

TITLE:

# A Research on Japanese Language Acquisition by Migrant Workers

## A Survey into an Indonesian Community

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This research is a comprehensive analysis of the use and acquisition of Japanese language in Indonesian migrant workers concentrated in the town of Ōarai, Higashi-Ibaraki County, Ibaraki Prefecture. The main results by chapters are as follows:

Chapter I examines previous research on related topics, analysing its contributions and shortcomings. The Japanese language acquisition in the members of the community in Ōarai can be regarded as a case of second language acquisition in adults (and a natural one at that). But we felt that a new multifaceted approach, overcoming the vision of language acquisition as a temporally linear process, is needed. Therefore we decided to use the theory of Situated Learning as exemplified by Lave and Wenger's (1991) Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP). Against this background we set up an objective of the study "to clarify the factors that promote or impede the acquisition of Japanese in the members of Ōarai Indonesian community", which is further subdivided into a number of aspects.

Chapter II elaborates on the territory covered by the survey and the methods used.

Chapter III introduces the establishment and functions of the Ōarai community as well as the social background of its members which is information, essential to the understanding of their Japanese language acquisition. We follow its history and development since the start.

Chapter IV focuses on the Japanese class designed for members of the Ōarai community as well as other attempts in this field including those from recent years.

Chapter V starts with the introduction of some of the tests the members of the Ōarai community were subjected to, namely the vocabulary test and the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview). The results

showed that the majority of the community had not gone beyond the “novice” level and the length of their stay in Japan has almost no bearing on their performance in the OPI. Further, there is a discussion on the participant observations of their work and everyday life, as well as speech activities of the community members, carried in order to find out the reasons for this situation.

Chapter VI starts with analysis of those members of the Ōarai community who performed above “intermediate” level at the OPI in order to find the factors which may have promoted their language acquisition. A further analysis of the “novice” level members, tries to find out the factors impeding the process. By the use of M-GTA (Modified Grounded Theory Approach) as a main method, the analysis of acquisition-promoting factors shows how the process of converting the “novice” into “intermediate” works. In order to understand impeding factors, the data from participant observations were added to the interview of “novice” speakers and consociates. Finally the findings of this research were summarized in the context of Situated Learning Theory. The approaches to coping with difficulties in “novice” learners were introduced first. Then we analysed the situation surrounding members of the Ōarai community from the viewpoint of LPP as a part of the above mentioned theory. We searched for certain hints to improve the situation inside reports from Germany and the Republic of Korea and further examined public assistance to the community against this background, making some suggestions. Finally we examined if the “Circle of Learning” (“Manabi-no wa”) introduced in Ōarai is efficient in the light of a multifaceted approach to second language learning based on the theory of Situated Learning. The analysis showed that:

- ① To members of the Ōarai community the working place is an important environment where they can interact with the host community and practice. The acquisition happens as part of this situation.
- ② To most members of the Ōarai community the “situation” usually involves unskilled labour and the learning induced by it does not go beyond of its limits.
- ③ It is possible that the furthest point, the members’ acquisition reaches, is set by the mutual

expectations of migrant workers and Japanese speakers, as well as the effort, time and funds invested. In other words, the troubles they have with their practice and Japanese acquisition are in a way “pre-designed” by the participants in the process, including themselves.

④ 95% (N=100) of the members who took the OPI were found to be “novice” (63% “Novice Mid”) which roughly corresponds to the level predetermined by the “situation”.

⑤ The intermediate speakers have a personal network that extends beyond the Ōarai community and gives them many opportunities to interact with the host community as part of many practice groups making their Legitimate Peripheral Participation successful to a certain extent. This seems to be what has brought them to the intermediate level in the first place.

⑥ Legitimate Peripheral Participation creates a new self-image of “a person who can speak Japanese” leading to a new “skilled” identity.

All this serves as evidence that the access to social practice is the main factor explaining the success of Japanese language acquisition in some members of the Ōarai community, making this research a successful implementation of the concept of Legitimate Peripheral Participation to language acquisition. It has also made some proposals as to how to improve Japanese language acquisition in members of the Ōarai community, including some suggestions considering the Japanese language course managed by the “Circle of Learning” (“Manabi-no wa”).