are non-native speakers, and only 20 percent of primary and secondary educational institutions have any native Japanese-language teachers (Japan Foundation 2003a). The level of Japanese competence of these teachers can be expected to vary, particularly depending on the level of classes, and will inevitably have an impact on what their students learn. The Japan Foundation notes the importance of “giving non-native Japanese language teachers a chance to visit Japan to improve their language proficiency, attain teaching methodologies, and place themselves in the Japanese cultural context” (Japan Foundation 2003b); in other words, to equip them better to teach “Japanese Japanese” (closer to Japanese as a second language, JSL).<sup>2</sup>

Teaching materials and methods need to be appropriate to the level and background of the students, taking into account the prevailing teaching methods and expectations in each country and the learners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds: teaching Japanese in China is very different from teaching it in the UK. The Japan Foundation 2003 report indicates that materials and methods are lagging behind the expansion of JFL into such a large number of countries: approximately 40 percent of institutions mention resource problems such as a “lack of teaching materials” and a “lack of information about teaching materials and teaching methods” (Japan Foundation 2003a). In some countries, teaching materials using the learners’ first language may not be available, so teachers have to produce their own materials; or use Japanese-only materials, such as those produced by the Japan Foundation; or teach via a third language, such as English.

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<sup>2</sup> The term JSL is used to refer specifically to Japanese as taught to and used by people living long-term in Japan, whereas JFL refers to the language as used and taught (mainly) outside the country; cf. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language). Although there is obviously a great deal of overlap, the distinction is useful.

### 3.2. IMPACT ON THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

What impact might be felt in the language itself, as the numbers of foreigners who can speak Japanese increase and Japanese loses its status as the language spoken almost exclusively by Japanese people? It is certainly no longer the case – indeed never was – that a Japanese person is someone who speaks Japanese or that someone who speaks Japanese is Japanese. I have argued in the past that it is unlikely that Japanese will be greatly influenced by foreigners using the language (Carroll 2001: 86), but this may not be the case in future, as the numbers of foreign speakers using Japanese, particularly within Japan, and interacting with Japanese people, go on growing. Tsuneyoshi (2004) discusses the various groups of “new” foreigners (as opposed to the “old” foreigners, the established Korean and Chinese populations) who are contributing to the process of Japan’s “internal internationalization”. As the numbers in these various groups increase and as people from a broader range of countries come to live in Japan on a temporary or more long-term basis, the potential for them to have an impact on language use will also grow. Shikama’s paper (this volume) on the need for foreign care workers in Japan’s rapidly ageing society is one example of how demographic change is having an impact on immigration, and may in turn influence language use.

Looking at discussions of how language use is changing in Japan, we see that the debate about deterioration in the language (*kotoba no midare*) that has long been a feature of popular perceptions of Japanese (Carroll 2001: 79–88) has so far tended to be attributed to changes within Japanese society, rather than to external influences. This is unlike the UK, where linguistic changes are frequently portrayed as the result of the negative influence of American English – or, more recently, thanks to the popularity of imported television soap operas, Australian English. There is, however, one example of linguistic change in Japanese that has been attributed to foreign influences, if not to foreign speakers: the spread of odd stress patterns and the trend to flatten out accents has been attributed to the growing number of returnees (*kikokushijo* – people who have lived and been educated abroad as children) appearing as TV newscasters (Carroll 2001: 86). Their experiences of other languages and cultures have an impact on their use of Japanese. The boundaries between Japanese and non-Japanese are being blurred by such individuals, who may function in and between different cultures – who can be said to be transcultural.

Another aspect of Japanese that might be influenced is honorific language (*keigo*). Foreign speakers of Japanese may be unable or unwilling to conform to the accepted norms of *keigo* use (see for example, Neustupný 2005: 309–310), and this may speed up changes in attitudes and use that

are already taking place within Japanese society, such as the shift from negative politeness towards positive politeness, and from hierarchy to solidarity (Carroll 2005; Murata n. d.).

### 3.3. RESPONSES OF THE JAPANESE GENERAL PUBLIC

There is certainly an awareness of the increase in the numbers of foreigners learning Japanese: a survey carried out by the National Language Section (*Kokugo-ka*) of the Agency for Cultural Affairs in 2001 found that 75.3 percent of those questioned said that they were aware that several million people were learning Japanese worldwide and that numbers were increasing (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 2002: 81). As for how Japanese people think foreigners cope with learning Japanese: back in 1991, a survey showed that 79 percent of those asked thought that Japanese was more difficult for foreigners to learn than other languages (NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo 1993: 136). This is presumably largely based on the stereotypical idea of a foreigner (*gaikokujin* or, informally, *gaijin*) and on the long-standing notion of Japanese as a “difficult” language. The same survey found that between 35 percent and 48 percent of those surveyed said a foreigner was either someone of foreign nationality or someone who spoke a foreign language. However, more interestingly, 25 percent said “American”, 15 percent said “a white person”, and almost no-one said “Chinese”, “Koreans resident in Japan”, or “Asians”. The latter groups are, of course, those who are more likely to be long-term residents in Japan and/or to have far less difficulty learning Japanese than the stereotypical American. The widely-held perception of Japanese as a difficult language, even for native speakers, has been criticized, notably by Roy Andrew Miller (1982), as mystification and as part of the “theories of Japaneseness” (*nihonjinron*) popularized in the 1970s and 1980s. However, Coulmas (1985: 255–256) posits an alternative explanation: that the rapid modernization of the language from the late nineteenth century onwards not only produced genuine practical difficulties, but also highlighted the issue of language in the general consciousness, an awareness that persists today. Coulmas also highlights the fact that the Japanese script is unarguably the most complex in the world, challenging even for native speakers. I would add that *keigo* [honorific language] is an area of sociolinguistic competence in which many Japanese feel themselves to be lacking and in which companies offer special training to new employees. There are, therefore, some good reasons why the average Japanese person considers his or her language to be difficult.

Despite the growing number of foreigners living in or visiting Japan, for most Japanese the extent of direct contact with them is still very

limited. Nevertheless, comparison of national surveys carried out by the Language Section showed an increase between 1995 and 2001 in the numbers of people who had spoken to foreigners. In 1995, only 5.4 percent of those surveyed said they had “frequently” been spoken to by foreigners within Japan in the last couple of years, compared to 63.1 percent who had never had such an experience. In the 2001 survey, these respective figures were 8.2 percent and 56.8 percent (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 2002: 85).

However, the answers to questions about what languages were used in these encounters are more difficult to interpret. In the 1995 survey, 30 percent said they were addressed by foreigners mainly in Japanese, and 36 percent were spoken to mainly in English; in the 2001 survey, 29.0 percent were addressed mainly in Japanese, 37.1 percent mainly in English, and 26.3 percent equally in both languages. The respondents were then asked in which language they replied: in 1995, 43.7 percent said mainly in Japanese, 12.2 percent said mainly in English, 39.3 percent said Japanese or English depending on the circumstances, and 4.0 percent said they either tried not to respond as far as possible or simply did not reply. In 2001, the figures were: mainly in Japanese (44.1 percent), mainly in English (16.7 percent) or in either these or another language depending on the situation (32.5 percent) (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 2002: 90). All these figures are very similar in both surveys.

In 1995 those who answered negatively to the first question were asked, “How would you reply if spoken to by a foreigner?” 43.8 percent said they would reply in Japanese, only 1.9 percent in English, and 28.2 percent in either Japanese or English depending on the situation. Interestingly, 12.8 percent said they would try not to reply if possible, and 6.7 percent said they would not respond (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 1995: 37–41). In the 2001 survey, the whole group was asked this question: 43.6 percent said they would reply mainly in Japanese, 7.7 percent mainly in English, 32.0 percent in Japanese or English depending on the situation, and 6.4 percent said they would try not to respond if possible (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 2002: 92). The larger percentages of people willing to respond (in any language) compared to the 1995 responses could be at least partly explained by the inclusion in the later survey of those who had already had encounters with foreigners.

Masamichi Sasaki’s nationwide survey of attitudes of children, their parents and other adults towards globalization and national identity carried out in 2003 included a similar question: “Suppose you had an opportunity to speak with a foreigner in Japan. Even if you knew the foreigner’s language, would you prefer to use Japanese?” While 64.4 percent of those over 60 answered in the affirmative, only 50.1 percent of

those aged 15–17 did, with 43.6 percent of this group saying they would not want to use Japanese (Sasaki 2004: 82). Greater confidence amongst this age group in their ability to use English, coupled with a desire to be “international” (*kokusaiteki*), seems a more likely explanation for the age-gap than a reluctance to hear foreigners speaking Japanese.

So how are Japanese people responding to greater numbers of people interacting with them in their own language, and to the different communities of learners, such as the Brazilian *nikkeijin* [people of Japanese descent], the western *gaikokujin* [foreigners], and the other Asians? Elsewhere in this volume, Shikama discusses how highly Japanese value language skills (and the cultural competence that is assumed to accompany them) in potential foreign workers. Nevertheless, the public also appears to be quite tolerant towards the kind of language that foreigners use. In a 1995 survey, 58.6 percent said that it did not matter if the Japanese that foreigners used was a little odd, so long as they communicated their meaning; 24.2 percent said any kind of Japanese was fine so long as they communicated their meaning; and only 12.7 percent said that foreigners should speak the language the same as Japanese people (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 1995: 35–42). The gradual acceptance of foreigners speaking Japanese can be attributed largely to the rapid increase in foreigners (students and workers) in Japan during the 1980s and 1990s. Tsuneyoshi Ryoko cites a 44.5 percent increase in the number of registered foreigners living in Japan in the decade up to 2002, as well as illegal immigrants, although the numbers are still low as a proportion of the total population (1.45 percent, of which the majority are Korean or of Korean descent) compared with other countries (2004: 60–61).

It is, however, true that expectations and tolerance levels vary considerably, depending on the origin of the foreigner. The obvious example of this is the problems faced by the South American *nikkeijin*, encouraged to come to Japan to fill the country’s labour shortages after a vast increase in illegal immigration during the 1980s. The official reason given for allowing immigration by *nikkeijin*, regardless of occupation, in the Revised Immigration Law of 1990 was that they would fit more easily into Japanese society than other foreigners (Goodman 2004: 467). Richard Gunde (2004) discusses the ambiguous status of the Brazilian *nikkeijin*:

“Most Japanese Brazilian migrants are second and third generation [...] They speak little – often very little – Japanese. And typically whatever Japanese they may speak is nonstandard and perceived by native Japanese as countrified and “low class”. [...] At least initially, in the 1980s, Japanese tended to view the migrants as sufficiently Japanese that they should be subject to more or less the same mores

as native Japanese. Thus, the migrants were not entitled to the same tolerance of difference accorded to most other foreigners. Inappropriate behavior that Japanese might find amusing in foreigners – since such behavior could be excused as the result of ignorance – they would find not the least bit amusing in Nikkeijin migrants, since they should know better. Even in bearing and demeanor – the way one carries oneself, the way one walks, one’s physical gestures, and so on, all of which is of course deeply engrained and usually totally unconscious – Japanese Brazilians could be perceived as transgressing.”

The paper by Yoshioka Keiko on speech-related gestures elsewhere in this issue indicates that it is very likely that factors such as subtle differences in gestural patterns accompanying speech may also contribute to negative perceptions of Brazilian *nikkeijin*. However, even in 1991, half of the Japanese people interviewed said they would not feel strange looking at someone who looked Japanese but could not speak the language, compared to 40 percent who said they would (NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo 1993: 136).

#### 3.4. RESPONSES OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE PLANNERS

In the early 1990s, two aspects of the impact of the expansion of Japanese amongst non-native speakers were considered by the National Language Council (*Kokugo Shingikai*): on the one hand, how to promote and improve the teaching and learning of Japanese as a Foreign or Second Language; and on the other, the need for Japanese people to adjust their attitudes towards foreigners using their language, as well as the effects that the growing number of non-native Japanese speakers might have on the language itself. Key issues included the following: what kind of Japanese should be taught to foreigners; how to promote Japanese abroad and where to focus these efforts; provision for Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) teaching for the growing number of foreign residents, including children, in Japan; and provision for extra tuition for returnees (Bunkachō 1995a: 140). How have things have developed since then?

Regarding the promotion of Japanese abroad, the last decade or so has seen a clear shift, with the Japan Foundation shifting funding away from Europe, North America and Australasia to focus on Southeast Asia, the Middle East and other regions where political and economic motivations are paramount. Meanwhile, within Japan, from the early 1990s, prefectural and local boards of education in areas with growing concentrations of foreign children and returnees began to offer special JSL assistance, providing guidebooks, workshops and assistant instructors. The Ministry of Education began collecting data on the numbers

of children requiring such assistance in 1991, and the 2002 figures were the highest up to that point (Tsuneyoshi 2004: 63–64), and are likely to continue to rise. In her study of schools in Kawasaki, Tsuneyoshi notes that returnees and the “newcomers” (children of foreign, mainly South American, immigrant workers) were placed in the same withdrawal classroom for Japanese and other subjects, despite their very different linguistic, socioeconomic and family backgrounds and their very different needs (2004: 72–73). This indicates that, although steps have been taken to meet the growing JSL need within Japan, there is still a long way to go in developing a sufficiently differentiated approach to be more effective in meeting the needs of the various categories of foreigners as well as those of the returnees.

The government is also promoting English and the development of communication skills in Japanese both in schools and amongst the general public (Carroll 2001: 146–157), policies that are a means of raising general language awareness and might lead to growing tolerance of foreigners speaking Japanese.

How would Japan’s language planners like the public to respond to the increasing numbers of foreigners speaking Japanese? In its last term before the National Language Council was dissolved and replaced by the National Language Subcommittee of the Cultural Affairs Council in January 2001, the Language Council noted the growth in the number of foreigners learning Japanese and the increasing level of contact between Japanese and foreigners. The report it issued stresses that people should be tolerant of, and make allowances for, non-native speakers; they should use clear language themselves, and check that they have understood the speaker’s intentions in order to avoid misunderstandings and taking offence where none is intended. Native speakers are thus encouraged to adjust to non-native speakers to some extent, and not to expect them to speak or behave the same as native speakers (Bunka-chō 2002: 393).

One interesting development that is relevant to this aim and is indicative of changing attitudes is the *yasashii nihongo* [easy Japanese] project led by Kazuyuki Sato at Hirosaki University, supported by a research grant from the Ministry of Education. The project aims to produce a manual of easy Japanese for use by emergency services, broadcasters and others in emergencies (Shibata 2006). It is important to note that this “easy Japanese” is quite different from Nomoto Kikuo’s proposed “simple Japanese” (*kan’yaku nihongo*) of the 1980s, which was criticized for presenting an artificial or “deviant” (Suda 2006) version of the language, restricted to foreigners, and with simplified grammatical forms. “Easy Japanese” is intended to be used by native speakers to foreigners. Crucially, “[w]hen a reporter speaks ‘easy Japanese’, the Japanese sentences

should sound natural to people whose mother language is Japanese” (NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo 2006). Thus foreigners are not separated from Japanese, and the more straightforward language may also be easier for Japanese to understand. “Easy Japanese” uses a restricted number of words: the 2,000 needed for Level 3 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. Its principles cover both spoken and written Japanese:

- keep sentences short to simplify the sentence structure
- use disaster-related terminology that foreign residents are likely to know, paraphrasing immediately after the original words or phrases
- be careful about using loanwords as they might be misunderstood
- use verb sentences rather than nouns derived from nominalized verb stems
- avoid double negation
- choose particles carefully to make sentences comprehensible
- avoid ambiguous expressions
- pay attention to the number of *kanji* used to avoid disadvantaging people from non-*kanji* cultures, and always add *furigana*

(NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo 2006; Shibata 2006: 37). Several of these guidelines are very similar to those recommended by the Plain English Campaign in the UK (Cutts and Maher 1986), and campaigns for “plain language” in other countries.

Looking to the future, it is useful to consider J. V. Neustupný’s (2005) examination of the various kinds of norms and evaluative processes that are applied in contact situations between Japanese and foreigners. He argues that the principle “when in Rome, do as the Romans do” no longer applies universally, and that people look for a more universal basis for their interactions. Although he is dealing largely with customs and behavioural patterns, his arguments also apply to sociolinguistic behaviour. This could prove a fruitful area for more research that could contribute to future education and policy-making that aims to reduce tensions and misunderstandings between foreign and native speakers of Japanese.

#### 4. JAPANESE AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE?

Is Japanese becoming more of an international language, or is its real influence largely restricted to East Asia, which accounts for 60 percent of learners, and Southeast Asia, where Japan is concentrating much of its efforts (Japan Foundation 2003a), while the UK, USA and other western countries shift their sights to learning Chinese to take advantage of China’s booming economy?

The statistics I introduced at the beginning present a mixed picture. On one hand, Japanese is clearly expanding in terms of overall numbers of learners, but, equally importantly, in the range of countries in which it is taught. On the other hand, the majority of learners are concentrated in East Asia, and this is likely to continue. However, if we consider the 16 new countries in which Japanese has begun to be taught between the Japan Foundation's surveys of 1998 and 2003, which are mainly in the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe, it is clear that Japanese has value as a language beyond its nearest neighbours in the "hemisphere of the Chinese script" (Coulmas 1989), and that the Japanese government, via the Japan Foundation, is promoting this view. Coulmas noted that the study of Japanese had been transformed during the preceding two decades "from a somewhat exotic scholarly pursuit into the acquisition of a practical skill with economic utility", and there is no doubt that this transformation has been consolidated since then.

Finally, the National Institute for Japanese Language (*Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo*) is conducting an ongoing research project on Japanese as an international language, recognising the need for more objective information to advance the debates on the issues of whether Japanese can become an international lingua franca and the changes occurring in the language. Regarding JFL, Mizutani Osamu, Director of the Institute from 1990 to 1998, notes that (Mizutani n. d.): "JFL education is thriving, and it is reported that the numbers of people using Japanese worldwide have rapidly increased. It is certainly the case that Japanese has begun to be no longer just something belonging to the Japanese, but we have almost no information on, or even a grasp of the reality of what form this takes in practice, or for what reasons people around the world are embracing Japanese." Although the Japan Foundation is heavily promoting Japanese in particular regions of the world, the above quotation shows that it has been recognized that lack of information on which to base such policies has been a problem, and is likely to continue to be so, given the relatively sudden and rapid expansion of JFL.

As for public opinion, responding to the 2001 Language Section survey, 58.6 percent agreed that it would be a good thing for Japanese to become an international language (Bunka-chō Bunka-bu Kokugo-ka 2002: 83). Will it achieve this status by the end of this century? Is the goal of Japanese language diffusion really to spread the language or rather simply to improve the perceptions of Japan elsewhere in the world? These are questions to be borne in mind when we look at the progress of Japanese worldwide in the decades to come.

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