Language Ideologies and L2 Speaker Legitimacy: Native Speaker Bias in Japan. Jae DiBello Takeuchi. Multilingual Matters, 2023. 208 pp. (ebook)

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Who has the right to claim a language? Jae DiBello Takeuchi's *Language Ideologies and L2 Speaker Legitimacy: Native Speaker Bias in Japan* (2023) is a compelling ethnographic analysis of the effects of language ownership and native speaker bias on the legitimacy of second language (L2) speakers in Japan. Language ideologies drive how ownership of a language is initially seized and then maintained and thus play a central role in determining the legitimacy of L2 speakers. As Japan struggles to liberalize its immigration policy to alleviate labor shortages, beliefs shaping national and linguistic identities are becoming increasingly contested. Takeuchi's sophisticated and engaging examination of how these ideologies intertwine and ultimately occlude L2 speaker legitimacy is therefore particularly timely.

By foregrounding first-hand accounts from foreign residents of Japan who "live their lives in Japanese" (p.5), Takeuchi's monograph successfully addresses a gap in the literature on L2 speaker legitimacy. The overwhelming majority of research on this topic has centered on L2-English speakers in educational settings. The few studies (e.g., Doerr, 2009; Okubo, 2009) that have examined the legitimacy of L2-Japanese speakers have been similarly confined to instructional contexts, such as overseas or exchange students learning Japanese as a *foreign* language. Takeuchi's research illuminates the challenges L2 speakers face within Japan-specific contexts, offering valuable new insights into how educators, researchers, and policymakers can advocate for greater L2 speaker legitimacy.

Divided into seven chapters, Takeuchi's book opens with an engaging and sophisticated orientation to the various ways in which language ideologies affect L2 speakers in Japan, focusing on how prevailing notions of linguistic capital, speaker legitimacy, native speaker bias, and language ownership are expressed within the Japanese context. She frames Japan-specific manifestations of language ownership and native speakerism as a linguistic reification of *nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese uniqueness) that enables the "bifurcation between Japanese and the Other" (Fairbrother, 2020, as cited in Takeuchi, 2023, p. 51).

To better understand this phenomenon of linguistic "othering," Takeuchi analyzed interview excerpts, participant observation notes, and questionnaires from her study participants, who are introduced in Chapter 2. These participants were a cohort of 27 L2-Japanese speakers and 27 of

their L1-Japanese-speaking friends, coworkers, and significant others (pp. 24-25). Notably, all but two L2 participants were L1-English speakers from inner-circle nations (Kachru, 1985) who originally came to Japan via the JET Program.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, Takeuchi examines the challenges that L2 speakers encounter when navigating three distinct Japanese speech styles: *keigo* (polite language), gendered language, and dialect. She contends that only through such speech styles can the full scope of one's identity as a Japanese speaker (p. 65-66) be expressed. A sophisticated command of *keigo,* for instance, can signify that the speaker is an adult who is a fully accepted member of society (p. 42). Takeuchi argues that a nuanced use of gendered forms can facilitate in-group access for L2 speakers and help them construct a valid L2 identity (Brown & Cheek, 2017). Proficiency in dialect, meanwhile, can be a way to avoid being seen as a "perpetual foreigner" (p. 124). Despite receiving divergent and conflicting messages from their L1 interlocutors regarding these speech styles, the restrictions ultimately applied to L2 speakers were limiting; the most expressive features of the Japanese language are reserved exclusively for those who are ethnically Japanese. For example, one of the L2 study participants, Louis, recounts being "laughed at by his L1-Japanese significant other when he tried to use formal or honorific speech" (p. 46).

The damaging effects of this linguistic gatekeeping resonate most fully in Chapter 6, where Takeuchi analyzes how native speaker bias shapes L1 speakers' conceptions of L2 speakers' linguistic competence. The degree to which this book forced me as a reader to confront the many ways in which my own use of Japanese has been discredited and invalidated, both by individuals in my personal and professional orbits and by myself, was unexpected and thought-provoking. Japanese learners and foreign residents of Japan will find themselves nodding along (often in wry recognition) with the deftly observed examples of how true ownership of the Japanese language is rendered unreachable for those not ethnically Japanese. An interview excerpt from Kazuki, the L1-Japanese-speaking partner of Peter, reveals that Kazuki "…speaks most naturally when he is with 'only Japanese' people" (p. 145). As a reader, the dawning realization that it is often our most intimate L1 partners who—knowingly or unknowingly—hinder our access to the full potential and emotional interiority of Japanese cut uncomfortably close to the bone.

One limitation of this study is that it did not investigate how the L2 participants' broader identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and class) intersected to propel or repel their acceptance as Japanese speakers. This limitation is significant, as such identities shape and alter the power dynamics and inequities experienced by L2 speakers. The interview excerpts are illuminating, and Takeuchi's analysis is thorough and insightful. Ultimately, however, the author

frames the L2 participants as a monolith that native speaker bias happens *to*. To never account for how their identities might afford them more or less agency as L2 speakers feels like a clear oversight. Does a cishet white man from an inner-circle country, for example, have more access to legitimacy than a queer Black woman from the same country? Norton's (2013) work on identity, for instance, posits that "a fully developed theory of identity highlights the multiple positions from which language learners can speak" (p. 2), could have been integrated far more explicitly here. Omitting how the L2-speakers' multiple identities affected their legitimacy is a curious omission in an otherwise meticulously observed piece.

Considering discursive constructions of identity more broadly, while Takeuchi acknowledges the limited generalizability of her study, it is reasonable to suggest that individuals in the JET Program—the majority of whom hail from the Global North—may experience the strictures of linguistic gatekeeping less keenly than other demographic groups migrating to Japan. As of 2021, out of the 2.5 million foreign residents in Japan, China accounted for 27.8%, followed by Korea with 15.6%, and Vietnam with 13.4% (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, n.d.). A study encompassing a broader range of participants under the intersectionality umbrella and centering of L2-Japanese speakers who are not native speakers of English could more accurately reflect the wider L2-Japanese learner experience and amplify the voices of those disproportionately affected by language ownership and native speaker bias.

Ultimately, these critiques do not greatly diminish what is a significant contribution to our understanding of how language ideologies and native speaker bias undermine L2 speaker legitimacy. Takeuchi's innovative perspective on a well-trodden topic provides a powerful tool for researchers, educators, and policymakers who advocate for the legitimacy of L2 speakers in Japan and beyond.

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