

SUMMARY

Changes in the position of the Japanese language and its education based on the number of applicants for upper secondary education examinations in New South Wales

Taku Shimazu

[International Student Center, Nagasaki University]

The history of Japanese language education at Australian high schools spans 90 years, dating back to 1918 when Fort Street High School, a public school in New South Wales (NSW), began offering Japanese as a subject. Japanese was subsequently introduced as a subject in upper secondary education examinations in NSW during the 1920s.

Although Japanese language education at high schools in NSW was suspended following the outbreak of war between Japan and Australia in December 1941, it was reinstated in 1946, just one year after the end of the war. As of 2006, 60 years later, some 25,000 students at public high schools (including lower secondary education) in NSW were studying Japanese.

The present study discusses the social position of the Japanese language and its education in post-war NSW, as well as the changes in position over time, based on the number of applicants for upper secondary education examinations in NSW.

Until the 1970s, French had been unrivaled as the predominant foreign language in Australia. In contrast, Japanese rapidly emerged as a foreign language from the 1980s. Another difference between French and Japanese is that the former is a European language, while the latter is an Asian language. Despite these differences, Japanese and French presently share a similar position as Languages Other Than English (LOTE) subjects in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations in upper secondary education in NSW. Both languages are LOTE that are characterized as foreign languages rather than heritage or community languages, and have similar types of applicants in terms of the duration and level of language learning. While the rapid increases in the number of Australian students learning Japanese during the 1980s and 1990s may have been fueled by the growth of the Japanese economy and the development of economic and personal exchanges between Japan and Australia, the fact that the number of students selecting Japanese as an HSC subject has not rapidly decreased despite Japan's subsequent economic slump indicates that the position and social recognition of the Japanese language in school education in NSW have become similar to those traditionally associated with French. In other words, Japanese is now positioned and socially recognized as a regular foreign language that is commonly taught at high schools.