

A Suggestion of “Intelligible Japanese” as a Way to Build a Multicultural Society

Against the Backdrop of an Increasing Number of Foreign Trainees

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The number of foreign nationals who live in Japan keeps on increasing. Their number now accounts for 1.63% of the total population of Japan (statistics of Immigration Bureau, Ministry of Justice 2007). It is estimated that approximately 1.3 million out of these people do not have, due to various reasons, the ability to speak Japanese minimally required for living in Japan (Nishiguchi 2007). Under such circumstances, it is important for the Japanese society to expand Japanese learning opportunities for foreign nationals and at the same time explore a form of articulation so as to create a Japanese language intelligible for foreign people. This approach that demands the Japanese society which accepts foreign people to change is shared by Toshio Okazaki (1994) and Hitomi Okazaki (2001). The point of their arguments, however, is that Japanese people and foreign people interact with one another, through which process both sides will create and acquire “a Japanese language” intelligible to both sides. That is, it is obviously predicated upon the premise that foreign nationals have a certain level of language ability to carry on “interactions.”

There is a marked increase particularly in the number of trainees among foreign nationals who come to Japan. In fact their number has already exceeded that of foreign students. It is predicted that this increasing trend will continue. A great number of these trainees have the ability to speak Japanese which hardly or barely satisfies the level 4 of the Japanese language proficiency test. In order for them to carry out their work safely and reliably at the workplace such as factory, it is essential for Japanese people to use “intelligible” Japanese. Hence, what is required for their training instructors is to receive language training to effectively

adjust their articulation in Japanese. It will become necessary to develop teaching materials for such articulation training as well. In parallel with the efforts of foreign trainees to learn Japanese, that Japanese themselves accept the change will eventually lead to the benefits of both sides.

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