Heritage, Nationhood, and Language

The notion of “heritage” has become one of the global tropes in recent years. At the heart of heritage politics are three questions: what heritage is, who decides what it is, and for whom is the decision made. However, existing work on heritage language has rarely tackled these questions, assuming that teaching children of migrants their “heritage language” empowers them. We challenge this assumption, situating the notion of heritage language in the host society’s involvement in social justice, nation-building efforts, (superficial) celebration of diversity, and investment on global links the migrants offer as well as the migrants’ fear of discrimination and desire for belonging, social status, and economic gain. Based on ethnographic research in Bolivia, Peru, the United States, and Japan, we illuminate the complexity and political nature of determining what constitutes heritage language for migrants with connections to Japan. The articles in this volume open up a new field of investigation in heritage language studies: the complex linkage between heritage language and social justice for migrants.

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HERITAGE, NATIONHOOD, AND LANGUAGE

Migrants with Japan Connections

Edited by Neriko Musha Doerr
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Abstracts

Introduction. Heritage, Nationhood, and Language: Migrants with Japan Connections

Neriko Musha Doerr

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the notion of “heritage” become one of the critical global tropes, through which many have voiced their preoccupations and aspirations. At the heart of heritage politics are three questions: what heritage is, who decides what it is, and for whom is the decision made. Researchers on heritage language education have rarely asked these questions. Determining what constitutes one’s “heritage language” is a complex effort; for migrants, claiming which language is their heritage language can also be a political statement. Based on ethnographic research in Bolivia, Peru, the United States, and Japan, the articles in this volume, “Heritage, Nationhood, and Language,” investigate diverse subjectivities of migrants with connections to Japan and analyze the processes by which they negotiate, contest, support, and rupture the notion of heritage. The authors examine the disjunctures between the notion of social justice and the experiences of empowerment and marginalization among these migrants. This volume sheds light on the conditions, processes, and effects of a particular language becoming one’s “heritage.” Intersecting factors that influence the ways a language becomes one’s “heritage” include a desire for belonging, a drive for social status, aspirations for economic gain, fear and guilt about discrimination, and an obligation and hope for social justice. This introduction outlines the historical and theoretical backgrounds to the subject and introduces the main arguments of the articles in this collection.

1. Learning to Be Transnational: Japanese Language Education for Bolivia’s Okinawan Diaspora

Taku Suzuki

Scholars and practitioners of heritage language education commonly hold two assumptions about heritage language: first, that heritage language is an official national language of a nation-state from which group originally migrated; and second, that heritage language is a vulnerable language on the verge of being eliminated by the national language of the nation-state of a migrant’s current residence. This article questions these two assumptions by examining
Japanese language education and speech practices among Okinawan-Bolivians in a rural agricultural community called Colonia Okinawa. Okinawan-Bolivians’ heritage language education and speech practices suggest that immigrants who were marginalized in the nation-states of their migratory/ancestral origin, like Okinawans, consciously transform their linguistic heritage from a sub-national one to a national one in order to gain socioeconomic advantages in their migratory destination. Furthermore, when immigrant community leaders deem the international standing of the country of their migratory origin higher than their host country’s status, such as Okinawan-Bolivian leaders in Colonia Okinawa, they regard heritage language education as a crucial means to maintain their community members’ political, economic, and symbolic powers over other local residents. By ethnographically portraying the ways in which Japanese is taught and spoken in Colonia Okinawa, this article highlights the shifting scales and locations of the immigrant community’s “ancestral homeland” and draws attention to the multiple meanings of the language the community designates as its “heritage.”

2. Conflicted Attitudes toward Heritage: Heritage Language Learning of Returnee Adolescents from Japan at a Nikkei School in Lima, Peru

Yuri Yamasaki

During their more than 100-year-long presence in Peru, Japanese descendants (Nikkei) have been linguistically integrated into Peruvian society. The portion of the population that speaks Japanese in daily life has been decreasing dramatically, and the majority of younger Nikkei typically grow up speaking mainly Spanish, mixed with a specific Japanese lexicon that has been transmitted intergenerationally within families. To prevent the complete loss of ancestral language and cultural traits, private all-day elementary and secondary schools, founded and run by the Nikkei, have been offering additional Japanese language educational programs. Drawing from an ethnographic study at one such Nikkei-sponsored secondary school in Lima, this article portrays the students’ inconsistent and ambiguous attitudes toward learning Japanese as their heritage. More specifically, the article focuses on returnee students from Japan, a recently emerged diaspora group of youngsters who have spent time in Japan as emigrants and then returned to resettle in Peru. The article examines the returnees’ negotiations with the language teachers regarding what is considered to be “proper” or “standard” Japanese. Classroom observations and interviews with both teachers and students demonstrate how contested the “heritage” of heritage language education is — defined as it is through social, economic, and political positions and interests of participants in the educational process. The study also shows how the institutionalized heritage language education at school sometimes results in encouraging the students to “dis-inherit” what they have learned outside school: this may relate to their family’s social status in their ancestral country.
3. Heritage: Owned or Assigned? The Cultural Politics of Teaching Heritage Language in Osaka, Japan

Yuko Okubo

Teaching heritage language is regarded as an act of social justice, but under what conditions and in what context? This article examines the educational practice of introducing heritage language to Chinese return-migrant children and Japan-born Vietnamese children. The language programs under investigation are conducted in a community education center and in an after-school setting in a public elementary school in a multiethnic neighborhood in Osaka, Japan. This study demonstrates how the local community's practice of heritage language learning dissolves the boundaries among ethnic minorities, bringing together all participants and cutting across ethnic lines. The result is empowering, but with a limited effect. At the same time, the institutionalized practice of heritage language learning at school becomes a marker for ethnic minorities and is used to maintain the boundary between ethnic minorities and Japanese, despite official discourses of minority education for empowerment. Ethnographic data show discrepancies between the views of teachers and communities about what ethnic minorities should be like and what they are hoping to find in Japan. The politics of heritage involves the legitimization of power and distinction, as well as the exclusion of those who do not have access to heritage. Situating each case within the politics of heritage, schooling, and Japan's multicultural initiatives, this article examines what is legitimized and what is excluded through teaching and learning heritage language in both cases and discusses the implications of heritage language teaching for immigrant children in Japan.


Neriko Musha Doerr and Kiri Lee

The late twentieth century saw a rise of global discourse about heritage. Research on heritage politics, however, has shed little light on heritage practices in schools, especially regarding language, that is, how heritage language is constructed and how it is “inherited” by students of various backgrounds. Heritage language education is often viewed as a means to empower heritage language speakers or to address the diverse needs of students in language classes. In existing works, the individual’s link to “heritage” is assumed as given and stable. More recent works show that the processes and effects of heritage language education are complex and nuanced due to diverse personal backgrounds and changing political economy and cultural politics. The role of schooling in the process of “inheriting” language, however, has not attracted much attention: how students are grouped or tracked into a particular class, for example. After ethnographically investigating various views and practices at a weekend Japa-
In the United States, where language is an important arena of struggle for cultural and political activists, heritage language education is seen as vital for empowering students with a sense of cultural identity as they face pressures to assimilate. This article attempts to rethink reclamations of “heritage” through language and, more generally, the relationship between heritage language and identity. Japanese American ethnic identity is developed outside the context of the imagined “ethnic homeland.” Return-migration, however, reconstructs the relationship between language, place, and identity. For Japanese Americans residing in Japan, then, Japanese as a heritage language becomes a newly fraught site of cultural negotiation. Drawing on ethnographic case studies, this article makes three arguments about how expectations of communicative competence shape experiences of being Japanese American in Japan. First, the significance of speaking a heritage language is contextually specific, differing according to the historical experiences of particular ethnic communities and the national (or transnational) location where a heritage language is spoken. Second, while activists have made great strides in reforming U.S. curricula to be more inclusive, in the case of Japanese Americans, the multiculturalist assumption that ethnic minorities should learn heritage languages to maintain their ethnic affiliation unintentionally plays into Japanese nationalist language ideologies. That is, it reinforces the cultural distance and non-belonging of Japanese American heritage language speakers in Japanese society. Finally, this article suggests that Japanese Americans residing in Japan are construed as uncanny contradictions of “Japanese-ness,” destabilizing assumptions about the inalienability of language and identity through everyday speech acts and practices.

6. Afterword. Japan-Related Linguistic Intervention

Laura Miller

In this commentary on articles published in Heritage, Nationhood, and Language: Japanese Connections, the author observes that languages we speak are “often the product of historical, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic trends, acci-
dents, and forces. They are insufficient to completely define or enclose our identities.” Thus, the author wonders, can any language be said to be “the best, most perfect one for any of us?”


**Krista E. Van Vleet**

Scholars of regions where multiple languages are spoken have much to gain by considering heritage language education, individual identity, and state power through these ethnographic and historical cases that focus on Japan and the Japanese diaspora. The articles in this volume offer insights into the interrelationships of linguistic hierarchies and political economy, the navigation of ethnic and racial subjectivities, and the ways children and adolescents claim belonging to various communities through their linguistic practices. The articles interrogate not only heritage but remembrance and the ways individuals may produce identity through language in everyday interactions and institutional settings.

8. Afterword. Dreaming in...English? The Complexity and Unexpectedness of Japanese Being and Becoming through Language

**Barbra A. Meek**

Focusing on the articles in this issue by Doerr and Lee and by Takaamori, this commentary asks what it means to identify some languages as heritage languages and others as not, and considers the various social processes, contexts, and ideologies that mediate the ways in which we go about doing so. The goal is to further draw out the complexities and the contradictions embedded in such processes of identification, both of and through language, as illustrated by these authors.
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Introduction

Heritage, Nationhood, and Language: Migrants with Japan Connections

Neriko Musha Doerr

The latter half of the twentieth century saw the notion of “heritage” become one of the critical global tropes through which many have voiced their preoccupations and aspirations. Three developments regarding heritage have influenced the relationships between groups within and across nation-states: (1) Unesco’s “world heritage” designation, which raises the status of those who have been awarded its designation (the social status of outcaste religious practitioners [shamans], for instance, was elevated once they were given the “world heritage” designation); (2) the emergence and growth of “heritage tourism” as a local industry; and (3) the development of heritage language educational programs for linguistically minority groups. At the heart of heritage politics are three questions that have rarely been asked: What is heritage? Who decides what it is? And for whom is the decision made. The articles in this book address these questions through ethnographic investigations of the politics of heritage language education, education grounded in a concern for social justice for linguistically minority groups. The articles examine the disjunctures between the notion of social justice and the experiences of empowerment and marginalization among migrants with connections to Japan in the context of Japan’s changing cultural politics as well as its position in the world.

Earlier studies of heritage typically focused on issues related to the representation of heritage in museum exhibitions and in so-called heritage tourism. Relationships between heritage and nationalism were also analyzed. In these contexts, heritage was often objectified: those involved in the heritage industry, such as museum curators and tourist industry personnel, took aspects of the social world such as cuisine and religious practices and interpreted these as typifying the totality. These they represented as detached, object-like “traits” that the bearers of a particular heritage were believed to possess. In recent studies, heritage has been understood as an assemblage of multivocal processes that involve various social actors and institutions, all making claims
on ownership, custodianship, and cultural inheritance of the heritage. These claims involve contestations regarding land tenure and property ownership, social codes of behavior for locals and visitors, archaeological science, and ideologies of nationalism, ethnicity, and development. "At stake in heritage-related practices is the government of values and meanings associated with a particular "heritage," so that the memories and knowledge of the "holders" of the heritage are (re)shaped to make sense of the present." 8

Heritage has been defined as a collection of practices that transform the relationship between individuals and what they do, awakening in them a metacultural awareness about their daily lives. Discussing the processes and effects of Unesco’s World Heritage designation, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that when heritage professionals bring cultural phenomena and practitioners into the heritage sphere by valorizing, regulating, and instrumentalizing them, they transform the relationships between the cultural phenomena and their practitioners such as performers, ritual specialists, and artisans. Such heritage interventions change how people understand their culture and themselves, and they alter the fundamental conditions for cultural production and reproduction. 9

Similarly, naming a language one’s “heritage” changes an individual’s relationship with his/her linguistic practices, other individuals, and an imagined ancestral homeland. Determining what constitutes one’s “native language,” “mother tongue,” or “heritage language” is a complex process. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson suggest four possible definitions of “mother tongue”: (1) the language(s) one learns first; (2) the language(s) one knows best; (3) the language(s) one uses most; and (4) the language(s) one identifies with most. Thus, one person may have different languages as one’s mother tongues, depending on which definition is used. 10

Recent scholarship also challenges the stable and taken-for-granted relationship of an individual to a homogeneous language inherent in the notion of “native speaker.” 11 Articles in this book show that, for migrants, claiming which language is their “mother tongue” or “heritage language” is often a political statement. For example, Taku Suzuki vividly illustrates in his article that for Okinawan immigrants in Bolivia to identify with the Japanese language as their “heritage language” allows them to capitalize on the position of Japan on the global stage. 12 Ayako Takamori’s article shows that for Japanese Americans in Japan to claim Japanese as their mother tongue (by speaking it well) serves to make them responsible for their actions as “Japanese” rather than as foreign visitors or migrants. 13 Yuko Okubo’s article in this issue illustrates how some minority groups in Japan fear being openly assigned minority status and associated with marginalized languages as their “heritage language” because this marks them as different and makes them targets of discriminatory actions. 14

The complex links between an individual and his/her “heritage language” (hereafter with no quotation marks) are not addressed in the existing studies of heritage language education. Emerging in the late 1970s as a new label for minority language education, heritage language education 15 challenges the power relations between speakers of the dominant language and those of mi-
Joshua Fishman argues that “promoting heritage language proficiency…will not only give us more individuals proficient in these languages, it will also dignify our country’s heritage language communities and the cultural and religious values that their languages represent.”

Research on heritage language education with minority language students has assumed that teaching heritage language constitutes an antihegemonic act of social justice. But the articles in this book question this assumption that heritage language education is in itself an antihegemonic process. More specifically, we are interested in who decides what heritage is, whose heritage it is, for whom it is considered heritage, and in what contexts.

What are the implications of calling a certain language a “heritage”? Does the act of “inheriting” language produce the heritage itself? What are the different consequences when a language taught to immigrant children is called their heritage language and when it is called their mother tongue? What are the effects of teaching a heritage language to children of racially and/or nationally mixed descent? What gives rise to a people’s urge to inculcate a heritage language in the younger generation? What kind of cultural politics does the idea of heritage language give rise to? What conditions spawn the view that teaching heritage language to immigrants’ children is an act of social justice? Based on ethnographic research in various contexts — Bolivia, Peru, the United States, and Japan — articles in this book explore these questions and investigate contextual and contested practices of “inheriting” language by migrants who are, in various ways, “connected” to Japan.

Language and Nation-States

In the modern world, made up of a jigsaw puzzle of nation-states, a nation is imagined as a linguistically and culturally homogeneous unit that is defined in relation to other nations. In late-eighteenth-century Germany, Johann Gottfried von Herder argued that each nation was set off by the “natural” characteristics of language and the intangible quality of a specific Volkgeist. The possession of its own distinctive language constitutes the touchstone of a people, or Volk, what is essential to its “national identity and spirit.” Herder argued that a Volk, a nation, a culture, and a polity must be homogeneous and that cultural and linguistic diversity within a nation is unnatural and potentially destructive. However, Herder was in fact not so much describing the contemporary situation as contributing to the creation of the Volk. His idea was a model for the nation rather than model of the nation, creating a myth of one-nation, one-language in the nation-state. Herder’s view also influenced the study of linguistics, such as Ferdinand de Saussure’s structural linguistics. Researchers of nation-states also note the importance of language as a metaphor for “nation.” Etienne Balibar argues that language can provide a group of people with a meaning for their continued existence, and a shared language makes it possible for “people” to be represented as an autonomous unit.

Linguistic diversity, if recognized, was supposed to disappear through the standardization processes within a nation-state. Pierre Bourdieu argues that a hierarchy among linguistic varieties emerges as the state imposes on its citizens...
an official language as the only legitimate one. This standardization establishes a “linguistic community,” in which the common recognition of the legitimacy of the standard occurs while access to that language remains uneven. The language chosen as the standard gains symbolic capital through a unified education system that teaches it as the only legitimate language, a unified labor market that receives a labor force differentiated by the education system, and a perceived connection between the standard language and social qualities such as moral rectitude, civilization, and education.25

Language ideologies facilitate such a process of standardization by underpinning linguistic forms and uses as well as the very notion of personhood and social groups.24 The language ideology of standardization organizes regional variation in language into hierarchical standard–dialect relationships and discourages the maintenance of minority languages.25 Political authorities tend to be suspicious of multilingualism as they view multiple languages as multiple loyalties and thus a temperamental flaw, a lack of trustworthiness.26

As the modern nation-state of Japan emerged in the late nineteenth century, standardization of the Japanese language became an issue. With the rise of nationalism in the post–Sino-Japan War (1894–1895) era, language standardization began to be carried out mainly through kokugo (national language; language arts) education. This process began in 1900, using Standard Japanese based on a linguistic variety used by educated people in Tokyo, Japan’s capital city.27

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, the notion of “one nation, one language” began to give way to new forms of nation-states in many parts of the world. Resurgences of minority groups within nation-states and the postcolonial movements in the 1960s introduced the politics of difference, pushing for political orders that recognize cultural and linguistic differences of minority groups rather than suppress them.28 Globalization processes in various domains changed the shape and meaning of nation-states, making it difficult to assume territorially bounded and stable nation-states.29 The reconfiguration of world alliances after the cold war, especially the emergence of new nation-states, also encouraged nation-states to allow minority groups to express their cultural differences rather than risk potential political secession.30

In the domain of language, calls to reverse the language shift of a marginalized minority language are viewed as more than a language issue: they are a matter of self-determination.31 Maintaining minority languages, which results in bi/multilingualism, came to be viewed as an asset and/or a right rather than a problem32 and the cognitive benefits of bi/multilingualism for the bi/multilingual speakers became evident.33 Some linguistic human rights advocates insisted that individuals have a right to identify positively with their mother tongue and to have others respect that identification. In addition, advocates argue, linguistic groups have the right to develop an autonomous education in their own language.34
Heritage Practices of Migrants with Connections to Japan

Although the global shift in discourse from monolingualism to an increased support for multilingualism suggests that heritage language education is by nature an antihegemonic practice that empowers minority students, articles in this book present more complex, multifaceted, and contextually shifting effects of “inheriting language,” situated in the language politics of particular national and local arenas. Suzuki’s article illustrates the transformation of the conceptualization of ancestral homeland through standardization processes in the education of heritage language — Japanese — in an Okinawan settlement in Bolivia, in spite of decades of Okinawa’s struggle against the cultural and political domination by mainland Japanese but in tune with the current position of Japan in Bolivia. Yamasaki’s article examines the contestation over what is considered to be “proper” Japanese between Japanese Peruvian students who have returned from Japan and teachers at a school that teaches Japanese as one subject in the regular curriculum in Peru. Neriko Musha Doerr and Kiri Lee’s article investigates the role of heritage language schooling in proliferating the imagining of the “heritage” — Japanese language — and ways of inheriting it in the United States. These three articles show that maintenance of minority language can replicate standardizing processes, marginalizing the peripheral variety of the minority language. Okubo’s article in this issue examines how, in the context of the monocultural language ideology in Japan, the multiculturalist discourse of nurturing heritage through teaching a heritage language results ironically in marking and marginalizing Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants in Japan. Okubo’s article, along with Suzuki’s, shows how acquiring standard language and developing code-switching skills between the standard and minority language allows the minority group access to the “culture of power” and education and career opportunities in mainstream society. Takamori’s article illustrates the complex ways in which Japanese Americans who moved to Japan manipulate, are constrained by, and go along with the boundaries of heritage and alterity contextually.

This book closes with Afterwords by Laura Miller, Krista Van Vleet, and Barbra Meek. Miller connects all of the chapters and situates them in the current understanding of language and the sense of self, linguistic diversity and standardization, and political economy and cultural politics. She points out the underlying complexity behind the migrants’ act of forging relationships to “their language.” Van Vleet situates the chapters on cross-cultural scholarship on language, such as Quechua speakers in the Andean region, in terms of (1) state power and language ideologies in the language hierarchy in multilingual situations, (2) expressions of “identity” through the use of language, and (3) the agency of children and the issue of socialization for migrants. Meek focuses on the latter half of the book — Takamori’s and Doerr and Lee’s chapters — and discusses them regarding language shift, language socialization, and sociolinguistic disjuncture. Meek situates these chapters’ ethnographic attention in the “complications and the contradictions that arise in practices of
choosing, labeling, and performing a singular heritage (and language)\textsuperscript{41} in existing research on heritage language, and points to further questions that need to be explored and more globally comparative works. These articles urge us to examine the conditions, processes, and effects of certain languages becoming one’s “heritage” at the intersections of desires, fears, goodwill, guilt, and hopes.

The articles in this book investigate the complex ways in which heritage politics manifests itself through the learning of “heritage” languages, which involves personal investment of time, money, and effort as well as one’s past personal connections, present interests, and future aspirations.\textsuperscript{42} The complex ways in which heritage politics manifests itself are situated nonetheless in wider contexts of political economy, changing forms and meanings of nation-states, and global flows\textsuperscript{43} and frictions\textsuperscript{44} in various domains. The authors of these articles question and disrupt the assumption that nurturing heritage is an act of social justice. They do so through their ethnographic investigations of the diverse subjectivities of migrants and through their analyses of the processes by which the migrants negotiate, contest, support, and rupture the notion of heritage against the backdrop of the standardization of the Japanese language. Thus, the authors open up discussions of heritage politics and social justice among migrants with connections to Japan and beyond.

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