

Intergenerational Transmission of Japanese in Argentina

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Introduction

Migration movements are the driving force behind language contact situations, which in turn may produce a change in linguistic behavior, oftentimes towards language shift. In point, the intergenerational transmission of language offers itself as a critical aspect in the ethnolinguistic vitality of immigrant languages. As Haque (2010) suggests, language transmission and language practices are often subjected to issues related to national, family and local language(s) policies. This communication addresses such aspects and focuses on the case of the ITL of Japanese as an migrant language in Argentina. Following Onaha (2011), a distinction is made between Pre-war and Post-war period in the history of the community, WW2 being a crucial event as from which permanent settling in South America became the norm and, with it, a relative loosening of the migrant language transmission practices. Through sociolinguistic and ethnographic research, an outline of the results of in-depth interviews, and archive resources review is offered.

Objectives

- 1) Explore the role of family language planning, language ideologies in the host country and educational language policies
- 2) Analyze how these aspects influenced the ITL of Japanese in Argentina

Methodology

- Archive review: newspapers, photographs
- Community-written book review: collected migration stories through interviews with 1st generation Japanese community members.
- Bibliographic search: expert views
- Ethnographic interviews with members of the community

Results

Pre-WW2	Post-WW2	1980-present
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family project: 1st generation Japanese migrants (<i>issei</i>) travel to Argentina seeking economic growth, and hold the expectation to return to Japan.• Community-led initiatives: Saturday schools, events, celebrations, 3 major entirely Japanese newspapers and radio broadcast, tanomoshi.• Community profile: Higher concentration in semi-rural and rural areas, mostly doing agricultural work in colonies; 2nd generation Japanese (<i>nisei</i>) in such areas are more proficient than those in urban settings (mostly working in dry-cleaning shops and cafés).• Language ideology within the community: Japanese is the language of the empire and must be passed down to the new generations abroad.• Inside-community debate: In the early 1930s, not all community members agreed on a bilingual education. Some sustained that an only-Spanish education would be more fruitful and advantageous.• Language ideology in Argentina: Japanese is rare and beyond the norm. Immigrants should strive to meet the language standard.• National language policy: Spanish monolingualism, government programs instilling nationalism in citizens and seeking assimilation of immigrant population (Di Tullio, 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family project: After WW2, Japanese migrants abandon their expectations to return to Japan. Instead, they decide to settle indefinitely in Argentina.• Community-led initiatives: During WW2, most of the activities were prohibited by the government. Japanese was still taught in home-based secret courses. After WW2, these activities were renewed. The Japanese community organises itself in <i>kenjinkai</i> (prefectural associations) in order to provide assistance to overseas relatives and connections to leave Japan and join them in Argentina.• Community profile: Concentration becomes higher in semi-rural and rural areas. <i>Nisei</i> attain higher education and become professionals. Most of them retain some level of bilingualism, but are mostly Spanish-dominant.• L.I. within the community: ITL is basically dropped, <i>nisei</i> do not master Japanese and their parents do not master Spanish, thus creating family communication problems. Japanese is seen as somewhat backward by some.• Inside-community debate: In the 1960s, many <i>nisei</i> debate over their cultural identity and create national forums and publications.• L. I. in Argentina: Respect towards the migrant language. Bilingual speakers prove reliable and collaborative in government communication between Japan and Argentina.• National language policy: Spanish monolingualism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family project: As Japan becomes a major player in the global economy, many Argentinians of Japanese ancestry seek to improve their condition by working or studying in Japan (as <i>dekasegi</i>).• Community-led initiatives: Many events and activities become open to the general public. Bazaas, Saturday schools and Japanese courses for adults are in demand by Argentinians. Work/study opportunities become available for Japanese descendants, who start studying Japanese as a foreign language.• Community profile: Many descendants move to urban settings but stay in touch through community events and <i>kenjinkai</i> meetings. They are monolingual in Spanish.• L. I. within the community: Japanese is seen as a language for future opportunities, as well as past heritage and family identity.• Inside-community debate: Cultural debate regarding ethnic identity, and the current purpose of some community organizations.• L. I. in Argentina: Pluralistic and inclusive multicultural paradigm. Japanese is seen as a powerful language.• National language policy: Spanish monolingualism, with learning of foreign languages.

Discussion and final words

The intergenerational transmission of Japanese in Argentina has been strongly dependant on family language planning and community perspectives, which in turn have been influenced by the political and economic scenario. During the pre-war period, under imperial Japan, transmission of Japanese language and traditions was deemed fundamental by many migrants, given the family project of returning to their home country. After the war and with Japan striving to rebuild itself, this expectation was abandoned, and language transmission became gradually interrupted. As from 1980s, later generations are almost exclusively Spanish-dominant, and Japanese learning is thriving, but also for them as a somewhat foreign language.

No matter the direction taken in terms of the intergenerational transmission of Japanese along this time, it is important to highlight **the role of the community** in creating opportunities for speakers or semi-speakers to use the language, providing a sense of togetherness and negotiating the link between Japan and Argentina. Interestingly, throughout its history, community life is intertwined with **inside debates**: whether it be 1st generation parents questioning the convenience of transmitting Japanese to their children or only Spanish, or the 2nd and 3rd generation distancing themselves from their parents by resorting to Spanish, or even questioning the divisions of cultural identity – whether full Argentinian, full Japanese, or somewhere beyond those clear-cut lines.

References

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