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CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC ADAPTATION
AMONG JAPANESE WOMEN MIGRANTS
IN NEW ZEALAND

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Modern Languages at
Massey University

BARRY ANTONY NATUSCH

1986

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ABSTRACT

A survey of the cultural and linguistic adaptation of 76 married Japanese women in New Zealand was carried out by means of interviews and language tests. Two basic sub-groups were identified: those who were married to Japanese husbands (INTRA subjects) and those who were interculturally married (INTER subjects). A number of marked differences, in particular those related to age and marriage type, were observed to exist between these INTRA and INTER groups.

The INTER subjects appeared to have made a smoother cultural adaptation to life in New Zealand than those in the INTRA group. The INTRA subjects all identified themselves culturally as Japanese as did the more recently arrived INTER subjects. However, some of the INTER group who had lived in New Zealand for many years appeared to have a cultural identity which was neither fully Japanese nor western.

The migrants continued to maintain the Japanese language for communicating among themselves although it did not seem to be passed on to the children of the INTER subjects. A considerable shift from Japanese to English was observed among the INTER subjects but was less evident among subjects in the INTRA group.

Levels of oral proficiency in English were not particularly high among the subjects, ranging between 0+ and 3+ on the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) assessment scale. Most of the INTRA group were assessed between level 0+ and 1+ on the scale whereas the majority of INTER subjects scored between levels 2 and 3+. This difference in oral proficiency was due mainly to influences associated with intercultural marriage.

An analysis of the subjects' oral English revealed that the INTRA subjects had higher frequencies of error in their English than the INTER subjects. Many phonological errors appeared to be due to interference from Japanese. An analysis of grammatical errors involving noun morphology, verb morphology and article usage, however, suggested several possible causes of error including interference, oversimplification, the learners' false hypotheses, faulty instruction and idiosyncratic variation. The nature and frequency of these errors resulted in pidgin-like characteristics being observed in the subjects' English. Lexical errors and communication strategies employed by the subjects were also described.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

The field of language contact requires the use of certain terms whose definitions are not necessarily constant among all linguists. Key terms defined according to their use in the present study are therefore listed below:

BILINGUAL:

Haugen (1961) has defined a bilingual in broad terms as a person who may have any degree of ability in two or more languages or dialects irrespective of the degree of proficiency in either language or dialect. This definition will be used when referring to bilingual subjects in the present study (p.396).

CODE SWITCHING:

Clyne (1982) defines the act of switching from one language to another in the middle of a text or sentence, due either to sociolinguistic factors or to trigger words, as code switching (p.106).

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:

This term will refer to "the unconscious employment of verbal or nonverbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when precise linguistic forms are for some reason not readily available to the learner at a point in communication" (Brown, 1980, p.178).

CULTURAL ADAPTATION:

The concept of cultural adaptation is described by Taft (1977) as being the adaptation of human behaviour associated with coping in a new and unfamiliar culture (p.146).

ERROR:

Chomsky (1965, p.11) stated that native speakers frequently produce utterances which would be judged to be "ungrammatical" by other native speakers. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between the momentary lapses of a native speaker and the habitual mistakes made by second language learners who do not yet have a complete knowledge of the rules of the new language. It is this latter type of habitual mistake made by second language learners that are called errors by writers such as Corder (1971) and George (1972).

INTERFERENCE:

In language contact situations, interference between the languages may occur in the speech of individuals who use both languages. Weinreich (1953) describes interference as being "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (p.1).

INTERLANGUAGE:

This is a term coined by Selinker (1972, p.209) to refer to the intermediate stages of learning which a learner passes through between his native language the target language. An incomplete knowledge of the rules of the target language may result in the learner making errors (e.g. those of overgeneralisation) which are distinctly different to interference errors described above. This phenomenon of interlanguage has also been defined by Nemser (1971) as an "approximative system" (p. 115).

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION vs LANGUAGE LEARNING:

Krashen (1981) makes a distinction between language acquisition which requires meaningful and natural interaction in the target language and where speakers are not concerned with the form of their utterances but with the messages they convey and language learning which involves more formal study and is marked by planned language input, presentation of rules and correction of learners' errors (p.1).

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE:

Fishman (1964) proposed the term language maintenance to emphasise active and self-conscious efforts made by migrants to prevent their native languages from becoming extinct as the migrants become more and more acculturated within the host society (p.32).

LANGUAGE SHIFT:

Fishman (1966) has given the term language shift to the situation where two languages come into contact and where "the languages sometimes replace each other among some speakers in certain types or domains of language behaviour and under some conditions of intergroup contact" (p.5).

LINGUISTIC ADAPTATION:

Weinreich (1953) makes the point that language contact is an important aspect of culture contact and that linguistic adaptation by an individual is necessary when he enters a different linguistic group. In almost all situations where migrants enter a new language community, there are the three interrelated processes involving acquisition of the new language, maintenance of the migrants' native language and, over a period of time, shift from the native language to that of the host community (p.6).

NATIVE LANGUAGE vs SECOND LANGUAGE:

The native language or mother tongue has been defined by Quirk et al. (1972,p.3) as the first language acquired by an individual. Usually, the native language remains the dominant one for life although Christophersen (1974,p.32) notes several situations where this may not always hold true. The second language is often used in language contact situations to refer to the language of the host community and which the migrant must learn if he is to interact effectively within that society.

PERFORMANCE:

Chomsky (1965) differentiates between competence (the knowledge that the native speaker-hearer has about the rules of his language) and performance (the actual use made of language by the native speaker-hearer in real-life situations). It is this performance aspect which is referred to at various points in the present study (p.4).

PROFICIENCY:

The use of the term proficiency will refer to the level of ability demonstrated by subjects to use the English language in oral situations.