



KOKUBAN

Volume 5, Issue 2

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The JCCC Heritage Department is pleased to bring you Kokuban - our monthly e-bulletin that covers topics from heritage treasures to stories about this unique community.

Editor’s note: This month, we focus our issue on the Japanese language in Japanese Canadian communities in honour of [International Mother Language Day](#). The observance has its roots in 1952 protests by students in present-day Bangladesh against Urdu being declared the sole national language, as Bangla was the majority tongue. Today, International Mother Language Day is marked by communities all over the world on February 21st to celebrate and bring awareness to the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Sedai Features: Frank Moritsugu – Prefectural dialects and *nisei nihongo* in pre-war Kitsilano



This month, Sedai features Frank Moritsugu, a nisei WWII veteran and one of the first Japanese Canadian journalists to write for mainstream publications. Here, he discusses the diversity of Japanese dialects found in pre-war Vancouver and his experience with his heritage language as a child of immigrants.

[Click here to listen to the interview](#)

“The goal isn’t to become fluent, the goal is to reconnect”: An interview with Christopher Gradin

We recently sat down with Christopher Gradin, a Japanese Canadian doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) whose research focuses on Japanese as a heritage language pedagogy, particularly among the descendants of interned Japanese Canadians, taking a historically informed approach using oral histories from the [JCCC's Sedai Oral History](#) collection.

If you're interested in learning more about Christopher's work, he will be giving a talk at OISE on February 22nd. See the upcoming events section for more details.

JCCC: Can you tell us a little bit about your research?

CG: My work is about how language loss happened historically among Japanese Canadians. I use the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. He talks about how, in society, people can compete for power through what's called cultural or symbolic capital, which is in contrast to economic capital. So, I'm looking at the exchange of this symbolic capital and the [symbolic violence](#) created by differences in symbolic capital between groups.

I try to understand how attitudes toward language have shifted from generation to generation during and after WWII and discuss the implications for heritage language learners now. So, what happened over issei, nisei, sansei generations, for language loss to occur? And how can that be applied to heritage language pedagogy? How can that language loss be addressed?

The sansei generation, who were mostly raised as monolingual English speakers, are getting quite elderly now. I'm not going to be teaching these elderly sansei, but there are further generations -- yonsei, gosei, not to mention mixed ethnicity people, like myself. How can family be brought into the heritage language conversation? My research has indicated that family should be the focus of the language learning effort for Nikkei people with that history, rather than going to Japan or watching anime.

JCCC: How did you come to this topic?

CG: I am a heritage language learner of Japanese. My mother is a Japanese immigrant who came here in the '70s and she struggled with English when I was a child. I always wanted to learn, and it's been a lifelong struggle to reclaim Japanese.

As well, I'm from Kelowna, BC, where so many Japanese Canadians put down roots after internment. My father, who is from Revelstoke, which was very close to New Denver – his childhood best friend was interned there, and I have many close family friends who were also Japanese Canadian. I'm very inspired by their story.

JCCC: So you used our Sedai Oral History collection in your research, along with older oral histories from Nikkei National Museum. What did you find in the interviews? What was surprising?

CG: The consistency of the reports of how the language atrophied over generations was what surprised me the most. I knew that language loss occurred probably after the issei generation, because they were Japan born. And their kids had to study Japanese. The issei generation had their kids going to Japanese language school every day and it was very important to them.

But with the nisei generation, internment occurred and there was a prohibition of Japanese language education in the camps. Many also wanted to show their allegiance with Canada and the best way to do that was to speak English only and ignore Japanese. So then the third generation were basically raised as monolingual English speakers. Of course, I am not pointing fingers at the nisei generation for language loss. What happened to them was imposed upon them, social forces beyond their control.

There is a mutually understood assumption about what nisei means in terms of language ability. There are terms like *nisei nihongo* which is like a Japanese-English pidgin and it's basically synonymous with limited Japanese ability. And sansei is understood to mean, maybe you understand a little bit of Japanese, but you don't speak it. There are some generalizations happening there, because the timing is fluid, for example, an early immigrant might have had a sansei grandchild that was interned. But I was really surprised that that pattern was so structured.



Kitsilano Japanese Language School, 1935. JCCC Original Photographic Collection 2001.11.55.

JCCC: What do we lose when we lose our heritage language?

CG: You lose a lot – more than just your language, you lose your culture, your identity. Another thing that surprised me was listening to interviews from the '70s of sansei in their twenties who are talking about the sansei identity crisis. They all had the same experience of having lost something that was a part of them. Especially as visible minorities, because people would look at them and assume they must have knowledge of some other language or awareness of that culture, but they didn't. It was this waking state of being loyal and good Canadians at the cost of having a fuller picture of who they were as individuals and really cutting those connections between the generations.

I talk about collective memory of the family. That's something that's broken when you can't talk about it. With internment, it gets more complicated because it compounds over generations. Nisei didn't want to talk about the injustices to spare their children the shame. Then, for sansei, not having the language cuts off any means of discovering it themselves. So many sansei now regret that their own children or grandchildren don't have more interest in learning more about it. It's all just the legacy of that symbolic violence that started in wartime.

Listening to those sansei experiences really blew me away because it parallels my experience, even though my mother came here in the '70s. Why is this still part of the social reality of being Japanese Canadian? I'm 46 now and I'm having the same experience that this guy's having in the '70s! This is speaking to a larger social phenomenon, as part of being a visible minority in Canada. It's really symbolic violence – taking the values and ideologies of the dominant culture and just espousing them as your own and then losing the very thread of who you are, who your family is.

JCCC: That's all so fascinating. The Japanese Canadian experience is such an important thread in the narrative of heritage language loss, because that rupturing event of internment complicates things compared to some other immigrant and racialized groups.

CG: That's one of the things that really stands out from a researcher point of view, that there was such an egregious racialized approach by the federal government. It really stands as a cautionary tale. The results of the symbolic violence that occurred following the internment are equal to the severity of the initial injustices of the incarceration. If we can learn from this extreme situation, it can work towards helping other minoritized groups, as well as Indigenous peoples who are looking to revitalize their own languages after even more extreme examples of violence.

JCCC: And so, what is gained when one begins to relearn their heritage language?

CG: [Joshua Fishman](#), a pioneer of heritage language research, talks about positive ethnolinguistic consciousness. And it's comprised of things like kinship and sanctity and the importance of something in and of itself, learning a language because it means something to you and to your family. I want to reconnect families by reigniting this positive ethnolinguistic consciousness. It's loyalty to the family, to the history, to the predecessors and respecting what they've gone through. The goal isn't to become fluent, modern Japanese speakers. The goal is just to reconnect.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.



JCCC SURVEY



[JCCC Programming and Events Survey](#)

There is still time to participate! A reminder that the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC) invites you to participate in a short survey regarding the programming offered by the Centre. Your feedback will be used to improve our offerings and to broaden our audience. It should take you about 15-20 minutes to complete this survey.

The survey can be accessed using this [link](#) (and will also be available directly on the JCCC website (<https://jccc.on.ca/>)). The survey will be open until February 29th, 2024. If you require assistance to complete the survey, please contact Reception at the JCCC (tel. 416-444-2345 ext.222 or email jccc@jccc.on.ca). We thank you in

アンケート参加、まだまだ間に合います！日系文化会館（JCCC）からJCCCのイベントや講座に関するアンケートへのご協力をお願いしています。皆様、まだお時間ありますのでよろしくお願いいたします。回答いただいた内容は、今後のサービス向上や会員拡大のために使用されます。このアンケートへの回答所要時間は15-20分程度となります。

こちらのリンク[link](#)をクリックしてください。また直接JCCCのウェブサイト(<https://jccc.on.ca>)からでもアクセスできます。アンケートへの回答期日は2024年2月29日までとなります。回答の際にお手伝いが必要な方はJCCC受付(tel. 416-444-2345 ext.222、email jccc@jccc.on.ca)にお問い合わせください。皆様のご協力に感謝申し上げます。

UPCOMING EVENTS



Heritage Language Learning in light of Japanese Canadian Internment: Developing an Oral History Informed Pedagogy

Japanese language learning environments in Canada are traditionally oriented towards a Japan-bound conception of identity and language use; however, for Japanese Canadians who have a family history of Internment, dispossession, and forced relocation during and after WWII, a shift towards a historically informed Japanese as a heritage language (JHL) is needed. There is a sense of urgency in engendering this shift, as direct witnesses are beginning to disappear. In this study, I draw upon the oral history archives in the two largest Japanese Canadian cultural institutions in Canada, The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto, Ontario, and the National Nikkei Museum and Cultural Centre in Burnaby, British Columbia. My review of the oral histories involved over 63 hours of audio and video recordings, spanning a period of almost 40 years, from 1976 to 2013. The primary recurrent theme is the progressive loss of Japanese in favour of English across the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei generations. Utilizing Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (Bourdieu, 1991; Swartz, 1997), I conducted an analysis of habitus and the field of intergenerational communication, revealing shifts in cultural capital intergenerationally and the subsequent assimilation of habitus; this gives rise to the second recurrent theme, the breakdown of intergenerational communication, resulting in obstacles to the transmission of collective memories of the family and discontinuities in cultural identity. The pedagogical implication of these results is that heritage language learning should not be approached from a second or additional language orientation, i.e., not from a Japan-bound orientation towards language use, but from a family-oriented approach. Potential pedagogical responses will be presented; feedback from Japanese language educators and administrators is encouraged.

SPEAKER

CHRISTOPHER GRADIN

Christopher Gradin is a PhD Candidate in the Language and Literacies Education program. His research centers around the role of history in heritage language learning for minoritized learners. In his 20 years of teaching experience, he has taught EFL in Japan, ESL, and EAP at the post-secondary level. His research interests include identity negotiation, intergenerational communication, teacher education, and professional development.



DATE

February, 22nd 2024

TIME

4-5pm

PLACE

OISE Room TBD
[Click to Register](#)

Can't join us live?
Head over to <https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/cerll> to watch recordings of previous CERLL events. Would you like to present your on-going or finished research? Contact lisa.lackner@mail.utoronto.ca to find out how!



Christopher Gradin research talk on Japanese as a heritage language | February 22nd, 4pm, @ OISE



Seagrass | February 23rd – 29th, @ TIFF

If you missed our January screening and panel discussion of Seagrass, directed by yonsei Meredith Hama-Brown, you have a second chance! Seagrass is having its theatrical release in Toronto from February 23rd to 29th at TIFF Bell Lightbox. See here for more information and to purchase tickets: <https://www.tiff.net/events/seagrass>.

We also have three pairs of tickets to give away. If you are interested, please email vidhyae@jccc.on.ca to receive a code that can be used at online checkout to get free tickets. These will be distributed on a first come, first serve basis.



Mottainai Artists' Walk and Talk | March 9th, 2pm-4pm, @ JCCC Gallery

Discover the beauty of reclaimed materials at our community show, Mottainai (勿体無い). Learn about the artist's creative process and how they incorporate the ethos of Mottainai into their work. Don't miss this opportunity to gain insight and appreciation for art and sustainability



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