

Influence of Korean on Remnant Japanese Language*

MYOKYUNG KIM

Kyoto Women's University

1 Remnant Japanese Among Older Koreans

In areas formerly governed by Japan in the Asia-Pacific region, some older individuals continue to use the Japanese language. In most cases, Japanese serves as their second language. Given that nearly eight decades have passed since the end of Japanese imperial rule, the Japanese spoken in these regions differ from that of native speakers in mainland Japan. This study refers to the variety of Japanese spoken by these individuals as ‘remnant Japanese’.

This study analyzes the influence of the speakers’ native language (Korean) on remnant Japanese, focusing on phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary. The analysis is based on data from the author’s collection of discourse materials.

2 Previous Studies

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on remnant Japanese in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, since 2011, three books have been published under the *The Japanese Language Abroad Series*, Asahi (2012), Chien (2011), and Long (2012) (published by Meiji Shoin). These studies have examined the characteristics of remnant Japanese, particularly in Taiwan, the

* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP22K20006.

Mariana Islands, and Sakhalin (Russia). Findings indicate significant individual variation in remnant Japanese, with substantial influence from local languages. However, broadly speaking, remnant Japanese in each region tends to exhibit a simplified language system.

Although the understanding of remnant Japanese has gradually improved, several issues remain in this study. Broadly, the following three challenges need to be addressed:

- (A) Research on remnant Japanese remains underdeveloped.
- (B) There is a lack of reusable research data, including recordings and transcriptions.
- (C) The characteristics of remnant Japanese have not been systematically compared with other variations of the Japanese language.

Older Koreans who received Japanese language education before and during the war are now entering their 90s, making this the last opportunity to record and document their use of remnant Japanese. Based on my observations, some speakers have lost most of their Japanese language proficiency due to language attrition, despite having received formal instruction. Thus, not all individuals above a certain age can be considered speakers.¹ Considering these facts, it is necessary to start research immediately.

Hwang (2008) (titled *The Retention of the Second Language in the Actual State of the Japanese Language of the Elderly in Korea*; doctoral dissertation from Osaka University) and others have conducted research on remnant Japanese in Korea. However, as noted in issues (B) and (C) above, Hwang (2008) did not leave behind discourse materials to serve as foundational data. Moreover, the positioning of remnant Japanese within the framework of second language acquisition remains unclear—for instance, how it differs from the Japanese used by second-language learners today. Additionally, the *Japanese Abroad Series* did not include Korea, despite the country being thought to have the largest number of remnant Japanese speakers, suggesting that Korean remnant Japanese studies have been largely overlooked.

Compared to the local languages spoken in Taiwan, the Mariana Islands, Sakhalin, and other regions, Korean is syntactically close to Japanese and has many Chinese derived words in common in terms of vocabulary. It is therefore necessary to investigate the characteristics of Japanese as spoken by native speakers of such languages and to document the rapidly disappearing Korean remnant Japanese. Furthermore, from a sociolinguistic perspective, contact with the Japanese language and Japanese culture was deliberately restricted in Korea until recently after the war. As a result, the Japanese used by older Koreans has had minimal exposure to postwar Japanese and is believed to have changed primarily due to independent linguistic evolution. Documenting this variety of Japanese has the potential to make a significant contribution to linguistics as a case study.

3 Survey

I am currently developing a database in response to the endangerment of remnant Japanese spoken by older Koreans.² For this research, I compiled spontaneous discourse data in which a native

¹ Some speakers appear to have lost nearly all their Japanese language proficiency. However, many—possibly due to having received their Japanese education at an early age (elementary school)—retain clear memories of Japanese nursery rhymes and can recall at least fragments of songs. Additionally, many can still recite from memory the precepts of the Japanese emperor that were emphasized under the imperialization policy.

² Some of the transcribed versions of the discourse have already been published (Kim 2015, 2024).

Japanese speakers engaged in conversations with a remnant Japanese speaker. This study analyzed two conversations recorded in 2023 and 2024 in Seoul, Korea. The speaker was a woman born in Seoul in 1935 who had never lived outside the country. Her first language is Korean. In terms of her nationality, she was born Japanese but became Korean at the age of 10, following the end of Japanese rule, which had begun in 1910.

She received Japanese language education at school in Seoul until the end of Japanese rule in 1945. At school, classes were conducted primarily in Japanese, both by Japanese and Korean teachers, and students were severely punished for speaking Korean. However, at home, she spoke Korean with her family as her first language, and at school, she secretly conversed in Korean with friends when she could not express something in Japanese. Later, she married a Korean man who had served in the former Japanese army. After the war, she visited Japan regularly and frequently attended military association gatherings as a family member. She often used the Japanese she had acquired before the war to maintain contact with her friends in Japan who were also affiliated with the military. In addition to her spoken Japanese proficiency, she is also capable of writing the language. She enjoys watching international Japanese-language broadcasts in Seoul and actively looks up unfamiliar Japanese words on her smartphone.

Most notably, however, she did not receive any formal Japanese-language education after the war. Her ability to maintain Japanese language skills over several decades is based solely on a few years of prewar education. Her speech reflects a high level of intelligence, giving the impression of a highly articulate and knowledgeable individual.

4 The Influence of the Korean Language on the Remnant Japanese Spoken by Older Koreans

The influence of local languages has been identified as a characteristic of remnant Japanese in Taiwan (Chien 2011), the Mariana Islands (Imamura & Long 2021, Long 2012), and Sakhalin, Russia (Asahi 2012). A similar phenomenon is observed among Korean speakers of remnant Japanese, as outlined below.

4.1 Phonetics: H-Dropping and Other Features

In Korean, the [h] sound between vowels is typically weakened and often becomes silent. Korean speakers of remnant Japanese have a tendency to weaken or omit the [h] sound between vowels, a feature commonly observed in the Korean language. This demonstrates how the local language has influenced remnant Japanese. The following table presents the total occurrences of H-dropping in both word-initial and word-medial positions. Examples are provided below the table, with instances of [h] omission underlined. The word-initial examples are presumably not due to Korean influence but are included for reference. Examples (1) to (3) are word-medial examples (where [h] is caught between vowels) that may have been influenced by Korean, and (4) and (5) are examples of word-initial occurrences.³

³ All example sentences below are presented in four rows: the first row contains Japanese characters; the second row presents phonemes; the third row provides glosses (with some simplification); and the fourth row contains English translations. However, since this is derived from natural discourse, the example sentences may contain slurring. Such utterances are indicated as they appear in the first and second rows, while the third row is left blank without a gloss.

H-dropping	Word-initial	Word-medial
	4 of 217	95 of 128

Table 1: Total Count of H-Dropping

- (1) におん, におんじんの先生が
 ni(h)on, ni(h)onjin=no sensee=ga
 Japan Japanese=GEN teacher=NOM
 ‘Japan... Japanese teacher (was)...’
- (2) あそこで, にあ, にばく, にあく (二泊)
 asoko=de, ni(h)a, nibaku, ni(h)aku
 there=INST two.nights
 ‘(I stayed) two nights there.’
- (3) グリーンホテル (グリーンホテル) があったよ
 guriin(h)oteru=ga atta=yo
 Green Hotel=NOM be:NPST=SFP
 ‘There was “Green Hotel”.’
- (4) ああ写真があいってた (入ってた)
 aa shashin=ga (h)aitteta
 oh picture=NOM be.in:CONT:PST
 ‘Oh, it has a picture (in it).’
- (5) このいと (人) が埼玉に住んでいて
 kono (h)ito=ga saitama=ni sundeite
 this person=NOM Saitama=DAT live:CONT:CTX
 ‘This person lives in Saitama, (and then...)’

Other features, such as the shortening of long vowels (e.g. [giŋkɔ], not [giŋkɔ:] ‘bank’), were also observed. This characteristic may be influenced by the fact that Korean does not distinguish between long and short vowels (in Standard Korean, long and short vowels are not distinctive, and phonologically long vowels are absent). Additionally, the voicing of voiceless consonants occurring between voiced sounds (e.g. [wadaɕi], not [wataɕi] ‘I’) was also observed. In Korean, such voicing consistently occurs. These two phonetic features should be analyzed with more discourse data in the future.

4.2 Grammar: Misuse of Particles

Here I examine the influence of Korean on Japanese grammar, focusing on particles. The Japanese particle *に* *ni* and the Korean particle (으)로 (*u*)*lo* are both used to indicate direction. The semantic similarities between *に* *ni* and the Korean (으)로 (*u*)*lo* suggests a possible extension of meaning between the two. However, while (으)로 (*u*)*lo* can indicate the method or means of transaction, *に* *ni* does not carry this meaning. In this context, native Japanese would use *で* *de* instead.

- (6) 無料に乗ることができました
 muryoo=ni nor-u koto=ga deki-mash-ita.
 Free=DAT ride-NPST thing=NOM can.do-POL-PST
 ‘(I) got a free ride.’

Thus, I observed cases in which the semantic range of Japanese forms such as =*ni*, =*ga*, and =*o* was extended to align with the semantic range of the Korean particles, although the number of such cases was not large, as shown in Table 2.

	= <i>ni</i>	= <i>ga</i>	= <i>o</i>
Misuse	3 of 287	2 of 181	6 of 115

Table 2: Total Count of Particle Misuse

The influence of Korean particle usage was also observed in the following example.

- (7) 馬を、乗るんですよ
 uma=o, nor-u=n=des-u=yo
 horse=ACC ride-NPST=NLZ=POL-NPST=SFP
 ‘(We) ride horses.’

Here, the use of =*o noru* ‘to ride on’ is borrowed from Korean, as in standard Japanese, =*ni noru* would be used. Similar to (7), (8) and (9) also reflect the influence of Korean particle usage, as they contain deviances from native Japanese usages. In (8) and (9), *に ni* should be used instead of *が ga* and *を o*, respectively. Since the nominative particle for (8) and the accusative particle for (9) are used in Korean, it can be said that these examples are definitely influenced by Korean.

- (8) 火事がなったら
 kaji=ga nattara
 fire=NOM become:COND
 ‘In case of fire’
- (9) 学校を通って
 gakkoo=o kayotte
 school=ACC go.to:CTX
 ‘(I) went to school, (and then...)’

In addition to the aforementioned Korean influence on particles, some of the sound declensions of conjugated verbs (音便 *onbin*) differed from those of native Japanese speakers.

- (10) あさい新聞社（朝日新聞社）に、す、かよんでいだ（通っていた）らしいんですよ
 ね
 asaishinbunsha=*ni*, su, kayondeida=rashii=n=des-u=yone
 Asahi Simbun =DAT attend:IPFV:PST=SEEM=NLZ=POL-NPST=SFP
 ‘(I) heard (my father) worked at Asahi Shimbun (name of newspaper company).’

- (11) よん年（四年）までは、国語としてならんだ（習った）
 yonnenmade=wa, kokugotoshite naranda
 until.forth.grade=TOP as.national.langage learn:PST
 ‘(I) learned (Japanese) as a national language until the fourth grade.’

For native speakers, (10) should be *kayotteita* and (11) *naratta*. Both are consonant stem verbs ending in *w* (*kayow-* and *naraw-*) and are considered relatively difficult for learners to conjugate correctly. Although this is not the primary focus of this study, it is a grammatical issue that should be addressed in future research using interviews.

4.3 Lexical

Finally, I will discuss lexical features that appear to have been influenced by the native Korean language. First, consider the following example (12).

- (12) この頃は村の友達も一緒に
 konogoro=wa mura=no tomodachimo isshoni
 recently=TOP village=GEN friends:also together
 ‘Recently, with some friends from the village...’

The Korean word 동네 *tongney*, which is considered to correspond semantically to Japanese 村 *mura*, can be used to denote a small community where people live. However, 동네 *tongney* in Korean can also refer to the immediate vicinity of an individual’s residence, a meaning not shared by 村 *mura*. The semantic similarity between the two words suggests an expanded use of their meanings.⁴

There is another example of a Korean influenced lexical feature in existential expressions. Japanese has two distinct existential verbs, one for animate subjects, いる *iru*, and one for inanimate subjects, ある *aru*, whereas Korean only has one existential verb, 있다 *issta*.

- (13) もうひとり（一人）ある
 moo hidori ar-u
 more one.person exist-NPST
 ‘There is one more person.’

(13) was observed from the speaker, who repeatedly used ある *aru*, the Japanese verb for inanimate subjects, in all contexts except one, suggesting influence from Korean. This can also be seen as an example of simplification in language acquisition.

5 Conclusion

The remnant Japanese speaker in this study demonstrated a high level of proficiency, enabling her to engage in lengthy conversations with a native Japanese speaker. However, her speech exhibited tendencies from her local language, Korean in this case, which is a key characteristic of remnant

⁴ Considering the period when the speaker learned Japanese, it is possible that what was once referred to as a ‘village’ is now termed a ‘town’, potentially leading to the lexical fossilization of the former term.

Japanese. Given that nearly 80 years has passed since the end of the war, language attrition may have occurred. Kim (2010), in a survey of Korean returnees from Japan, noted a similar trend in the use of particles and vocabulary, which shifted over time following their return to Korea. It was crucial to collect as much discourse data from remnant Japanese speakers, including the speaker in this study, as soon as possible, and to develop my research by comparing the language attrition in their use of Japanese with that of other speakers.

Abbreviations

- = affix boundary; = = clitic boundary; ACC = accusative; COND = conditional; CONT = continuous; CTX = contextual; DAT = dative; GEN = genitive; IPFV = imperfective; NLZ = nominalizer; NOM = nominative; NPST = non-past; POL = polite; PST = past; SEEM = seeming; SFP = sentence-final particle; TOP = topic

X.Y = This form means X and Y

X:Y = This form consists of a morpheme meaning X and a morpheme meaning Y

References

- Asahi, N. 2012. *Sakhalin's Remaining Japanese Karafuto Dialect*. Tokyo: Meiji Shoin.
- Chien, Y. 2011. *The Japanese Language in Taiwan Today: The Figure as a Lingua Franca*. Tokyo: Meiji Shoin.
- Hwang, Y. 2008. *The Retention of the Second Language in the Actual State of the Japanese Language of the Elderly in Korea*. Doctoral dissertation, Osaka University.
- Imamura, K. and D. Long (eds.). 2021. *Ajia, Taiheiyoo-ni okeru Nihongo-no Kako to Genzai* (Vestiges of the Japanese Language in the Asia-Pacific Region). Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobo.
- Kim, M. 2010. Kikokushijo-no Nihongo-no Iji-to Mametsu (Maintenance and Attrition of Returnee's Japanese Language). *Nihongogaku* 29(14): 183–95.
- Kim, M. 2015. Kankoku Koonensoo-no Zanzon Nihongo Danwa Shiryoo (Remnant Japanese Discourse Material of Korean Older Adult). *Fukuoka daigaku kenkyuubu ronshuu A: Jinbunkagakuhen* (The bulletin of Central Research Institute Fukuoka University. Humanities, Series A) 14(2): 85–91.
- Kim, M. 2024. Aru Kankoku koonensoo-no zanzon Nihongo tekisuto (A remnant Japanese text from an elderly Korean). *Aichi syukutoku daigaku ronshuu; kooryuubunkagakubuhon* (Bulletin of Aichi Shukutoku University, Faculty of Global Culture and Communication) 14: 101–16.
- Long, D. 2012. *Japanese Language Remaining in the Mariana Islands: Its Characteristics as an Interlanguage*. Tokyo: Meiji Shoin.