
Plurilingual Tokyo: Representations and attitudes among Japanese and non-Japanese university students in Tokyo in 2020

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Résumé

Although Japan has often been considered a prototypical monolingual society for a long time, it has been steadily evolving into a more diverse country over the past decades, especially in large urban centres like Tokyo, due to the influx of foreign students, trainees, workers and tourists, as has been witnessed by the evolution of its multilingual linguistic landscape (Backhaus 2005, 2006). Tokyo, the country's capital city where one out of five foreign residents of Japan live, with a total population of about 14 million inhabitants including around 550 000 holders of foreign passports, has been gradually acknowledging the reality of its multilingualism and increasing its emphasis on the positive value of plurilingualism, for economic, educational, cultural, and political reasons, against the demographic backdrop of a rapidly graying population. However, much of the emphasis was initially set on English, depicted as a "global language". It is only recently that the potential impact of other languages has started to receive some renewed attention in the public sphere, especially through the concept of "glocalisation", which was introduced in the 1980s to tackle the heterogeneity effects linked to globalisation (Robertson 1994), for example when global services and local interests are mutually adjusted. Given that such developments cannot rely exclusively on top-down public linguistic policies, and that the general public's opinion matters at least as much, especially in a country like Japan where social trends are closely scrutinized by the overall consensus-seeking social community, it is important to assess how the next generation of Japanese and non-Japanese Tokyoite citizens perceive the value of plurilingualism in Tokyo, beyond the "all-English" approach. In this presentation, after a brief introduction to Japan's and Tokyo's linguistic history (Shibatani 1992; Maher & Yashiro 1995), we present the result of a pilot survey (N=402) carried out in 2020 in several universities in Tokyo. This survey explores the representations and attitudes of Japanese and non-Japanese students towards some of the main languages found in Tokyo (e.g. English and its variation; mandarin Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Thai, Hindi and Urdu, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish), in connection with their historical and contemporary relation to Japan, in terms of economic, social and cultural dimensions. Our conclusion aims at highlighting potential tracks for educational developments (Haida 2010; Tajiri & Otsu 2010; Ostheider 2012; Nishiyama 2017; Vollmer & Thanyawatpokin 2019; Detey to appear) which

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could target a higher degree of plurilingualism in Tokyo beyond English, while at the same time preserving the social value of a national linguistic cohesion which has been remarkably cultivated in Japan since Tokyo became the capital city of the country and "standard Japanese" its national language (Inoue 2011).

Mots-Clés: multilingualism, plurilingualism, Tokyo, linguistic education, attitudes, representations, university students, Japan