

Language and its Impact on the Nikkei During the Internment Years

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As the Pacific war drew near, language began to play a more prominent but divisive role than ever before in the lives of the Nikkei in the United States. Japanese, the mother tongue of the Nikkei Issei, (Japanese immigrants to the United States), was widely and unabashedly used while their young offspring, the Nikkei Nisei, (second generation), tried valiantly to balance both languages, Japanese in the household and ethnic community and English in American public schools. By the time Executive Order 9066 was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942 to remove and evacuate all “aliens” of Japanese ancestry to assembly centers and finally to isolated internment camps throughout the mainland United States, policies were instituted to discourage the corporate use of the Japanese language while widely enforcing the use of English. What was the reason for this dramatic shift in language policy? What forces were in play to mandate the use of English during this highly volatile period? Firstly, Japanese functioned as a “minority” language, and was rarely viewed as a threat to its American hosts, until the immigrants began to exhibit their entrepreneurial prowess in agriculture, which encroached into the all-white labor market. Secondly, as war with Japan became imminent, the American populace would now view Japanese, the people and its language, with contempt.

Conversely, the push for English was a concerted, nationalistic effort to diminish the propagation and function of the Japanese language and cultural influence while intensifying a governmental campaign for Americanization policies. May argues this action has “to do with power, prejudice, (unequal) competition and, in many cases, overt discrimination and subordination.” (2001 p.4) and is exerted by the dominant nation state and its function is closely associated with the “institutionalization” of language in cultural, social, and political settings. (2001 p.6)

This paper will argue that the U.S. government policy interventions, spanning from the settlement period of the first generation of Japanese pioneers to the time of wartime incarceration of the Japanese, adversely affected inter-Nikkei relations by depriving them of their ability and right to their livelihood. It is the contention of this paper that restrictive policies and societal attitudes to control language use served to polarize the Japanese and English-speaking Nikkei community, thus contributing greatly to the decline of the use of the mother tongue and also hastening the assimilation of the Nikkei into mainstream American society.

Issei attempt to assimilate

The first large wave of Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States in the late 1800s and after a period of time there, as Kitano assessed, “The majority[of Issei]could not communicate in English”, with good reason; their intention was to return to Japan after their brief “fortune-seeking” sojourn in the U.S. Therefore, they failed to see the merits of learning the host language while they were there. The nature of their work also determined whether the use of English was necessary. Kitano points out that “small shops and businesses that were primarily dependent on the ethnic group clientele, and the Japanese-owned busi-

nesses maintaining headquarters in Japan were primarily non-acculturative in a direct sense". (1976 p.24) Farm laborers, too, had little contact with Americans. In addition, since the immigrants encountered numerous racist reprisals, it was only natural that they, like most first generation immigrants, would seek haven in Japanese-speaking communities away from host neighborhoods. (Kitano, 1976 p.69)

Other immigrants had no choice but to work in isolated environments and so their encounters with English speakers were infrequent. Linguistic progress remained stagnant and hindered their conversations with their English-speaking children. Born in Hiroshima, Saburo Tanaka was an itinerant laborer who refused to let his children speak English at home, often disciplining them to use Japanese. He lectured them that "a Japanese is no good unless he can speak Japanese." (Kikumura, 1981 p.32) Some children were defiant about the parental rules forced upon them.

A Los Angeles Issei had the forethought to put his daughter in an integrated kindergarten. Aware of her language shortcomings at school, he decided he would use only English at home for the sake of his daughter's future. (Girdner & Loftis, 1969 p.77) Wayne Kanemoto, whose Issei father was a farmer in California, admitted there were gaps in communication.

...We couldn't speak Japanese, and they couldn't speak English. We knew the rudiments, but when you got to discussing anything you ran out of vocabulary before you got very far... (Girdner & Loftis, 1969 p.78)

Bolder and more frequent attempts were made to establish themselves with the majority group of Americans but the Issei continued to

face obstacles. Smith countered the belief that the Issei were unas-similable:

They had studied English, they were becoming converts to Chris-tianity...When their efforts to be American did nothing to prevent boycott, land law and restrictive covenant, they gave up trying. (1948 p.247)

Even their fervent efforts to integrate had limitations. A graduate of the University of California, and the secretary of the Japanese Association of America, Kanzaki Kiichi, encouraged his immigrant counterparts to study English as a way of furthering their understanding of Americanism. (Ichioka, 1988 p.195) After assessing only moderate progress, however, Kiichi felt that complete assimilation was unattainable “unless equality of races and equality of opportunity are established, unless all the barriers[to]assimilation are melted away, and unless the time element is given its full power of transformation.” (Ichioka, 1988 p.196) Those barriers Kanzaki goes on to say, were identified as racial prejudice, alien land laws, and residential segregation.

Barriers: Anti-Japanese restrictive policies

The land law Smith and Kanzaki refer to was the 1913 California Alien Land Law, which prohibited the Japanese from purchasing and selling farmland to a “fellow immigrant”. (Ichioka, 1988 p.153) The 1924 Immigration Act halted all Asian immigration to the United States. (Ichioka, 1988, p.244) The last statute, by far the most restrictive, barred the naturalization rights of foreigners. Ozawa Takao was one of the first Japanese to graduate from Berkeley High School and the University of California. Educated and acculturated in America, and well-

versed in English, Ozawa filed a petition for the right of naturalization and took his case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1922, the court ruled he was ineligible for citizenship on the grounds that as he was “neither a free white person nor an African by birth or descent, he did not have the right of naturalization as a Mongolian.” (Ichioka, 1988 p.226)

These laws clearly reflected the discriminatory practices directed towards Japanese settlers and immigrants. The statutes had a two-pronged effect: they served to limit land ownership, mainly agricultural property, and to prevent further inflow of Japanese immigrants particularly in already populated “Japan towns” in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Sacramento. While many bitterly considered moving elsewhere outside the state of California, and even to Mexico or other parts of South America, most of the first-generation Japanese chose to stay. Others expressed humiliation at what they perceived to be “anti-Japanese” treatment, but they endured and hoped for the best. Despite their struggles to adapt and establish themselves in a foreign land, prospects for a better future rested in the hands of their American-born children who could exert their “God-given” rights, and thus forge a legitimate existence in the United States. They prayed that their offspring would not have to face the same misfortunes and that America would be more accepting of them. When their Nisei children assimilated,

the Issei felt that the many years’ hardship would soon be over... This ability to speak English was sufficient to make the Nisei a superior being in the mind of Issei... (Kitagawa, 1967 p.23)

As the Issei parents marveled at their children’s linguistic progress and the fluidity with which they spoke, they realized English would no longer stand as a formidable barrier to Japanese integration into Ameri-

can society. The next hurdle was to provide their children with complementary exposure to Japanese language and deeper appreciation of Japanese values and morals.

The Kibei paradox

The Issei who managed to gain some sense of stability in their lives were now faced with a labyrinth of issues concerning their children's future, aging parents in Japan, existing familial burden and other household stress. The most rational solution was to send their children, commonly the oldest member, to Japan to solidify family and cultural ties. Under the care of their grandparents and other relatives, they would profit from exposure to Japanese life and a Japanese education. For many Nisei newcomers to Japan, the homecoming experience was far from ideal as they experienced difficult adjustments particularly, with the Japanese language, home and school life.

Well-grounded in Japanese cultural principles and morals, the Kibei returned to America, only now they would face a climate of mounting prejudice even among their Nisei peers. Glenn notes that "many never became fully fluent in English and their occupational choices were therefore limited. (1986 p.53) Their incapability to speak fluent English, their opposing political views of national allegiance and duty, and Japanese cultural mannerisms directly clashed with those of the Nisei, who had never been to Japan. The Kibei's cultural style represented everything the Nisei didn't want to be. (Takahashi, 1997 p.83) Takahashi goes on to comment,

Nisei rejection resulted in Kibei adhering to their "Japaneseness" all the more...the racial and political tenor of the times shaped relations between Nisei and Kibei that would soon lead to direct

and open conflict in the internment camps. (1997 p.83)

When internees were asked to state their loyalty, most marginalized Kibei who were American citizens by birth, declared their allegiance to the Emperor of Japan. Consequently, the Kibei actively sought affiliation with other pro-Japan sympathizers, and internment camps were the perfect environment for their seeds of anti-U.S. sentiment to germinate.

Japanese language school

Prior to mass internment of the Japanese, most Nisei children attended Japanese language schools, which were held either after public school hours or on Saturdays. During their pre-school years they were more proficient in spoken Japanese since this was the language of function at home. Japanese schools, parents hoped, would serve the purpose of furthering their language development. Also anticipating their possible return to Japan, parents felt that an education grounded in Japanese language, values and cultural appreciation would enhance their children's socialization and communication skills and thus provide them a smoother transition to Japan to assist with family business or tend to the elders in their hometown. Another reason for sending their children to language school for "maintaining ethnic ties and of equipping Nisei to operate more effectively within the immigrant community." (Yoo, 2000 p.19) Perhaps foremost in their mind, and as only a parent could desire, was the occasion to speak Japanese at a more intimate level with their children.

For the most part, the Nisei pupils didn't fare well in learning their parents' mother tongue. Much to the parent's disdain, language schools merely served to appease parents' wishes and to pass the time. The rea-

sons for their disregard, as Ichihashi points out, was their widespread exposure to English, which simply overwhelmed their paltry use of Japanese, and the stress of bearing “derogatory remarks from their American classmates and playmates.” (1932 p.332) Well aware of their linguistic shortcomings in Japanese, Nisei children were forced to concede that English had taken over. It was not just the Japanese language to which they were opposed but also the school’s myriad rules for conduct, speech, etiquette, and appearance. Teiko Wada complained, “It’s not Japan here. It’s America; so why should we have to learn and follow these stiff rules of behavior if we don’t want to go back to Japan?” (Girdner & Loftis, 1969 p. 79)

There were other indications of the children’s opposition to “Japaneseness”. It was not uncommon to see many immigrant parents attempt to impose their values on their young ones. In her book, Uchida recalls when her Issei mother tried to teach Japanese to her and her sister, she recalls the

many stormy sessions as Mama tried to inject a little knowledge of a difficult language into very reluctant beings. Learning Japanese to us was just one more thing that would accentuate our “differentness”, something we tried very hard to overcome. (1982 p. 40)

It was not so much the fault of their parents or the schools for their lack of Japanese ability or motivation to learn Japanese. Uchida put the blame squarely on the Caucasian majority.

Society caused us to feel ashamed of something that should have made us feel proud. Instead of directing anger at the society that

excluded and diminished us, such was the climate of the times and so low our self-esteem... (Uchida, 1982 p.42)

At times public rebuke was too much for a Nisei child to bear as this incident clearly illustrates. A Caucasian woman seated in the bus was visibly irritated by the Nisei kids speaking in Japanese. As she got up to leave the bus she turned and asked,

Are you Japanese?" "Yes, Japanese American", the boy answered. "But I thought you people didn't know how to speak English!" And the boy discovered for the first time that there were many in this country who had yet to realize that he -- a Japanese American -- was American...Japanese only in looks. (Minidoka Irrigator, Jun 5, 1943 p.5)

The young man's nationality was never in question, rather, it was the ignorance of the general public that caused such disillusionment and he felt compelled to educate them.

As a consequence, Issei parents noticed gradual but permanent changes in their children's character and behavior as they became more educationally, socially and culturally entwined in the American lifestyle. They had become essentially "hakujiin" (a Caucasian) with an Asian face. One mother reflected forlornly, "I feel like a chicken that hatched duck's eggs." (Kessler, 1993 p.133)

Shifting attitudes

The American-born Nisei realized that, within the context of their internment, in order to advance their cause, the only viable direction they could choose was first to acknowledge and then assert their alle-

giance to the U.S. while eschewing the cultural and linguistic “scaffolds” carefully erected by their Issei parents. It was painfully apparent that they were unsuccessful in retaining their parent’s native tongue despite the efforts of the Japanese schools. The pervading influence of western-style education tugged at the anchor of their Japanese identity. Then, there were outside pressures which underlined their cultural and racial differences. Internment, though, was the ideal place and time to make that clear break from their parent’s cultural stronghold.

In his internment diary, 26-year-old Charles Kikuchi advocated the necessity for the Nisei to use English, since they were cut off from “caucasian contacts”

there will be a greater tendency to speak more and more Japanese unless we carefully guard against it. Someday these Nisei will once again go out into the greater American society and it is so important that they be able to speak English well ...(1973 p.66)

When an Issei house manager told the Nisei not to speak English due to Issei’s lack of understanding in meetings, Kikuchi wrote, “this kind of thing makes me boil; after all, we are in America.” (1973 p.66)

Another factor which swayed their disposition toward America was the indifference exhibited by Caucasian teachers at internment schools about using their pupils’ Japanese names. Hosokawa provided examples.

Makoto became Mac, Isamu naturally was changed to Sam, Shoji was easily altered to George. Nicknames also came easily: Masahisa became Mud, Kanetada became Kelly, Hisao became Horse... (1969 p.160)

When attempts were made to show cultural sensitivity, they often backfired. Students would cringe in embarrassment during class roll call, for their names would never sound right. Mike, who had a twin brother named Ike, said,

Some teachers compounded the problem by trying to make Japanese names out of students' American names. Mike said one teacher pronounced his name "me-kay" and his brother's "i-kay [for Ike]." That instructor was under the impression that everyone with a Japanese face had a Japanese name. (Mackey, 2000 p.63)

As their days in confinement grew longer, frustration began to boil over. To the older Nisei, much of the blame for their plight shifted from the Japanese aggressors at war to the compliant Issei in camps. On the other hand, the Issei's emotional attachment to their homeland and their respect for their emperor left them longing to return home, and they were well aware that many critical eyes were on them, even among the Nikkei population. An Issei shared her pain of guilt,

The Nisei became very angry and upset since they thought this unfortunate situation had befallen them because of their Japanese parents. They repeated ...it was because of the issei that they had to go to relocation camps. (Sarasohn, 1998 p.183)

Unknowingly, the same guilt was passed on to their children as well. They realized that they were imprisoned not as a result of any crime they committed, but simply because they were Japanese. It was natural for them to then rationalize that anything Japanese was bad,

and since their parents were Japanese, they had to be bad as well. This logic seemed to explain why they had to be evacuated and incarcerated. Okimoto admitted that his children “grew to despise the Japanese part of themselves and to feel ashamed for being somehow related to a people who dare strike so underhandedly at Americans.” (1971 p.29)

Kitagawa summed up the population’s overall attitude within the confinement.

The Issei was driven, both by his longing for his homeland and by the social pressure ... into remaining conservative, or even backward, while the Nisei, deliberately turning his back upon Japan ... had become a two-hundred percent American, whose patriotism was distinguished more by anti-Japanese sentiment... (1967 p.36)

Restrictive military policies

The ashes were still smoldering from the destruction of Pearl Harbor when the United States military swiftly took over the Hawaiian civilian government. Martial law was declared resulting in hundreds of new regulations being enacted and enforced. One of the first regulations under military order was curfew which confined Hawaiian residents to their homes at night. Aoki, a Hawaiian Nisei, remembers answering to the soldiers after being asked, “Hey kid, what are you?” The reply was “Me Chinese” for fear of being harassed by American soldiers. (Aoki, 2007). Fearing arrest, Japanese names were altered, family mementoes such as photos, certificates, letters were discarded or burned.

As a result of the Pearl Harbor attack, “all of Japanese culture, it seemed had been tainted, including the language.” (Brown, 1989 p.113)

A department store ad served to warn the islanders about speaking Japanese.

So long as any group persists in using the language of the enemy, it is inevitable that they will arouse the suspicion that they also think with the enemy. It is their duty... to SPEAK AMERICAN!
(Brown, 1989 p.113)

Language warnings had a debilitating effect on the Issei who were left with no alternative but to rely on their children for translating or interpreting of "...regulations concerning enemy aliens. The Issei who knew no other language kept silent even at home, and when they needed to talk they whispered." (Kimura, 1988 p.225)

Meanwhile, in the continental United States, the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) oversaw the evacuation process for the mainland Nikkei, who were initially transported and housed in assembly centers during the months of April through October of 1942. Barely a month had passed after their arrival, and already efforts were made on getting the internees, particularly the non-English-speaking community, acclimated to their new surroundings as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, the initiatives by camp administrators to assist in the way of information dissemination were found greatly lacking. Often-times it was the internees themselves, serving as spokespersons for the Japanese-speaking Issei, who had to actively lobby for camp improvements which otherwise would have fallen on deaf ears. The requests were recorded on minutes of the house manager's meetings at Tanforan assembly center:

1.) June 2, it was reported that the assembly center manager re-

quested an interpreter for the post office to provide English communication assistance. (Tanforan, 1942)

2.) June 9, house managers were to see “that Japanese translations of official bulletins are placed on bulletin boards for the convenience of the Isseis.” (Tanforan, 1942)

3.) June 10, the maintenance committee reported that the printing department would have signs placed in latrines both in English and Japanese [after the administration issued the removal of Japanese signs stated in the minutes on July 1]. (Tanforan, 1942)

Fellow internees were sympathetic towards the Issei who found their voices muted in group meetings by the English-only policy. In the minds of English-speaking Japanese, who served as liaisons to the camp administrators, it was paramount for harmony’s sake to acknowledge the presence of the Issei. In the May 31 report by the social welfare department in Tulare assembly center, an observer reported, “It seems foolish to keep the issei ignorant, when there is a good opportunity to improve their morale.” (Tulare, 1942) This sentiment was echoed in the executive council representative, Toby Ogawa’s letter to Frank E. Davis, camp manager at Tanforan assembly center, on the subject of confiscating Japanese literature from the internees:

Since many of the old folks cannot read English at all, we feel that the [prohibiting Japanese literature is a] needless deprivation ... [that] only hampers our objective of maintaining high morale (1942)

The administrative handling of the Japanese language policy wors-

ened. On June 18, six men (later increased to 11) from the Santa Anita (California) assembly center were detained on the charges that a secret meeting was convened without the presence of a policeman, that Japanese was spoken in the meeting, another violation and finally the conspiring “to circulate a petition for the publication of a Japanese section in the camp paper.” (Girdner & Loftis, 1969 p.182)

Two weeks later Frank E. Davis, issued the following restrictions, dated July 3, 1942, regarding the use of the printed Japanese language and Japanese speech.

I. Japanese Print.

- A. Japanese print of any kind, such as newspapers, books, pamphlets, etc., with the exception of approved Japanese religious books (Bibles and hymnals) and English–Japanese dictionaries, are not authorized ...
- B. Any notice or program to be used in this Center for which Japanese translations are desired should be presented to the Center Manager in writing ...for permission to use.

II. Japanese Speech.

- A. Under no circumstances will any meeting of the Center Council or any other organized meeting be held wherein the Japanese language is used, except where it is absolutely necessary to interpret Center regulations and other administrative matters.
- B. Any instruction or other program proposed to be used in any organized meeting should be submitted to the Center Manager for approval prior to the time of the intended use.
- C. This in no way restricts the use of the Japanese language in ordinary conversation or such other speech as is necessary...

D. Japanese will not be spoken in connection with religious services or activities except where the use of English prevents the congregation from comprehending the services... will be permitted only with the prior approval of the Center Manager. (Davis, 1942)

In the July 8, 1942 assembly center newspaper, the *Santa Anita Pacemaker* stated that "all literature printed in Japanese has been designated as contraband." Several weeks later, the *Pacemaker* specified contraband materials such as phonographic records including Japanese music and speeches which had to be turned in. (Santa Anita, 1942)

Though the announcements appeared to have put the onus on the owners to turn in Japanese printed matter and records, such materials were often seized through organized and comprehensive searches by the camp administration. People were left lamenting whether "they would ever again see some of their confiscated valuables." (Girdner & Loftis, 1969 p.178).

The confiscation of Japanese publications left the Issei with no suitable reading material which underscored their desire for any information in Japanese. Their inability to understand English forced many to rely on those more proficient for news, while having to discern whether or not the translations was factual and accurate. At the Poston internment camp, the Issei found that radio and newspaper translations "were often far from adequate. Under the pressure of their desires, as well as their fears, the Isseis were able to believe the most absurd rumors and when they encountered news unfavorable to Japan, they rejected it as "propaganda". (Leighton, 1968 p.157)

Japanese Cultural Activities

Japanese cultural activities were performed at various internment camps, however, camp administration officials made it a point to endorse American interests while undermining Japanese pursuits. “In camp Americanization was encouraged at the expense of Japanese heritage and ethnic ties. On the school grounds, speaking Japanese and practicing Japanese martial arts such as judo and kendo were prohibited.” (Takezawa, 1995 p.110) Cultural performances had to be “pre-viewed by camp officials before permits were issued ...” thus making efforts more arduous than necessary. (Mackey, 2000 p.75)

College-bound Nisei

By 1943, when the stringent “English only policy” was eventually relaxed such as the lifting of the ban on Issei’s role to participate in self-government, a new dynamic was taking place with the college-age Nisei population. Through the assistance of the National Student Relocation Council, they were accepted at schools in the midwest and east coast of the United States. Similarly, doors to employment opened to those eager for work experience. Permission to leave and subsequent exodus was indicative of both the residents’ demonstration of their loyalty to their country as well as their host communities and the camp administration’s desire to get them integrated into American society, but not all took advantage of these opportunities.

If they were the oldest children in their families, they often felt a responsibility to care for the young and for their aged parents. An illness in the family was enough to keep many students in the camps, since parents often depended on their children to commu-

nicate with authorities in the English language. (James, 1987 p.127)

Often it was the case that a parent's care took precedence over their college plans.

To those who were accepted and granted leave, the camp director had these words to say to the parting students. "Don't get into groups, don't bring attention to yourselves, don't speak Japanese; on your shoulders rests the success of the relocation movement." Chizu Iiyama still remembers her feeling of bitterness. "This was the kind of brainwashing that the government practiced which made Nisei fearful and very self-conscious about themselves." (Takahashi, 1997 p.104) It was as if there was something bad about being Japanese. (Takezawa, 1995 p.111)

Conclusion

Strong measures by the government to suppress the Japanese language crippled the political role of the first generation of Nikkei and hastened forced allegiances. The outbreak of the Pacific war created hysteria which fed into the public's fear of the Japanese. Language schools were forced to close and the use of Japanese was forbidden in public areas. In assembly centers, the enforced use of English was a pervasive strategy in everyday life in schools, camp meetings, hospitals and post offices while anything Japanese such as Japanese literature and music were subject to administrative seizure. Although it was impossible for many to function without the use of the Japanese language in their daily dealings, this was the only allowance the administration authorities made. The only exception was Tule Lake internment camp, which housed the so-called "disloyals", most of them who had strong allegiance to Japan and expressed their wish to return there. Japanese

schools were allowed to run to prepare children for their repatriation to Japan. “As a consequence, the evacuees were exposed to few influences that would move them from their positions of indifference or bitterness” and large numbers of Issei and Kibei were “cut off by language”. (Leighton, 1968 p.98)

As a result, the War Relocation Authority (WRA), which oversaw the evacuation and internment of the Nikkei internees, favored association with the English-speaking Nikkei (mostly Nisei) on policy-making issues. They were less likely to have contact with the Issei, simply because of the administration’s bias against people “whose language and cultural values they could not understand.” (Leighton, 1968 p. 129) This is further supported by Harris’ assessment of WRA’s treatment of the Japanese community while relying on the “young Americanized English-speaking Nisei” and neglecting “the older, more traditional Japanese-speaking *issei*.” (Harris, 1999 p.39) Without language supporting opportunities or equitable representation, the impact on the Japanese-speaking residents was catastrophic.

The disempowered, who felt shunned by the administration, developed divisive attitudes over their treatment and loyalty to America. The opposition argued over the government’s actions to segregate the loyal and disloyals: mainly the Issei and Kibei, who leaned toward repatriation to Japan, and the Nisei, despite their incarceration, maintained faith in American democracy and most chose to remain in America indefinitely. Social psychologist Philip Zimbardo commented that both the pre-war and the internment experience had a devastating effect on the self-esteem of the interned Nisei. (Zimbardo, 1981 as cited in Nagata, p.32) As a way of coping with the trauma of being treated as second class citizens, Takezawa states the Nisei were driven “to prove themselves good Americans”. (Nagata, 1993 p.33) Nagata goes on to say that

internment effected the Nisei to[increase their]"desire to assimilate into the "majority" culture and minimize their "Japaneseness." (Nagata, 1993 p.177) Their efforts inversely contributed to the regression and diminishing of Japanese language and supporting lifestyle.

Evidence of this pernicious effect was the lack of use of Japanese by the Sansei, the third generation Nikkei, the offspring of the Nisei. According to Nagata of Takezawa's assessment, "The internment has been seen as causing an accelerated loss of the language at a rate beyond that which might have occurred without such a trauma." (Nagata, 1993 p.177) For the Nisei, exposure to the Japanese language was supplemented by Japanese language school and other opportunities at home and in the community. In contrast, the Sansei lacked acquisition opportunities simply for the reason that their Nisei parents either under duress of incarceration or of their own volition, chose to assimilate with the dominant society and spurn their Japanese cultural heritage. (Nagata, 1993 pp.176-177)

The effect of this language loss extended beyond the Sansei's loss of culture. It also prevented them from being able to communicate with their Issei grandparents, who spoke primarily and in many cases entirely, in Japanese. (Nagata, 1993 p.179)

The dominance of English during internment had a destructive effect on the Nikkei family infrastructure. Without a voice or representation, the Japanese-speaking Issei and Kibei were politically handcuffed and thus felt further isolated. Though the relationship between Issei and their Kibei offspring were strengthened during this period, they could not overcome linguistic and cultural obstacles like their Nisei counterparts. Raised in divergent environments, imbued by clashing ide-

ologies and custom, forced to declare separate loyalties, which were often discordant, enclosed in confining barracks, the Nikkei population nevertheless struggled to communicate with one another. Without the administrative and national base for linguistic assistance, the Japanese speaking and English speaking community suffered profoundly and future communication between the first and second generations would remain limited at best.

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Language and its Impact on the Nikkei During the Internment Years

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This paper looks at the role of language and its impact on the Japanese Nikkei internees during their incarceration during World War II. The word, “Nikkei” refers to Japanese emigrants and their descendants living both in and outside of Japan. Soon after the war with Japan became a shocking reality, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, which forced the Nikkei living in the United States to vacate their homes, community, and livelihood. Over 110,000 Japanese Americans and their Japanese born parents were rounded up, herded into trucks and trains and sent to assembly centers where they endured a life of meager existence. Less than a year later, they were transported once again to even more isolated areas located further inland. Many of the Issei who had dedicated their lives to serving the Japanese communities prior to the war, were separated from their families and hurried off to Justice Department internment camps. For the Nikkei, their expulsion from society and subsequent evacuation and incarceration were the ultimate humiliation to their years of sacrifice and hardship in America. The restriction on Japanese language usage and the subsequent enforcement of English had a debilitating effect on the immigrant families: it usurped the authority of the Issei (first generation emigrants born in Japan) community leaders, hastened the Americanization of the Nisei (the second generation, born in the United States to Issei parents), and contributed to the attrition of the Japanese lan-

guage. The author uses a diverse collection of sources including archival documents, oral histories, and references gathered from a number of authoritative writers in the field of Japanese American internment to gain information on the impact of language on the lives of the Nikkei during the internment years.