
Nationalism and Linguistic Purism in Contemporary Japan: National Sentiment Expressed through Public Attitudes towards Foreignisms

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Abstract (in French and English)

The role of national language in forming and strengthening national sentiment has been the object of considerable scholarly attention. It has notably been observed that when national sentiment is threatened in any way, linguistic debates regarding the use of national language frequently become fiercer. Linguistic purism is the urge to preserve a 'desirable' language form while eliminating 'undesirable' linguistic elements, a drive profoundly intertwined with nationalism. An example of this phenomenon is the controversy on the use of foreign loanwords observed in contemporary Japan and which has seen demands that foreignisms be replaced by 'Japanese' terms to purify the language. This paper examines the contrasting expressions and metaphors used to describe the national language and foreignisms found in recent Japanese newspaper articles and argues that the growing tendency to discuss national language in contrast to foreignisms can be understood as a particular manifestation of ongoing (re-)negotiation of national identity. The controversy is found to be grounded upon a desire to establish specific understandings of Japaneseness in reference to the otherness felt within a society that is symbolised by loanwords, constructing an 'internal Other' to a Japanese 'Self', the identity of which is neither autonomous nor clearly delineated.

Keywords: Contemporary Japan, Nationalism, Linguistic Purism

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