FROM SCRIPT TO SPEECH:
LANGUAGE POLICY IN JAPAN IN THE 1980s AND 1990s

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1. Introduction

Language is a potent symbol — of identity, of belonging, of shared cultural roots. It is an integral part of a culture and society, and it is language as part of the national image and identity that is at the core of my interest in language policy: what government and government-related bodies are thinking and doing about language reflects wider concerns about society. All countries, whether multilingual or monolingual, and whether or not they have official bodies dedicated to language planning, take stances regarding language, and these attitudes reflect official thinking on what is going on in the nation and aspirations for its future. An understanding of what is happening in language policy in Japan today can shed light on both official and more generally held views on many current issues, such as the continuing tension between tradition and change, perceptions of Japan in the wider world, and maintenance of cultural heritage as manifested in the language.

Language policy and language planning have been defined in various ways. In her book on reform of the Japanese writing system, Nanette Gottlieb discusses some of these, summing up language planning as 'consciously engineered language change', and language policy as 'the specific strategies formulated and implemented by the planners to achieve their objectives' (Gottlieb, 1995: 1-2). Jirí V Neustupný distinguishes between 'policy' (including selection of an official language or dialect, or orthography reforms), 'cultivation' (including issues of style and correctness) (Neustupný 1978: 258-261). In a very brief definition, William F Mackey says simply, 'Language policy is the

accommodation of society to language diversity.' (Mackey 1991: 51). Language planning is often seen simply as language reform, which Neustupný defines as 'the extensive radical changes in linguistic usage as a conscious response to the existence of language problems' (Neustupný, 1983: 29), or, as Carol Eastman points out, 'exclusively as standardisation' (Eastman 1983: 153). My approach takes a much wider interpretation, whereby language planning and policy include any involvement by governmental or quasi-governmental bodies in any aspect of language, thus including Neustupný's 'policy' and 'cultivation' types of language treatment. Specific measures such as selection of an official language, standardisation, and language reform (including of script) are clearly involved, but in the broadest sense that I employ throughout this paper, however, language policy also includes language education and promotion of language awareness. This latter is perhaps the area most closely linked with national image and identity, which is why it is of particular interest.

As Donna Christian points out, language policy is not simply based on linguistic considerations, but exists in a matrix of social, political, and cultural factors. It is of general interest because it reflects what is happening elsewhere in the social, economic, cultural environment of a country:

> It is important to bear in mind that language fills not only communication, but also symbolic functions within a society. In many cases the policy decisions relate as much to the symbolic value of language as a unifying or separatist force in a community (Garvin and Mathiot 1956) as to real

> communication needs. As a result, political, social and economic concerns typically far outweigh linguistic considerations in language planning' (Christian, 1988: 193-4).

If language influences how we see the world, then what governments and their organs do to regulate or influence language says something about what they want our view of the world to be. In doing so, it also says something about image and identity — individual, national, regional, and international. Policies on language can be used to support moves in other areas:

> 'Language policy in Japan, as indeed anywhere else, has always been formulated to suit the agenda of those in power at the time.' (Gottlieb, 1994: 1195).

In the past this agenda has been 'driven by imperatives ranging from modernisation to imperialism to democratisation to conservatism.' (Gottlieb, 1995: 21). This paper focuses on investigating the current agenda (explicit and implicit), and the underlying 'political, social, and economic concerns', and seeks to highlight why language policy should still be considered important in Japan as it approaches the end of the twentieth century.

1.1 State organisations involved in language policy in Japan

Before outlining the history of Japanese language policy, it is useful to look at the bodies involved in this process and their inter-relationships. Various governmental or quasi-governmental organisations play a role in language policy in Japan, but all come under the jurisdiction of the Monbushô (Ministry of Education and Culture). It oversees the Kokugo Shingikai (National Language Consultative Council)[1], the Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyûjo (National Language Research Institute), and the Kokugoka (National Language Division) which is part of the Bunkachô (Agency for Cultural Affairs). As different organs have been established, become moribund, and been reincarnated, their respective roles and functions have shifted. Today, each has a specific role in the formulation and diffusion of official language policy, but there is still a high degree of interaction and interdependence between them.

The organ now charged with defining policy is the Kokugo Shingikai (National Language Council); this has had various incarnations since the first commission on language, the Kokugo Chôsa Kai, was set up in 1900 by the Monbusho in answer to the discussions on the language and its reform which had been taking place throughout the Meiji Era. This was replaced in 1902 (Meiji 35) by the Kokugo Chôsa Iinkai (National Language Investigative Committee) (Loveday 1986: 309). Its remit was to investigate and make recommendations on various issues, in particular, to investigate dialects and fix upon a standard language, to investigate *genbun'itchi* (unification of speech and writing),[2] and to consider the various options for script reform (Daniels 1976: 16-17).

These aims cover both research and policy; thus the interdependence of the two is seen from the earliest stages of language policy in Japan.

As the political, social and economic circumstances changed, so the council was established, abolished, and reformed, and the changing appellations followed a shifting emphasis in its functions, from research to focusing on policy-making. The Kokugo Chôsa Iinkai was dissolved in 1913 in a general reorganisation of the Monbushô, having produced 'A number of valuable historical studies — on *kana* spellings, phonology, colloquial grammar, etc.' *(ibid)*, and the notion of a language council was not revived until 1921 with the setting up of the Rinji Kokugo Chôsakai (Interim National Language Investigatory Council). It was at this point that the functions of policy and research were separated, leaving research to the universities. In 1934 this was replaced by the more permanent Kokugo Shingikai (National Language Council), which was re-established in 1949 (Loveday 1986: 310); today it operates under the terms of the revised ordinance of 1962 (Gottlieb, 1995: 17).

The Council deliberates and makes recommendations to the Cabinet, which then issues *kunrei* (decrees binding on all government offices), and *kokuji* (notification/bulletins — information for the general public that have no binding force). It comprises up to fifty members from various spheres — education, journalism, broadcasting, writers, academics (linguists, scientists, and others) — who serve a two year term; they are appointed by the Education Minister on the recommendations of the Head of the Bunkachô (Agency for Cultural Affairs); and the Chair is elected by council members.

Each session or term lasts two years. Its remit is to investigate matters relating to the improvement and reform of the language, promotion of language education, and romanisation; to make proposals on matters relevant to these issues to the Education Minister or other Ministers or the Head of the Agency for Cultural Affairs; it also issues annual reports, in which modifications of the script still feature prominently.

The Council in its current form was described by the Monbushô in 1950 as:

> ... the supreme technical organ of deliberation over the national language and also ... a perfect democratic organ of deliberation ... [whose duty is to] obtain a fair and wise conclusion for the national language reform ... (Monbushô, 1950: 89).

The second official language body is the Kokugoka (Japanese/National Language Division), which is today a division of the Bunkachô (Agency for Cultural Affairs), an external organ of the Ministry of Education established in 1968 (Agency for Cultural Affairs 1973: 1). The Kokogoka was established in 1940 to regularise the Japanese language and writing system, and, more particularly, to promote Japanese overseas (ie in the Japanese-occupied territories of Taiwan and Korea) (Shioda 1973: 141). The desire to unite these outposts of Japan led to the imposition of Japanese as the language officially recognised throughout the Empire.

Today, the Kokugoka manages the general affairs of the National Language Council. It publishes official recommendations, for example, restricted *kanji* lists and guidelines on *kana* usage, which are binding on government offices. It issues guidelines to government departments on official writing styles, including avoidance of official jargon and layout of forms. It also carries out surveys and produces various publications on language for the general public; it is thus crucial in the dissemination to the wider public of official thinking on language, including the language policy decisions of the Kokugo Shingikai and the research of the Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyûjo.

With the aim of promoting language awareness and appreciation, in 1973, following a recommendation made the previous year by the Kokugo Shingikai, the Kokugoka began to issue a regular series of booklets on the Japanese language that are available for general consumption, particularly for 'schools and the institutions of social education' (Agency of Cultural Affairs 1983: 28). This *Kotoba Shiriizu* (Language Series) already ran to forty-one booklets in 1994, whose titles reflect what official language bodies in Japan consider to be important aspects of the language. There are introductions to more technically linguistic matters, for example, No 18 *Kotoba to Onsei* (Language and Phonetics); and a number of collections of discussions on particular points of usage *Kotoba ni Kansuru Mondai 1-13* (Questions and Answers on Language). Of more interest to this investigation, however, are the publications which cover sociolinguistic topics, for example, No 2 *Kotoba no Shitsuke* (Language Discipline/Training Manners), No 10 *Nihongo no Tokushoku* (Special Features of Japanese), No 26 *Nihongo to Gaikokujin* (Japanese and Foreigners), No 40 *Kotoba no kyoiku* (Language Education),

and so on. The booklets present the public with an officially approved picture of the Japanese language. The official view concerning the desired attitudes of the general public is perhaps summed up in a statement in an English language publication on the work of the Bunkachô:

> In order to make national language simpler, more exact, more beautiful and richer, it is of dire necessity to enhance the nation's consciousness of the language and to inspire among the nation the spirit of attaching more importance to the language. (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1983).

This is a clear statement of the role of the Kokugoka in promoting language awareness amongst the general public. More specifically:

> Needless to say, it is essential for Japanese people to use good Japanese in an articulate manner. The Monbusho has been conducting various surveys and studies on the Japanese language and preparing relevant publications, with a view to ensuring that every Japanese increases a proper awareness of the national language and nurture a love for the language. (Monbushô 1989: 46)

The last of the three main organisations is the Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyûjo (National Japanese Language Research Institute), which carries out research that the Kokugo Shingikai may then use as the basis for policy recommendations. With its founding in late 1947 (Monbushô, 1950: 88), research into the national language was brought back under

the wing of the Monbushô, and the Ministry regained its overall control of language research, policy, and promotion. A separate division concerned with the teaching of Japanese to foreigners (*nihongo* as opposed to *kokugo*) was set up in 1974.

The Institute's role was to carry out research into all aspects of the Japanese language: sociolinguistic studies of the language habits of the population (*gengo seikatsu* — literally, 'language life'), including detailed studies of regional dialects and accents; research on the phonetic and grammatical systems of Japanese; studies on language usage in newspapers and other publications (Daniels 1976: 21-22). The head attends Language Council meetings, and the academic research of the Institute is seen as having very practical applications in policy formation:[3]

> The findings of the surveys on these problems are expected to be useful in predicting future speech behaviour. They are assumed to serve as the academic foundations for making practical language policies, among which the major one is that of language standardization. (Ide, 1986: 232)

Nevertheless, the Institute is independent of the Council, and has its own remit and aims to fulfil: its overall role is to increase 'general knowledge of the language and its function in Japanese society' (Gottlieb, 1995: 19). For researchers, the most valuable of its publications is probably the annual Kokugo Nenkan (Language Yearbook), which lists all publications on language in that year.

Currently the Institute is staffed by around seventy-five academics who are classed as civil servants (Grootaers 1983: 34); they are specialists in linguistics and the Japanese language (*kokugo*); the latter represents the more traditional strand of language study in Japan, while the former (*gengogaku*) is based on linguistics as studied in other countries. The Institute combines these approaches and thereby goes some way towards presenting a united stance on linguistic matters; in fact the ideological splits between the two approaches are sometimes considerable.[4] The emphasis of the research is on data rather than theory: as Sachiko Ide points out, research reports tend to consist of quantities of detailed data with little or no interpretation of the possible implications:

> ... there is no theoretical framework or model on which the surveys are designed; neither is there any attempt to set up rules, nor any argument over the theoretical implications of individual findings. Such findings are not integrated in order to arrive at general conclusions, but are merely listed. (Ide 1986: 284).

Apart from the three official state bodies concerned with language, one other relevant organisation is NHK (Nippon Hyôsô Kyôkai — Japan Broadcasting Corporation), Japan's public broadcasting organisation, which is currently comparable to the BBC. It is not a state broadcasting organisation, but it has links with the above institutions and considerable influence on what is considered as the standard language and its promotion throughout the nation:

> ... one of the most convenient ways of identifying the exact parameters of the standard language is to define it as that variety of Japanese recorded in the pronouncing dictionaries and other handbooks prepared by the state broadcasting corporation for the use of its announcing staff. This gives some idea of the importance that radio and television have had in the diffusion of the standard of Tokyo speech throughout the country. (Miller, 1967: 145)

As Izumi (1978: 61) points out, 'Undoubtedly, the Japanese are heavy TV viewers.' The whole population now has daily exposure to the standard language, and is familiar with it, at least on a passive level. In terms of language production, many people's actual language use varies on a scale between pure standard and pure local dialect, depending on the formality of the situation and the interlocutors (Neustupný, 1987: 160-1).

Broadcasting is recognised by the general public as playing a central role in presenting and promoting the standard language: in a 1989 NHK survey on language, 68.5% selected the category 'language of announcers' as being 'standard language'. The Language Division of the NHK Culture Research Institute carries out research on broadcasting language, public linguistic attitudes, dialects, and other aspects of language; it complements the work of the Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyûjo, albeit on a much smaller scale. NHK announcers use the Tokyo standard, appropriate for the public domain. NHK also makes efforts to avoid confusing homonyms as much as possible in its broadcasting. I have examined the role of NHK in language policy in an earlier paper (Carroll 1995),

and my concern here is mainly with the official government bodies. It is of course true that many other organisations, particularly the commercial media and the business world, have as much, if not more, influence on actual language usage than these official bodies, but a full examination of these influences is outside the scope of this paper.

It is clear from the above descriptions that Japan is well furnished with official bodies concerning themselves with the national language, and that these bodies have close contacts with each other, covering the areas of research investigation, discussion and policy-making, and promotion of policies and language awareness. How these organisations have worked together in the past to develop language policy up to the 1980s is the subject of the following section.

2. Background: a brief history of language policy in Japan

Language policy in Japan has its roots in the nineteenth century, with the reforms of the late Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishô Periods (1912-1926); since then the focus has shifted according to the perceived priorities of the nation. The early emphasis was on establishing and codifying a standard language, and on written language reform; this shifted to a focus on script reform after the Second World War. These were two key phases, both prompted by external forces. In Meiji Japan, it was the perceived need to raise educational levels, integrate the nation, and modernise and industrialise to catch up with other nations that was the impetus for reform. After the Second World War, it was

pressure from the Occupation for democratisation; in terms of the language, this meant reform of the script. Here, external pressure combined with the long-standing internal pressure for simplification, if not an outright switch to romanisation.

The major language reforms began, as in so many other areas, in the Meiji (1868-1912) Period. The new rulers of Meiji Japan saw an urgent need to unite the country in order to modernise and catch up with the West:

> Leaders gradually came to realise that what was needed in the wake of the tremendous social upheavals following the Meiji Restoration was the fashioning and refining of that language into an instrument which would serve the nation both as a means of achieving its various planned reforms and as a focus of national pride, an element in a sense of nationalism....' (Twine 1991: 9)

The establishment of a standard language can play an important part in defining a nation as an entity, in bringing together disparate groups within its boundaries, and in presenting a unified face to, and an official means of communication with, the outside world. The development of a standard is therefore a process which tends to occur at a certain point in a country's economic, technological, social and political development. This tends to be when 'ideas of nationhood and political autonomy are gaining currency' (Leith 1983: 39). At the end of the nineteenth century Japan was at this point, and a common standard language comprehensible throughout the country would lend credence to the idea of one

nation, one race (Sanada, 1987: 73-4). The establishment of a national standard language served both a practical purpose as a prerequisite for improved communication and the spread of mass education necessary for modernisation, and more idealistic ones, as a focal point for national identity and unity and a move towards breaking down the hierarchies of the old feudal system.

As mentioned in the description of the various official language bodies above, the Kokugo Chôsa Iinkai was set up in 1902 to investigate various language issues. Its tasks included the following: investigation of Japanese dialects with a view to selecting an official standard; research into the possibilities of abolishing *kanji* (Chinese characters) and replacing them with a phonetic script (*kana* — Japanese syllabaries, or *rômaji* — roman alphabet); the written style favoured by the 'unification of written and spoken language' movement; and the phonetic system of Japanese. One of its major aims was therefore to settle the issue of an official standard language once and for all. By this point, a *de facto* common language was already in use, based on the dialect of the Yamanote area of Tokyo. Its rise began with the Edo Era (1603-1867), when the Shogun Tokugawa leyasu set up his capital in Edo (now Tokyo), thus establishing a rival centre to the Imperial capital of Kyoto. Until then, the Kyoto dialect had been the prestige language variety, associated with the nobility, and it continued to be a rival to the Edo dialect. The first national dialect dictionary, which appeared in 1776, still gave the Kyoto dialect as standard, but indicated the growing influence of the Edo dialect as the language of the educated upper classes throughout the country (Sanada 1987: 65). The growth of Edo and the influx of people from all over Japan, together with the system

of *sankin kôtai* (alternate attendance), infused elements of many dialects, so that today's standard contains features not found in other dialects of Eastern Japan (Tanaka 1983: 9). Gradually the balance shifted in favour of the Edo dialect, and when the Meiji Restoration of 1868 moved the Imperial capital to Edo, renamed Tokyo, its future as the official standard language, not simply the *de facto* common language, was virtually assured. However, the selection of the Tokyo dialect was not a foregone conclusion: there was much discussion of the alternatives in government and scholarly circles, with the Kyoto dialect still being favoured by some, and even the famous proposal in 1873 from Mori Arinori, Minister of Education and Culture, to abandon Japanese completely and switch to English (Miller 1982: 108). The Kokugo Chôsa Iinkai reported to the Monbushô in 1905: the Tokyo dialect, that of the political, economic, Imperial, and cultural centre of Japan, triumphed.

Another major obstacle was the gulf between the spoken language and the wide range of written styles, varieties of Classical Japanese now far removed from normal speech in grammar and lexis. At the beginning of the Meiji Period, it became clear that these existing diverse classical traditions of the written language were a barrier to extending literacy to all and thus to the educational and economic development of the country. The establishment of a uniform style of writing based on the grammar and vocabulary of a standard form of the spoken language was vital. The *genbun'itchi* ('unification of written and spoken language') movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries first appeared in the literary world and gradually gained ground in other spheres, particularly

the major newspapers. It was crucial in simplifying the confusion of varieties in use, thereby facilitating the spread of a standard, at least in written form.

The Monbushô's subsequent use of the Tokyo dialect, or that variety of it already widely accepted as the standard, and the style of the 'unification of written and spoken language' movement gave them the official seal of approval and set the scene for more vigorous promotion of the standard. School textbooks were the immediate means of establishing the standard in written form amongst the upcoming generations, and these were, as today, all sanctioned by the Education Ministry.

It is at this point that a crucial influence in the spread of a spoken standard language came into being: NHK, the public broadcasting corporation (analogous to the British BBC) started radio broadcasting in 1925 and television broadcasting in 1953. Mass education had proved insufficient for the spread of the spoken standard on a large scale, particularly since the teachers themselves were not all fluent standard speakers; and when radio broadcasting began, the standard was still by no means fully established throughout Japan, at least in its spoken form. As pointed out by Bruno Lewin, NHK has been as crucial in the spread of a nationally recognised and acceptable spoken standard language as the national education system has been for the written standard (Lewin 1979: 90). The advent of broadcasting was the final event that ensured the dominance of a standard dialect based on the speech of the middle and upper classes of the capital and surrounding area, and validated this as the desirable variety to which to aspire.

Once the related issues of deciding on an officially sanctioned dialect as the standard one, and a written style closer to the spoken language had been resolved, the major remaining challenge was to reform the complex writing system. When it reported to the government in 1905, the Kokugo Chôsa Iinkai rejected the arguments for abolishing *kanji*. These subsequently resurfaced after the Second World War, but in the meantime, in an early attempt at reducing the burden of *kanji*, the Chôsakai proposed in May 1923 a restricted list of 1962 *kanji* for general use (*jôyô kanji*). The large newspapers were about to implement this list when the Kantô earthquake of September 1923 destroyed the type, amongst much else, and delayed until 1925 implementation of a revised list of 2,108 *kanji*. Any moves towards replacing *kanji* by a phonetic system (*kana* or *rômaji*), or further reducing the number of *kanji* in general use, were stopped in their tracks in the ultra-nationalistic 1930s (Unger 1996: 57). In particular, the Manchuria Incident in September 1931 prevented the introduction of the Interim Council's proposed revised list of 1,856 characters, partly because of the need to use many characters for Chinese place and personal names that were not common in Japan, but, more importantly in ideological terms, because of the military's predilection for *kango* (Sino-Japanese vocabulary) and difficult characters (Seeley 1991: 147). Although the more permanent National Language Council replaced the Interim one in 1934, it had to exercise 'great circumspection in its deliberations on the reform of Chinese characters' (Seeley 1991: 148). The value of *kanji* as the repository of Japanese history, culture, and ultimately the Japanese spirit was emphasised in the prevailing political climate; they were seen as central to the preservation of *kokutai* (national polity) (*ibid*; see also Miller 1982: 92-94). The irony of the fact that *kanji* were not indigenous, but introduced from China, seems

to have been conveniently ignored in this way of thinking. It is well-known that this was a period of purging of foreign words and, by extension, ideas, when, for example, *beesubôru* (baseball) was replaced by *yakyû*. Although a list of *kanji* recommended for use in government offices and in general use, the *hyôjun kanjihyô* was issued in December 1942, it contained 2,669 characters, around 700 more than the proposed 1923 list (Seeley 1991: 149). However, pragmatic considerations eventually outweighed ideological ones when the military was forced to simplify the nomenclature used for weapon parts and abandon the use of historical *kanazukai* (kana usage) in order to avoid the potentially disastrous consequences of the low level of literacy of many of its recruits (Seeley 1991: 150-1).

With Japan's defeat in 1945 came the opportunity for the second wave of reforms; the initial reforms were carried out swiftly, and were largely concerned with simplifying and rationalising the complex Japanese script. The immediate post-war years are described in a contemporary Monbushô publication as 'an epoch-making period not only for our history of education, but also for the history of the national language which may be called the incarnation of our people's spirit.' (Monbushô 1950: 80). In his 1976 review of Japanese language policy, F J Daniels highlights the revealing fact that Japan was able to spare scarce funds to set up the National Language Research Institute at a time when the nation was desperately short of resources (Daniels 1976: 22): an indication of the central importance of the language to the Japanese state and people. The language was one thing that the Japanese had left more or less intact at the end of World War II: their industry and cities were largely destroyed; their Emperor was stripped of his divine

status; the Empire was lost; the language could be seen as an emblem of Japanese unity and culture and a bulwark against potentially overwhelming foreign influence — as it had been before in the Meiji Period. The country's leaders were willing to invest in an organisation to investigate the language and associated problems. The symbolic and practical power that the language was seen to hold is illustrated in the following quote from an approximately contemporary report on educational reform:

> ... the problem of language reform not only forms the basic phase of educational reform, but it has the grave significance of revolutionizing culture and people's life from its very bottom.' (Monbushô, 1950: 79)

The actual degree of external threat to the language, or rather, the writing system, is investigated in J Marshall Unger's 1996 book, *Literacy and Script Reform in Occupation Japan: Reading Between the Lines*. The idea that the Japanese had to produce the *tôyô kanjihyô* quickly under threat of more radical reform being imposed by SCAP (Supreme Command for the Allied Powers) is contradicted by the many preceding (purely Japanese) proposals and actual moves to limit the number of characters in general use; in fact, the 1946 *tôyô kanjihyô* (List of Characters for Current Use), with its 1850 characters, is only smaller than the proposed 1923 list by about 70 characters. And although the visiting United States Education Mission recommended in 1946 that romanisation be adopted, it stressed that its implementation should be left to the Japanese themselves (Unger 1996: 59). For those who opposed reform outright the Occupation was a convenient scapegoat. Unger describes how key American officials

undermined an experiment using romanisation in primary schools, and thus worked against radical script reform. In an earlier book, he sums up the failure to introduce romanisation to replace Japanese script as follows:

> ... the golden opportunity afforded by the Occupation was lost because proponents of script reform became entangled in negative political fights, among themselves and with the government, instead of building a positive consensus among ordinary Japanese by getting them to read and write without *kanji*. (Unger 1987: 195)

The changes that actually took place in this second major wave of reforms were a continuation of the process begun at the beginning of the century, and fall into three phases. First, the immediate post-war period saw *kanji* and *kana* reform leading to the restricted list of 1,850 *kanji* to be used by all government organisations, press etc, that is, in the public domain — the *tôyô kanjihyô*. This was issued in 1946 and was intended as an 'interim' measure, a first step on the way to further reduction of characters. It was followed later the same year by recommendations on *gendai kanazukai* (modern *kana* usage), and in 1951 by a separate list of 92 characters permitted for given names (*jinmeiyô kanji beppyô*) (Seeley 1991: 152-57). All of these reforms worked to simplify the script and make it more accessible, thus contributing to the process of democratisation promoted by both the Occupation and Japanese reformers.

The new Constitution of May 1947 used the *tôyô kanji* in conjunction with *hiragana* rather than the *katakana* traditionally used for official documents, and 'was written in colloquial Japanese readable for any citizen of Japan in contemporary society' (Inoue 1982: 281). In doing so, it gave authority to the restricted *kanji* list and proved that it was possible to write the most important legal document in the land in a style comprehensible to all. It was therefore an important symbol of democracy, and ensured that all future official documents were written in the same style. [5]

Although the *kanji* and *kana* lists were widely accepted, used in government publications, school textbooks, newspapers, and so on, not everyone was happy with them. The growing strength of conservative elements in the National Language Council and the intervention of the LDP during the late 1950s culminated in the highly-publicised walk-out of five conservatives from a Language Council meeting in 1961 (Gottlieb 1995: 166-171). This prompted the second phase, the cycle of review of the immediate post-war reforms between 1966 and 1991 (Shôwa 41–Heisei 3), which resulted in the *jôyô kanji* list (1981), and revised recommendations on *okurigana* (declensional *kan*a word endings)and *katakana* usage. The Cabinet announcement stresses that the *jôyô kanji* list is a standard, a set of guidelines for legal, official, press, broadcasting and general use, and does not extend to science, technology and the arts. The list therefore serves as a recommendation rather than a definite set of rules; it embodies the move from the notion of *seigen* (limit) to *meyasu* (guideline). Moreover, it contains 1945 characters, 95 more than the *tôyô kanji* list, and therefore makes manifest a clear reversal in the original idea of the *tôyo kanji* list being the first step along the road to further character reduction.

> ‘With the issue of a policy document ‘The writing of foreign loanwords’ (*katakana*) in 1991, the 25-year cycle of reflection on and revision of the postwar revisions requested by the Minister [of Education] came to an end ... in all matters relating to characters there had been a definite reversal of previous policy, confirming the central importance of characters to written Japanese, removing strict limits on their use ...’ (Gottlieb 1994: 1194).

Since this second phase finished in 1991, the focus has widened from just the written language, and discussions on this new phase began with the opening of the nineteenth session of the Kokugo Shingikai in September 1991. It is this period that is the main focus of this paper, and which I now go on to examine.

3. Current situation

3.1 Shift from the 1980s to the 1990s

Western researchers such as Jiri Neustupný, Christopher Seeley, and Nanette Gottlieb argue that there has been a shift away from the aim of encouraging democracy of the immediate postwar years towards conservatism. The views of Japanese scholars range from the Marxist interpretations of Miyajima Tatsuo and Suzuki Yasuyuki, to the widely

available right-wing publications of Maruya Saiichi and Ôno Susumu. The former argue that collusion between an increasingly right-wing government and the Kokugo Shingikai led to the shift from radical to revisionist approach. The latter view the postwar reforms as detrimental to Japan's culture and point to the success of Japanese language word processors as proving that the script is not a barrier to technological progress (summarised in Gottlieb 195: 35-6). This view is not shared by everyone, as we see later. Gottlieb herself attributes the shift from a radical to a revisionist approach through the 1960s to 'a combination of increased social leisure to reflect on the nature of things Japanese and political interference, manipulated to the full by those who had never supported the reforms in the first place.' (Gottlieb, 1995: 17). The recent broadening of discussion to focus on various aspects of the spoken language has taken place against a different background. Public perceptions, social and economic change, the growing importance of broadcasting, and Japan's changing role in the world are amongst the factors that have prompted the change in direction of Kokugo Shingikai discussions.

In the past, official policy has focused mainly on the written language for several reasons: firstly, the written language is relatively easy to codify, set standards for, and monitor, unlike speech (Fasold 1984: 258). Secondly, the complexities of the Japanese writing system have long been seen as a major problem. Calls for simplification on a major scale (conversion to *kana* only or to *rômaji*), renewed during the Occupation, have never made headway. The problems of the large number of homonyms in the Sino-Japanese vocabulary, which only context and different *kanji* can differentiate, appear to form a permanent barrier to such a radical change, although some, notably J Marshall Unger,

argue that *kanji* are not essential; he rates the cultural and psychological importance of *kanji* for the Japanese as far outweighing such practical considerations (Unger 1987, 1996).

Despite the long-standing emphasis on the written language, within the last decade, a shift in public perceptions of what language policy is concerned with has become apparent. In the mid-late 1980s, when I stated my interest in language policy, the assumption was that this was concerned with *kanji*. By 1994, however, the reaction had changed to what now seems to have become a set phrase: *kotoba ga midarete iru* — 'the language has become confused / is in a state of disorder'.

This is not just a shift in public perceptions: the focus of official policy had indeed changed during this period, broadening out to consider wider language issues again, including grammar and, specifically, spoken language. At the beginning of each two-year term of the Kokugo shingikai, it sets out the issues to be discussed and dealt with; these tasks are decided based on a request from the Education Minister, who is in turn advised by the Bunkachô (Gottlieb, 1995: 18). Within the Bunkachô, it is of course the Kokugoka which carries out public opinion surveys and makes recommendations bearing the results of these in mind. Thus there is a cycle in which the Kokugoka feeds areas of public concern into the deliberations of the Shingikai, and then publicises its subsequent conclusions. It is therefore difficult to ascertain where the idea of 'disorder' in the language first arose, since the influence between public opinion and policy is reciprocal; but what is clear, not only from my conversations with Japanese language specialists and

acquaintances in various fields, but also from the newspapers, is that the theme of *midare* — 'confusion' — has become well-known and is a target of language policy.

The nineteenth session of the Kokugo Shingikai began in September 1991; the Council had forty-five members from various academic fields, and from journalism, business, broadcasting, and the literary world. At the end of its two year term it produced a new set of issues to be discussed in the following session; these were listed under five main headings, and outlined in a report issued in June 1993 (Heisei 5), *Gendai no kokugo o meguru sho-mondai ni tsuite* ('Some problems concerning the national language') (Kokugo Shingikai, 1993). This report gives some indication of priorities and concerns; together with interviews I carried out in Japan in early 1994 with members of the National Language Research Institute, the National Language Section, and the NHK Broadcasting Research Institute, it forms the basis of the following section of the paper. It is the developments from this report that will be the subject of my continuing research — what is of concern, to whom, and why? What recommendations will be made, and how likely are they to be put into practice?

3.2. Areas established by 19th session of National Language Council

The 1993 report listed five areas of *gendai no kotoba* (current / contemporary language) to be examined by future sessions of the National Language Council. The areas were:

1) language usage — *kotobazukai*

2) *jôhôka* — shift to information society

3) international society

4) language education / research

5) script

If we compare these five areas to be investigated and the general views expressed on them with policy in past, it is possible to see how the climate has changed and continues to change, and how the focus has broadened out from the narrow one of script to include other aspects of language, much as in the early days of language reform.

3.2.1. *(Gendai) kotobazukai*

The area of current language usage covers a range of topics, and it is stressed that it is vital to think about the needs of today's world. The report emphasises the desirability of clear, precise, beautiful, rich language.

> Kokugo no hyôgen wa, heimei, tekkaku de, utsukushiku, yutaka na mono de aru koto ga nozomashii.' (Bunkachô 1993: 5).

Kotoba no midare

It is under the heading of 'current language usage' that the key phrase *kotoba no midare* appears. In the recent Japanese literature, two different words are used to describe this phenomenon: *midare* and *yure*. The former connotes 'disorder, confusion', whereas the latter refers rather to a shift or change in language. In its publications, NHK uses *yure*,

which it sees as being more objective; *midare*, on the other hand, implies a subjective value judgement, where the emphasis is on a shift away from a standard, from 'how things used to be' — *jibun no monosashi kara zurete iru*; there is an implied desire for things to return to the previous state of affairs. *Midare* therefore has a somewhat negative image (interview with NHK researcher, February 1994). However, *midare* seems to be used in official surveys, for example, those carried out by the Kokugoka (Bunkachô 1995).

This perceived 'disorder' is manifest in various phenomena[6]; specifically mentioned in the report are: pronunciation and accent, particularly the trend to a flattening out of accent (*heibonka*); and the *ra nuki kotoba* debate.[7] The latter is a good example of natural language change and resistance to it; in this particular case, since its use amongst younger generations is growing, the long-term battle is probably lost.

Broadcasting

The rapid spread of broadcasting, and the influence of television on language, especially of children, is a major source of concern. The report does not distinguish between NHK and commercial broadcasters. Again, the plea for 'beautiful, rich, attractive' (*miryoku ni tonda*) language usage (in broadcasting) is made.

Given the influence attributed by the general public to broadcasting — 83% of those in a 1992 NHK survey thought that the media bore a great responsibility for *kotoba no midare* — the gap between this aspiration and reality appears rather wide. Broadcasting language, however, is clearly not the same as everyday spoken language. It is a variety in

its own right, particularly the language of news programmes; it falls somewhere between written and spoken language, and is still a new and developing variety. One writer goes so far as to suggest that a new *genbun'itchi* (unification of speech and writing) is taking place in broadcasting (Inagaki 1992: 75).

As stated above, the influence of the mass media, particularly of television in spreading a 'common language' (*kyôtsûgo*), at least in terms of its comprehension, cannot be underestimated; and although dialects still exist in parallel with this common language, like all language they too change and evolve. NHK has increasing numbers of reporters from different regions with varying accents, so the range is widening. A growing number of contributors other than trained announcers are appearing on radio and television, and for such people, content is valued over form or presentation; the range of language heard is broadened as a consequence. The influence of commercial broadcasting is also important here; given the vast amount of airtime such organisations cover, and the amount of television watched by Japanese, it could be argued that they have more influence than NHK. If any recommendations on language in broadcasting are made, therefore, the cooperation of these commercial broadcasters will be essential.

***Keigo* (respect language)**

Although misuse of *keigo* (respect language) is frequently cited as evidence of the breakdown of the language and the two areas are clearly closely linked, *keigo* is dealt with as a separate category from *kotoba no midare*. The Council sees *keigo* as very important, vital for 'smooth human relations', and states the need to look at *keigo* in both spoken and written language. This is not the first time that it has been the subject of

discussion by the National Language Council. In 1952 it issued recommendations on *keigo* usage, *Kore kara no keigo* , but since then, there have been no official guidelines. Society has changed enormously in the last half-century, but this has not meant that *keigo* is disappearing; on the contrary, there is evidence that many people still attach great importance to its correct usage. Books for the general public on *keigo* are available in plenty; schoolteachers are asking the Education Ministry for guidelines; new company employees are specifically trained in its use; and complaints about its misuse are frequently heard. Since *keigo* is the linguistic expression of social relations, its proper use is seen as a mirror of the functioning of society. The implications of a perceived breakdown in *keigo* usage are discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Dialects

The view expressed in the 1993 report is that dialects must be valued together with the *kyôtsûgo* (common language). This is a very different attitude from the early days of language reform when the need was to forge one united nation and modernise, and the use of dialects was very strongly discouraged, particularly in schools. From the early Taishô Era (1912-1926) there was increased stress on the use of the spoken standard in schools, with children being punished for using their own dialects, (Ishino 1975: 68), just as the speakers of the Celtic languages, and other dialect users of the British Isles, were punished for not using English at school (Leith 1983: 153-183). A famous case in Okinawa in 1930 brought severe criticism, but the case was forgotten in the military build-up (Ishino *op cit*). Dialects are now seen as something to be positively valued and maintained, a shift in attitudes that has arisen against a background of changing political and social imperatives: the rise of regionalism from the 1970s onwards, the *furusato*

boom,[8] and the U-turn phenomenon, whereby people who move from their homes to study and work in the big cities are increasingly wanting to return to their home region, and being encouraged to do so by local governments (Harnischfeger 1992: 12-13). These phenomena are discussed more fully in the following section on underlying themes. (Section 4.)

3.2.2. *Jôhôka shakai* (the information society)

The 1993 report notes that technology — the daily use of word processors, faxes, progress on machine translation, sound input for computers, and so on — has benefits, but it also carries the risk of restricting the language through its limitations. Ultimately this could result in the language becoming more uniform, which is seen as undesirable. One concrete example of this tendency is in the standardising of *kanji* forms to facilitate computer input and the limitations subsequently placed on *kanji* in personal names. The same problem is also expressed in a rather different way as concern about the capacity of the language to cope with technological change. Another concern is the shift from words to images and consequent distancing of children from the world of print; discussion of this issue is certainly not confined to Japan, and can regularly be seen in newspapers in Britain and elsewhere.

One specific and well-known example of the influence of technology on the written language is the now widespread use of word processors. In Japanese business, and to a large extent in private life (at least for the younger generations), the change has largely

been straight from handwriting to word-processing, without the intervening stage of typewriters. It is too early to evaluate fully the effects of word-processors on the language and the language skills of the population, but the long-term potential impact of the technology is great and many-faceted. For many, the development of efficient word processors appears to have removed any possibility of the abandonment of *kanji* (eg Kabashi Tadao, quoted in Unger 1987: 122). On the other hand, transcriptive word processors have not solved all the problems: for example, typing in a string of syllables or words on a *rômaji* keyboard, converting them into *kanji*, and then checking that the correct ones have been selected, is still far more time-consuming that typing in the western alphabet; and characters or character forms used historically or currently only in names are often not included in the software. Unger argues that *kanji* will continue to form a barrier to progress in computing (Unger 1987, 1996). It seems that different sections of the population may have very different opinions on this issue. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the use of *kanji* with word processors is on the increase, simply because they are easily available in a computer's memory bank, and *kanji* recognition skills may well improve; on the other hand, frequent users indicate problems when they have to write *kanji* by hand, and the extent to which this will have a long-term effect on their reading skills has yet to become clear (*ibid*). The report concludes that there is a need to think carefully about the implications of technology, and it is certain that its long-term impact cannot be overstated.

3.2.3. *Kokusaika* (internationalisation) and *kokusaishakai* (international society)

Japan's international role is the key here: with increasing international contact and trade, more foreigners are interested in the Japanese language, and the need for Japan to communicate effectively with the rest of the world has never been greater. Until recently, Japanese has mainly been for domestic use, with the exception of established migrant populations in the Americas and elsewhere. Now, it is increasingly being used by foreigners, and the need for policies to support Japanese as a foreign language education is recognised. One recent example of this trend is the establishment of a Japan Foundation Language Centre in London in 1997; currently dealing only with the UK, it ultimately aims at the promotion of Japanese language teaching throughout Europe.

The report notes that the Japanese language is no longer just for Japanese people, and consequently there is a need to investigate the reaction of the population to the spread of Japanese and its use to communicate with foreigners. This attitude recognises that it is indeed possible for foreigners to learn Japanese, thus contradicting one of Roy Andrew Miller's claims: that foreigners' inability to learn Japanese properly is part of the official myth of Japanese uniqueness (Miller 1977: 77-89). This appears to indicate that the 'myth' has had to be adjusted to take account of the current reality of ever growing numbers of foreigners using Japanese.

Disseminating the Japanese language amongst foreigners is only one aspect of internationalisation; on the 'receptive' side is the influence of foreign languages, overwhelmingly English, on the Japanese language, in the form of loanwords and foreign words (*katakanago*). [9] For example, the 1991 recommendations on *katakana* usage for foreign names and words, showed a clear shift towards trying to get as close to the original pronunciation as possible, and more sensitivity to foreign ears. This entails the introduction of non-native sounds to the Japanese language, such as 'ti', 'di', and 'vi'. The report takes a cautiously balanced view on the influence of English on Japanese, stating that, while there are voices saying 'we need to stop the influx of foreign words', this should also be seen as a good opportunity to re-evaluate the language. Language is described as being simultaneously a common bond in people's life and consciousness, but also an important tool for developing friendly international relations, and these two aspects need to be reconciled.

Internationalisation manifests itself in one particular way in broadcasting: in the growing number of returnees appearing as TV newscasters. This may be linked to the increasing use of *katakanago*, odd stress patterns, and the trend to flatten out accents (interview with NHK researchers, February 1994). While it is unlikely that Japanese will be greatly influenced by foreigners using the language, the influence of returnees, particularly in such positions, is already being noted.

3.2.4. Education and research

The Language Council's 1993 report states that:

> We can say that at no time more than the present has it been more desirable to aim at clear, precise, beautiful, rich language, and to foster a feeling of protection towards it. So it is important to look again at language education and encourage people to take an interest in language and widen the opportunities for discussion about it. (Bunkachô 1993: 5).

Such comments about raising language awareness illustrate the wider interpretation of language policy that I use throughout this paper.

Several specific points are mentioned in the report. National language education (*kokugo kyôiku*) needs to be reconsidered to ensure that it meets the needs of today's society. The importance of language education as the basis of all other education is stressed, along with the need to deepen the recognition of its importance, and to value the role of family/home and society in this. One crucial point is the importance placed on the spoken language and the cultivation of thinking and expressive abilities. There is a need for more education in such matters, especially the spoken language.

In an interview carried out at the NHK Broadcasting Research Institute in February 1994, one of the language researchers said that Japan has an image of France and the

USA as valuing spoken language and discussion, and being advanced in these areas, whereas Japan traditionally has been weak. Now Japan seeks to (or is being forced to?) play a more active role in diplomatic terms, it sees the importance of spoken communication; the perceived need to develop spoken language skills is partly a reaction to criticism of Japan's lack of participation in the international arena. Although international dealings usually take place in English, it is envisaged that skills developed in Japanese via changes in the education system will carry over into English.

In its capacity as Ministry for Education, the Monbushô has a key role in the implementation of such policies. It issues curriculum guidelines, and approves texts; it also stipulates the *kanji* to be learnt in each school grade. So much time is required merely to master the writing system and the study of Classical Japanese (still seen as important), that little time is left for other aspects of language study. In a 1988 interview, a Monbushô Schools Inspector expressed the concern that speaking skills need to be developed more in the future. This point is taken up in the Language Council's 1993 report, and changes in language teaching in schools have already taken place: spoken language classes and debating were introduced in Junior High Schools from 1993. In April 1994 the curriculum for *kokugo* (national/Japanese language) changed to include more areas; there is now more emphasis on *gendaigo* (current language) as in *hanashikotoba* (spoken language), although *gendaibun* (current written language) still remains and has not decreased. Most importantly, although the amount of material to be covered has increased, the number of lessons per week remains the same, and it is left to each school to decide the balance between the different areas. The reduction of Saturday

morning classes to once or twice a month has also increased the pressure on time. Other problems have also been encountered. Teachers have not been trained for such things, and debating (*tôron* — a fashionable word) is a new concept for the Japanese. The Japanese *zadankai* (discussion meeting) involved each speaker simply giving his/her own opinions, rather than debating with each other; this is quite different from the western dialectical tradition. Young people's views are changing, and they are becoming more willing to express their own opinions, but change in such areas can only be gradual.

This is a major shift from equating language with the written language, and education with its mastery; it is indicative of a broadening of thinking and attitudes to match the changes in society. The concept of 'internationalisation' is acknowledged as a factor in this change, but others, such as the massive increase in broadcasting and communications in general, and increased mobility and the concomitant breaking up of established communities, contribute to the general feeling that spoken language skills are not something that can be taken for granted but have to be developed actively.

As background to these developments, research is vital. The National Language Research Institute provides the basis of policy, and the report notes that its activities need to be looked at again in this light. In addition to the data supplied by the Institute, a considerable amount of the research used by the National Language Council in its recent deliberations has been provided by the NHK Language Research Section (Carroll 1995, passim). Finally, one specific major project is mentioned: the production of a new *kokugo*

daijiten (Japanese language dictionary), which the National Language Institute is already working on.

3.2.5. Script

Although the major problems of the writing system have been resolved, there are still some areas to be discussed. The report stresses that the *jôyô kanji* list, recommendations on *kana* usage and so on, are to be seen as 'guides' (*meyasu* or *yoridokoro*), and that this indicates a shift to freer approach, away from the 'restrictions' (*seigen*) of the *toyô kanji* list. Many Japanese and other researchers argue that this is in fact a shift to conservatism because it tacitly allows the number of characters in general use to increase, by adopting a more *laisser faire* approach. One specific area for re-examination is the use of *mazegaki* — a mixture of *kanji* and *kana* in the same word, seen as undesirable; other points mentioned are the issue of horizontal versus vertical writing, *rômaji*, punctuation, and ordering of words in dictionaries. It is also recognised that the *jôyô kanji* list is not the final word on *kanji*, and that this may need to be amended again as society changes. As in the past, which direction these changes will take will depend as much on socio-cultural and political motivations as on practical ones.

4. Underlying themes — social, political, and cultural change

Of these five broad areas, the first one — *gendai kotobazukai* — is the broadest category and clearly concentrates on spoken language; the last one deals purely with script. The other three deal with both the spoken and written language. It is quite clear that there has been a change in thinking in the period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. What has prompted this shift?

The phrase *kotoba ga midarete iru* reverberates throughout this discussion. It seems that the fear of language being in disarray/disorder mirrors the fear of society breaking down, in a period of social and economic change. This idea is, of course, not unique to Japan, nor to the present time. As David Crystal says:

> The phenomenon of language change probably attracts more public notice and criticism than any other linguistic issue. There is a widely held belief that change must mean deterioration and decay. Older people observe the casual speech of the young, and conclude that standards have fallen markedly. (Crystal 1987: 4)

Nor is the phrase itself a new coinage; Lewin discusses the concerns summed up in *kokugo no midare* in the immediate postwar period, particularly the sudden influx of foreign (English) words brought in by the Occupation, and the changes in *keigo* brought about by Japan's defeat and the breakdown of old structures. (Lewin 1979: 95).

However, a corollary of the very rapidity of social, economic, and cultural change today, fuelled by technological change and the quickening pace of life in general, is that people (particularly of the older generations) are likely to be even more keen to 'maintain standards' and cling on to the familiar.

Within this concern over standards is doubtless the age-old cry that 'language isn't what it used to be' and 'young people don't/can't speak/write properly these days'. The National Language Council's 1993 report notes that rapid changes in society lead to a widening gap between the language usage of different generations. Growing mobility (work transfers etc), and changing life and work patterns bring about changes in language usage, and language and social behaviour interact. It is natural that different kinds of language should be evolved by different groups or generations, and that language usage varies according to the private or public sphere, but it is when distinction between these worlds gets forgotten that damage to human relations and communication can occur.

In June 1993, the General Affairs Office (Seirichô) carried out a survey on attitudes to the Japanese language (Inagaki and Inoue, 1993: 4). In response to the question, 'Is the language in a state of disorder?' (*Kokugo wa midarete iru ka*?), 20.4% said 'extremely' 54.3% said 'to a certain extent'. NHK also carried out various surveys, which produce some interesting findings. The number of people thinking that language is 'in disorder' goes up with age: the big difference is between people in their teens and the older generations, even those in their twenties (Ishino and Inagaki 1986: 3). This is true not

only in terms of whether people think language is ‘in a mess’, but also in terms of whether they think something should be done about it (Ishino and Yasuhira 1993: 93-94).

The two areas of spoken and written language seem to be separate in the minds of public and planners alike. Since written language is much more easily subject to codification and correction it is natural that it should be the main target of language policy. However, all the areas mentioned in the Seirichô 1992 survey as being of concern — *hanashikata* (way of speaking), use of *keigo* (respect language), *aisatsu* (greetings), *ra nuki kotoba* — are crucial in social relations: if the language used to maintain these is seen as becoming confused, corrupt, what does this mean for social relations and society at large?

Keigo is one aspect of Japanese language that is deeply ingrained in the society. The interdependent concepts of hierarchy and group affiliation that are deeply ingrained in the Japanese culture are expressed linguistically by the use of particular lexical items, morphemic and syntactic patterns to show deference or respect, distance or closeness; these are accompanied by appropriate non-verbal behaviour. Apart from these socio-cultural considerations, it must also be noted that the use of *keigo* has another vital linguistic function: the grammatical subject is frequently not stated, provided that this is clear from context, and honorific and humble language often provides a crucial part of this context.[10] For this reason alone, *keigo* is unlikely to disappear completely. Even now, many of the complaints focus not on its non-use, but on its misuse, particularly in

cases where people know that *keigo* is required but mistakenly use a humble verb in place of an honorific verb, or the hyper-correct combination of the honorific passive together with other honorific constructions.

In 1979, an NHK survey on language showed that 49.8% of those interviewed felt that the use of *keigo* was 'in a mess' (*midarete iru*) in two respects: firstly, people did not know when to use *keigo* or not, and to what extent; secondly, misuse of *keigo* was a matter for concern (Ishino 1986: 44). The first category included examples of children failing to use *keigo* to their teachers, or media people overusing it to sports stars and other celebrities. Such complaints can be seen as evidence of social change — those previously seen as meriting respect are now not being given it, and those who many see as undeserving of such respect, such as the untalented *tarento* are being accorded high status by virtue of the language used to them. In the Kokugoka's 1995 survey, 91.3% of those questioned agreed that 'one should use *keigo* to one's superiors'; the highest level of agreement came from males aged 16-19 years, evidence of the continuing importance attached to respect language and status. Interestingly, a far higher percentage of women than men, across all age groups, agreed that 'depending on circumstances, one should use *keigo* to younger people'. This points to a difference in the way men and women use and view *keigo*, and this difference in attitude has been examined elsewhere (eg Ide 1982).

If *keigo* is symbolic of traditional values, the recent shift to tolerance, even promotion, of local dialects can also be seen as part of a re-evaluation of Japan's priorities. It may be

partly due to a realisation that the pragmatic needs of the nation to have one standard language comprehensible to and used by all do not mean that other, perhaps more emotional, needs can be ignored. Considered from another perspective, that of those who are real linguistic minorities in Japan — the Koreans, the Ainu, the Okinawans — this more open policy on dialects could be seen either as indicating a potentially greater receptiveness to promotion of their languages, or alternatively, as a superficial shift towards diversity whilst remaining within the bounds of the national language, the *kokugo*.[11]

Since the late 1970s, when the expression *chihô no jidai* (age of localism) was coined (Robertson 1988: 502), politicians have encouraged development of the provinces as a counterbalance to the centralising pull of Tokyo. The idea of *furusato* (native place) became a key concept in the early 1980s, appearing in advertising slogans and used by central and local government in their campaigns to revitalise depopulated rural communities. Robertson lists the key *furusato* components as 'nostalgia, pleasant scenery, local dialect, compassion, camaraderie, motherly love, enriching lifestyle' (Robertson 1988: 502). Thus local dialect (*hôgen*) is now associated with positive qualities and partakes of the overall rehabilitation and 'image change' of *inaka* ('the sticks'). A monolithic culture is no longer seen as the best way forward.

Not only are local governments promoting their regions and encouraging people to visit and return to live there (Harnischfeger 1992: 12-13), but business is also showing an interest. In 1992, the Sumitomo Corporation sponsored symposia across the country

addressing the issue of the revival of regional culture. Sumitomo 'decided to advocate re-examination of the cultural diversity of Japan, as an important step toward achievement of Japanese social maturity' (Sumitomo Corporation, 1992: 14).

The fear of a perceived breakdown in language mirroring a breakdown in society, and the re-evaluating of the provinces versus Tokyo are both internal factors in the broadening out of language policy to deal with the spoken language. The third major factor, however, is externally prompted, and is the source of one of the most prominent catchphrases in the discussions on language policy in the 1990s: *kokusaika* (internationalisation) or *kokusai shakai* (international society). The political background to this new emphasis is clear. In May 1988, Prime Minister Takeshita announced Japan's International Cooperation Initiative, specifying international cultural exchange as one of its three main aims of diplomatic policy, together with Official Development Assistance (economic cooperation) and cooperation in peacekeeping efforts.[12]

It has only been possible here to outline the main topics of current discussions on Japanese language policy, and to begin to examine the underlying themes and how these concerns relate to wider changes in Japanese culture and society. I intend to examine these in more detail in my ongoing research.

5. Conclusion

If the current discussions on language are placed in a historical context, it is clear that some themes recur, although they may be treated in a very different way. One such historical parallel is between the current trend to 'internationalisation' and the opening up of Japan in the Meiji Period. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the pressing need was for modernisation and the establishment of a unified nation. In the immediate post war period, the focus was on democratisation and rebuilding. Today, Japan is a major economic world power, and is rethinking its role in the world; *kokusaika*, *furusato*, and regionalism, are buzzwords that are reflected in language policy, as is the need to reconcile maintaining what are seen as traditional Japanese values alongside technological advance. The tension between language as a tool and as a cultural symbol is always evident; it may be at its most obvious in terms of the script, but also exists in the spoken language.

The importance of facilitating mass education, another theme of the early language reforms, can also be seen in a rather different form today: now the pressing need is seen to be the developing of spoken skills to match the high literacy rate and foster Japan's relations with the rest of the world, economic and diplomatic. Significantly, the return to looking at language in its broadest sense, particularly the spoken language, rather than just its written manifestation, indicates a reviewing of Japan's position one century on from the official decision on what was to be the standard language. Whilst uncertainty and disquiet over social change may be at the root of concern about language, it may be

politically easier to make noises about language and promise to try to do something about it, than to deal with the underlying issues.

It is important to emphasise that Japan is not unique in seeing its national language as part of its culture, and as a mirror of society. In Britain, one only has to think of the regular newspaper reports and politicians' pronouncements about declining ability of young people to use language properly, their poverty of language, lack of understanding of grammar, inability to spell, and so on. But each nation's reactions to these challenges reflects its own history and changing priorities. Although Japan's major language reforms may be over, its broader policy on language continues and has much to show us about changes in Japanese society. At the end of the nineteenth century, Japan sought to standardise and simplify its language to facilitate mass education and the formation of a nation-state along the lines of those of the West. At the end of the twentieth century, it is seeking to adapt to a new role in the world; improving communication skills both within and outside its boundaries is seen as playing an important part in this quest.

Endnotes

[1] English translations of Kokugo Shingikai vary; Christopher Seeley terms it 'Deliberative Council of the National Language' (Seeley 1991:148); Shimada Masahiko uses 'Council on the National Language' (Shimada 1983: 38-9). For the sake of brevity I have used the shorter term 'National Language Council' or simply 'Language Council' throughout this paper.

[2] For a full discussion of the *genbun'itchi* movement and the early written language reforms, see Nanette Twine *1991 Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese*.

[3] The extent to which the Institute's research really serves as a basis for policy has been questioned by the Marxist scholar, Suzuki Yasuyuki, whose investigations of the data led him to conclude that 'the Council has merely used the name of the Institute to foster the illusion that its changes are of a scientific and democratic nature, whereas in reality its actions are quite the opposite.' (Gottlieb 1995: 36).

[4] See Janet Shibamoto (1987), Sachiko Ide (1986).

[5] In her 1982 article, Kyoko Inoue details the drafting of the 1947 Constitution, and argues that for Jôji Matsumoto, the drafter of the Japanese text, the prime motivation for the adoption of colloquial Japanese was not the democratisation urged by the Association for People's Language Movement *(Kokumin no Kokugo Undô Renmei*), but the desire to make the text (translated from the original English draft) appear more natural in the little time available to him.

[6] Although these include *keigo* (respect language) it is treated as a separate category in the report and I have therefore done likewise.

[7] To form the potential of vowel stem verbs, *-rareru* is added, eg *taberu* (eat) becomes *taberareru* (can eat). Consonant stem verbs form their potential by adding *-eru* , eg *iku* (go) becomes *ikeru* (can go). However, the latter is in fact a variant that has taken over from the other possible form ikareru, where *-reru* is added to the negative verb stem (Uno, 1985: 211), The *ra nuki kotoba* debate concerns the growing tendency, particularly amongst young people, to drop the *ra* from the potential forms of vowel stem verbs; thus taberu becomes *tabereru.* There have been many articles in academic journals and daily newspapers about this trend. It can be argued that it parallels the previous change in consonant stem verbs (*ibid*), and that both these changes enable a distinction to be made between the potential and the passive verb forms (*tabereru* — potential; *taberareru* — passive). Although it is such a recent topic of controversy, there is evidence that this form was used in the Kansai region before the Second World War, and indeed was the topic of an article in *Gengo Seikatsu* in 1951 (Mainichi Shinbun 11 September 1993: 4). One correspondent to the Asahi Shinbun argues that the change makes for ease of pronunciation, particularly for many foreigners and should therefore be encouraged in the spirit of internationalisation (Asahi Shinbun 3 October 1992: 17).

[8]For more detailed discussions of furusato, see Jennifer Robertson (1988), and William Kelly (1986).

[9]In an earlier paper, I discussed the increasing use of *katakanago* by government offices (Carroll 1991).

[10]Thus different lexical items may have the dual function of showing respect and distinguishing between subjects: *irassharu* ('be, come, go' depending on the context) can never refer to the speaker; one would use one of a set of neutral verbs - *iru* (be), *kuru* (to come), *iku* (go); or one of the corresponding humble verbs, *oru* (be), *mairu* (come, go).

[11] For more detailed discussions of these minorities, see Maher and Macdonald 1995 *Diversity in Japanese Culture and Language.*

[12] As mentioned above, the need to develop spoken communicative skills is seen as part of Japan's becoming more integrated in the international community; cultural diplomacy demands good communication. The massive increase in recruitment to the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme, is perhaps one effort towards this goal. The programme took its present name in 1987, and then involved participants from Britain, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. It is overseen by the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, and Home Affairs, and has expanded to involve other European countries as well as Canada; participants are placed either in local government offices, where they assist with international activities, or in schools as English teaching assistants. Although participants may sometimes feel they are a token foreigner, the scheme does mean that many Japanese who would not otherwise do so now work with foreigners on a daily basis, or have dealings with them on a lesser scale.

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