

Attitudes toward Language Use among Vietnamese Residents in Kanagawa¹

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Abstract

In this paper, the language use and attitude patterns of a Vietnamese community in Kanagawa will be examined based on results from a questionnaire survey. The main findings are as follows: 1) the use of Japanese is most dominant among the second and intermediate generations, and less dominant among those in the first generation; 2) among respondents of the first generation, language use differs based on age and conversational contexts; 3) first generation respondents use Japanese more frequently when they do calculations than when they dream.

1. Introduction

According to the *Nyuukoku Kanrikyoku* (Immigration Bureau of Japan) (2017), 232,562 Vietnamese people were living in Japan as of 2017. This number has increased sixfold over the past ten years. One reason is that, in addition to the increase of newcomers as students and technical intern trainees, Indo-Chinese refugees,² who came to Japan in the late seventies after the Vietnam War, brought their relatives or marriage partners from their home country to Japan. Kanagawaken Kokusaika (International Division of Kanagawa Prefecture Government) (2017) reports that 13,496 Vietnamese people were in Kanagawa as of 2017. This makes up 5.8 percent of all Vietnamese residents in Japan. Kawakami (2001: 112) explains that many refugees settled in Kanagawa because there was a Resettlement Promotion Center in Yamato City, which closed in 1998, and they were offered job placement there.

What do Vietnamese residents experience in Japan? How does their language awareness change over the generations? Previous questionnaire surveys have suggested that Vietnamese refugee children who came to Japan in early life tend to speak Japanese to others in the same generation while they speak Vietnamese to Vietnamese adults (Kawakami 1991, Yamaguchi and Hifumi 1998). In this article, I will report the results of a questionnaire survey on the language use and awareness of Vietnamese adults as well as adolescents, conducted in a community Japanese class in Kanagawa.

¹ This paper is based on the presentation "Attitudes to language use among Vietnamese residents in Kanagawa: A questionnaire survey in a local community Japanese language class," First International Symposium of Tokyo Academic Forum on Immigrant Languages "Ethnicity, Identity and Language Variation in Multilingual Contexts" at University of Tokyo on May 8, 2011.

² According to Refugee Assistance Headquarters (2016), 8,656 Vietnamese people were settled in Japan as Indo-Chinese refugees by 2005.

2. Method

Between Yokohama City and Yamato City, there is a large public housing complex, A (Picture 1). The number of households was estimated at about 3,300 in 2010, and roughly 30 percent of them were of foreign origin; currently, there are an estimated 3,600 of households living there. In this area, there are many ethnic grocery stores. Moreover, public signs (Picture 2) and community bulletins (Picture 3) are written, in addition to Japanese, in various languages such as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Portuguese. In 1994, local volunteers started a night-time Japanese language class in the housing complex. I have participated in this class as a volunteer since 2007. Learners come from China, Vietnam, Pakistan, and many other countries. They practice Japanese grammar and conversation with volunteers in small groups twice a week (Picture 4).



Picture 1. Housing Complex A



Picture 2. A public sign

(Photo credit: Tabunka Machizukuri Koubo)



Picture 3. A community bulletin Picture 4. A community Japanese language class

(Photo credit: Tabunka Machizukuri Koubo)

From November 2010 to April 2011, a questionnaire survey was carried out among Vietnamese participants in the class. The number of respondents was 55, including 18 men and 37 women. The questionnaires were prepared in both Vietnamese and Japanese and had the same content: questions about basic attributes such as birth place and length of residence in Japan, followed by a self-assessment of the two language proficiencies, language preference depending on conversation partners or situations, future aspirations, and language attitudes. Respondents were informed that they could use either language in answering questions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Generations of the immigrants

Respondents were categorized into 4 groups according to birth place, age of arrival, and age when surveyed, as below.

A. *First generation adults* (24 people):

The first generation adults were all studying Japanese in classes. Their average age is 31.0; their ages ranged from 20 to 49. They arrived in Japan after graduating from junior high school (11 people), high school (9 people), vocational school (1 person), or university (3 people) in Vietnam. They have been in Japan for at least 1 month, and up to 16 years and 4 months, for an average of 5.5 years. Half of them are factory workers. All of them responded to the questionnaire in Vietnamese.

B. *First generation adolescents* (20 people):

The first generation adolescents are also language learners in Japanese classes. The classification of groups A and B was based on whether or not they were over the age of 20 at the time of the survey. Their average age is 16.2, with ages ranging from 12 to 19. They came to Japan while in junior high school (7 people), after graduating from junior high school (7 people), while in high school (3 people), or after graduating from high school (3 people). They have been in Japan for, on average, 4.9 months, ranging from 1 month to 2 years. Now they are junior high school students (6 people), part-time high school students (4 people), working at factories (6 people), or in search of jobs (1 person); an additional 3 people did not provide an answer. They responded to the questionnaire exclusively in Vietnamese, as in the case of the first generation adults.

C. *Intermediate generation* (6 people):

Those in the intermediate generation are teachers in Japanese classes. They came to Japan between the ages of 6–13. They are now 20 to 28 years old, with an average of 23.5. They have resided in Japan for an average of 13.9 years, ranging from 10 years 4 months to 16 years and 5 months. 1 person came to Japan after graduating from elementary school, 4 people while in elementary school, and 1 person before entering elementary school. After receiving a secondary education in Japan, they are now workers (4 people), a housewife (1 person), or a university student (1 person). All of them answered the questionnaire in Japanese.

D. *Second generation* (5 people):

Those in the second generation were born in Japan, or came to Japan soon after birth. They are now ages 13 to 20, or 16.2 years old on average. They are in Japanese junior high school (2 people), in high school (2 people), or graduated from high school (1 person). In the night classes, they teach Japanese or receive assistance on their schoolwork. 3 of them have studied Vietnamese in a community mother language class for 1 month, 3 months, and a year, respectively.

3.2 Self-evaluation of the two language abilities

Figure 1 shows the average scores of respondents' self-evaluations of their Vietnamese and Japanese abilities on a scale of 0–3: 3 (Excellent), 2 (Intermediate), 1 (A little), or 0 (Not at all). The first generation responded that they were better at Vietnamese than Japanese in all four abilities, that is, speaking, listening, writing, and reading. In contrast, the second generation evaluated their Japanese abilities as higher than their Vietnamese abilities, especially in writing and reading. Although the two language abilities of the intermediate generation do not seem differ much, half of them answered that they felt more comfortable writing and reading in Japanese than in Vietnamese.

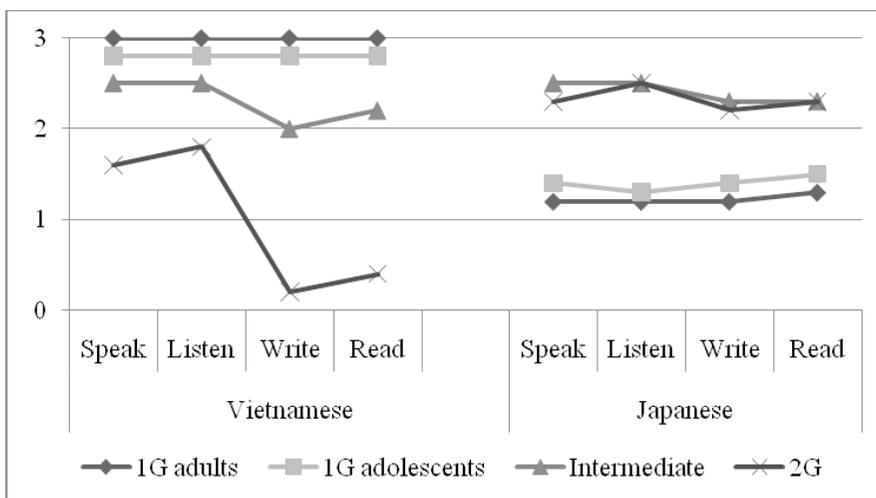


Figure 1. Self-evaluation of two language abilities

3.3 Language choice in and outside the home

Figure 2 shows the average scores of how much Vietnamese is used when Vietnamese residents speak to their family members or Vietnamese people outside the home on a scale of 0–4: 4 (Vietnamese), 3 (Vietnamese more than Japanese), 2 (Half and half), 1 (Japanese more than Vietnamese), or 0 (Japanese). Most of the first and intermediate generations speak Vietnamese to Vietnamese people. In contrast, the second generation uses more Japanese than other generations.

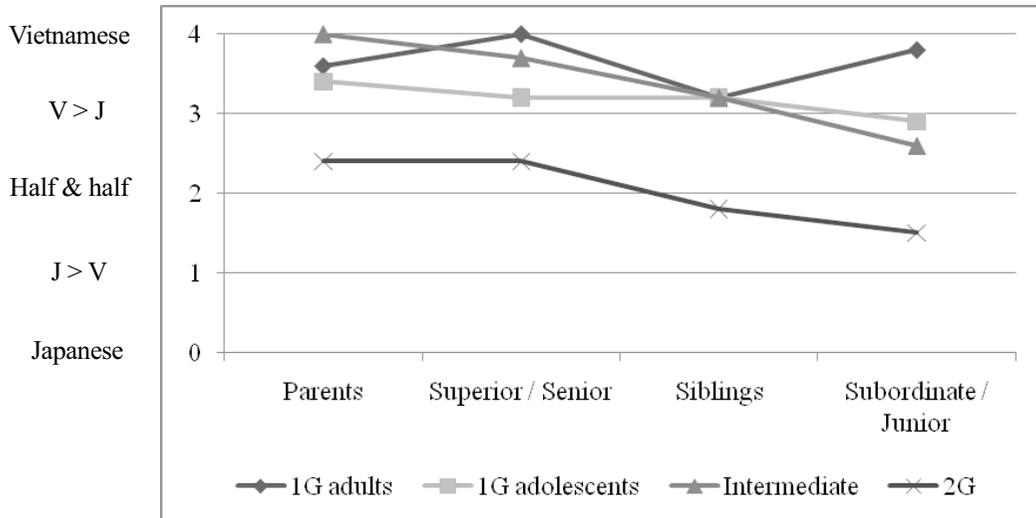


Figure 2. Language choice with Vietnamese conversation partners

3.4 Social domains and language choice

Both Figures 3 and 4 exhibit almost the same tendency; it seems that the language choice in each social domain (Figure 4) depends on the people with whom the respondents associate (Figure 3). Vietnamese residents tend to use Vietnamese if there are more Vietnamese people around them, such as on their days off, in religious places, and at Vietnamese grocery stores. In contrast, they speak Japanese more in work places, schools, and in their neighborhood.

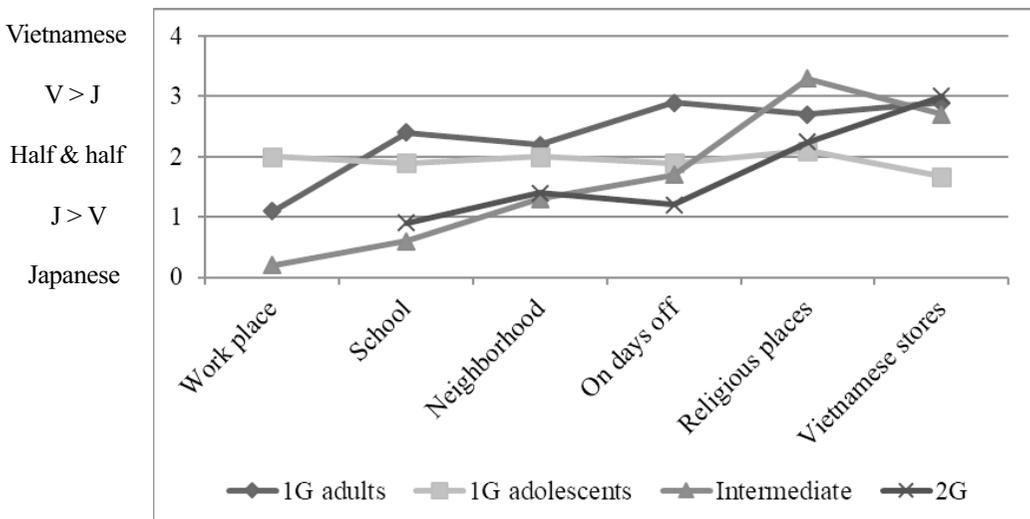


Figure 3. People with whom respondents associate in each social domain

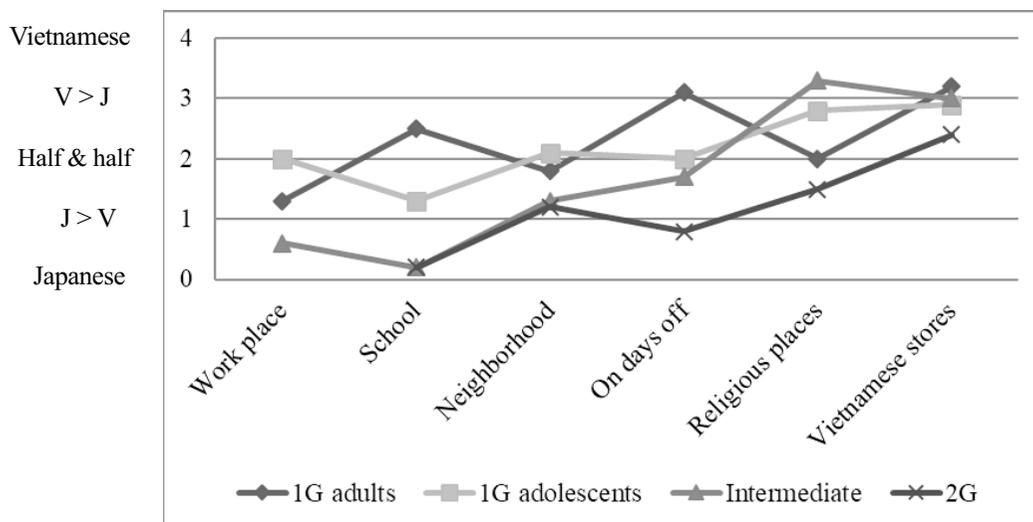


Figure 4. Language use in each social domain

3.5 Specific contexts and language choice

This section will discuss language choice depending on particular contexts in the respondents' daily lives, specifically counting numbers and dreaming. As mentioned in 3.1, the first generation prefers to speak Vietnamese. However, when they count numbers or calculate, the percentage of those using Japanese among the first generation, especially among adolescents, increases as shown in Table 1. 13 (65%) first generation adolescents answered that they use “Half and half” or “Japanese more than Vietnamese” for calculations; 7 of these respondents were junior or senior high school students. It seems that the term “calculations” evoked for them images of mathematics classes in Japanese schools. In follow-up interviews some respondents shared the following comments. “I select which language to use depending on the occasion” (by a respondent from the intermediate generation); “I use Vietnamese at home and Japanese at school” (by a respondent from the second generation). In addition, “I usually count in Vietnamese, but when I count like ‘2, 4, 6, 8...’ I use Japanese” (by a respondent from the intermediate generation).

Table 1. Language use in counting numbers and calculations³

	V > J	Half & half	J > V	Don't know	No answer
1G adults	13.5 (56.3%)	8.5 (35.4%)	2 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
1G adolescents	5 (25.0%)	9 (45.0%)	4 (20.0%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (5.0%)
Intermediate	1 (16.7%)	3 (50%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
2G	0 (0.0%)	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Table 2 shows that most of the first generation uses Vietnamese more when they dream than when they calculate. In contrast, the intermediate and the second generation dream in Japanese more than in Vietnamese. One intermediate-generation person said that “While I was in Vietnam I dreamed in Vietnamese. However, recently I rarely dream in Vietnamese.”

Table 2. Language use in dreams

	V > J	Half & half	J > V	Don't know	No answer
1G adults	18 (75.0%)	1 (4.0%)	1 (4.0%)	4 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
1G adolescents	10 (50%)	3 (15.0%)	2 (10.0%)	4 (20.0%)	1 (5.0%)
Intermediate	0 (0.0%)	3 (50.0%)	2 (33.4%)	1 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
2G	0 (0.0%)	1 (20.0%)	3 (60.0%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Why do immigrants tend to use the host country language when they calculate more than when they dream? Based on his questionnaire survey of Koreans in Japan, the U.S., and China, Yim (2005: 83) argues that because calculations and doing math in one's head are essential to leading one's daily life in a new place and because one is forced to use it everyday, they seem to be different from psychological activities such as dreaming. I agree with this idea. It is possible that language environments such as math classes in school or checking production amounts in factories affect language choice in counting and calculations. In contrast, it would be make sense that there would be fewer such constraints in dreaming so that people tend to dream in the language they are more comfortable with.

What of other immigrants? Tables 3 and 4 show which language they have reported that they use, their host country's or their homeland's, in calculations and in dreams, based on data from surveys of

³ An adult respondent of the first generation checked both options “Vietnamese more than Japanese” and “Half and half,” so 0.5 was added to each column.

Koreans overseas and of Turkish people in Germany (see Table 5). Most of them use their homelands' languages more in dreams than in calculations. However, the first-generation Koreans in Japan seem to use Korean more in calculations (49.1% chose "Home > Host") than in dreams (38.6%). Therefore, other factors should also be considered in explaining this phenomenon.

Table 3. Language use in calculations of various immigrants

	Home > Host	Half & half	Host > Home	Don't know	No answer
Koreans in Japan	2.3%	93.1%	4.6%	—	0.0%
Koreans in the U.S.	49.2%	18.8%	31.9%	—	0.1%
Koreans in China	50.0%	29.3%	20.7%	—	0.0%
Korea-born Korean adults in Japan	28 (49.1%)	8 (14.0%)	19 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.5%)
Japan-born Korean adults in Japan	0 (0.0%)	3 (2.7%)	110 (97.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Korea-born Korean children in Japan	32 (52.5%)	15 (24.6%)	12 (19.7%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Japan-born Korean children in Japan	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)	133 (94.4%)	2 (1.4%)	2 (1.4%)
Turkish students in Germany	30 (25.7%)	38 (32.6%)	43 (37.1%)	2 (1.7%)	3 (2.6%)

Table 4. Language use in dreams of various immigrants

	Home > Host	Half & half	Host > Home	Don't know	No answer
Koreans in Japan	2.5%	92.4%	4.9%	—	0.2%
Koreans in the U.S.	51.6%	35.2%	13.2%	—	0.0%
Koreans in China	61.1%	31.6%	7.3%	—	0.0%
Korea-born Korean adults in Japan	22 (38.6%)	10 (17.5%)	11 (19.3%)	12 (21.1%)	2 (3.5%)
Japan-born Korean adults in Japan	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.8%)	99 (87.6%)	9 (8%)	2 (1.8%)
Korea-born Korean children in Japan	22 (36.1%)	15 (24.6%)	15 (24.6%)	9 (14.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Japan-born Korean children in Japan	0 (0.0%)	4 (2.8%)	125 (88.7%)	12 (8.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Turkish students in Germany	38 (32.8%)	56 (48.3%)	5 (4.3%)	14 (12.1%)	3 (2.6%)

Table 5. Survey data

Immigrants	Authors	Participants	Notes
Koreans in Japan	Yim (2005)	432	Immigrated between 1910 and 1945
Koreans in China		423	Immigrated between the 17th and 20th century
Koreans in the U.S.		282	Immigrated after 1965
Koreans in Japan	Ogoshi (2004)		Students and parents in ethnic schools
Korea-born adults		57	
Korea-born children		61	
Japan-born adults		113	
Japan-born children		141	
Turkish students in Germany	Hayasi (2004)	116	Ages 12–18 Taking Turkish language classes 17 Turkey-born, 99 Germany-born

3.6 Ties with home country

Respondents were asked about their frequency of return trips to Vietnam and their ideal marriage partner as indicators of their ties with Vietnam. As shown in Figure 5, not every generation visits Vietnam regularly.

It seems that the respondents' ideal marriage partner relates to the respondent's age and marriage experience. Many adults of the first and intermediate generations replied that their ideal spouse would be Vietnamese. This is possibly because 21 (87.5%) of the first generation adults and 2 (33.3%) of the intermediate generation had already married Vietnamese spouses. In contrast, the first generation adolescents and second generation both seem to think that a potential spouse from either nationality would be okay. Therefore, it seems to be the case that Vietnamese residents in Japan have fewer opportunities to visit their homeland but many of them have Vietnamese spouses and speak Vietnamese at home.

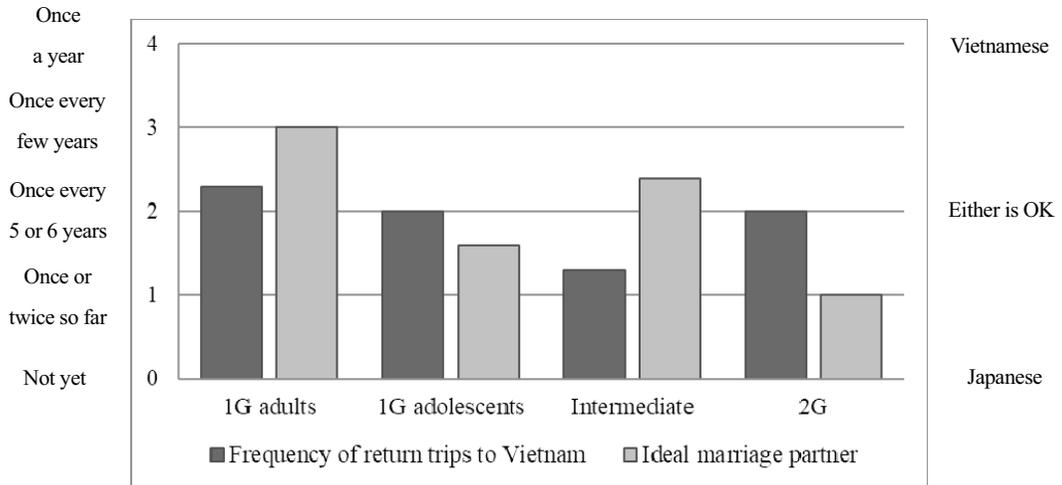


Figure 5. Frequency of return trips to Vietnam and ideal marriage partner

3.7 Future aspirations

As shown in Figure 6, most respondents in every generation reported that they wanted to attend or wanted their children to attend Japanese universities. A few people mentioned universities in the U.S. and Australia. Nguyen (2007: 31) also notes, on the basis of her interview results, that many Vietnamese people in Kanagawa are very interested in the Japanese education system.

When asked in which country they expected to be residing 20 years after the time of the survey, many of every generation answered “Japan.” In particular, among the intermediate and the second generations, no one said “Vietnam.” Therefore, it seems that many of the Vietnamese residents plan to continue to stay in Japan and to send their children to Japanese universities in the future.

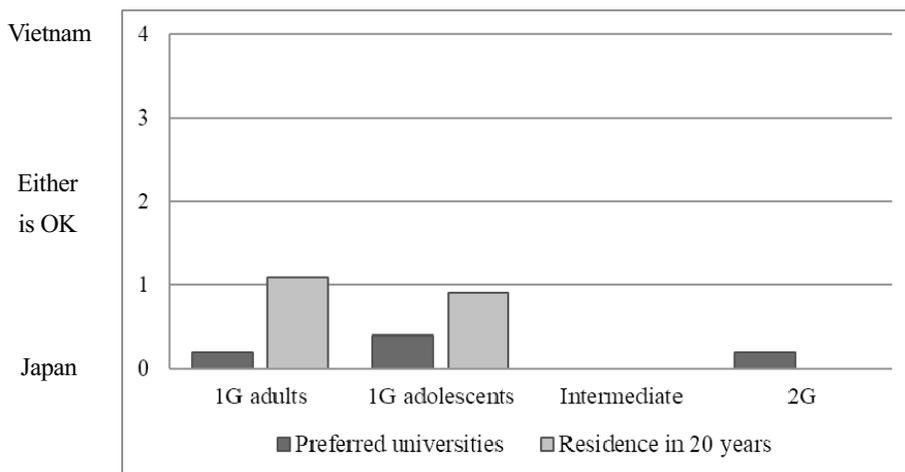


Figure 6. Preferred university and residence in 20 years

3.8 Language awareness

When asked which language is important for their future and their children’s future, many respondents replied “Both languages” or “Japanese.” This seems to relate to their future aspirations, which are to continue residing in Japan and to receive a higher education there, as mentioned in 3.7. This might be one reason they are studying Japanese in the night classes.

The final question was “Whether Vietnamese people born in Japan must have proficiency in Vietnamese or not” with options on a scale of 0–4: 4 (Must have Vietnamese proficiency), 2 (Should have it), and 0 (Don’t have to). As Figure 7 indicates, many of the respondents expect their offspring to be Vietnamese/Japanese bilinguals. The first generation might connect Vietnamese to their origins and identities. At the same time, they consider acquiring Japanese to have practical advantages. In a follow-up interview, a respondent from the second generation said: “I’d like my children to be able to communicate with my parents, that is, their grandparents, directly in Vietnamese. I think this because I’m not very good at Vietnamese.”

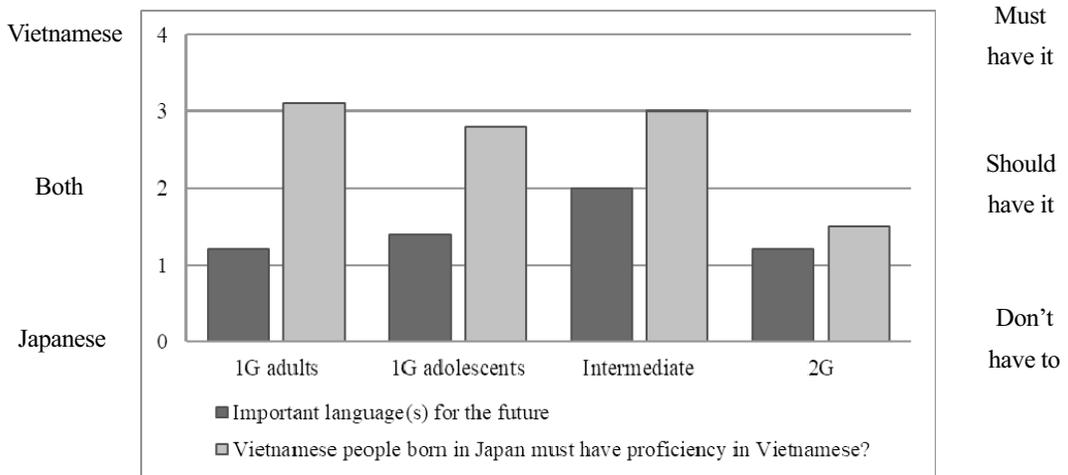


Figure 7. Important language(s) for the future

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I reported the results of a questionnaire survey on language choice, attitudes, and awareness conducted with Vietnamese participants in a Japanese language class in Kanagawa. First generation immigrants, as a generation of parents, have many tangible hopes: to continue to stay in Japan, to acquire Japanese in order to associate with Japanese colleagues in the work place, and to send their children to Japanese universities. At the same time, they hope to maintain the Vietnamese language in Vietnamese communities such as at home and in Vietnamese stores. However, as the survey respondents spend more time in Japan, with every generation, they tend to become more Japan-oriented and more Japanese-oriented. The language use and awareness of Vietnamese residents in Japan is now in transition towards increasing diversification.

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神奈川県に在住するベトナム系住民の言語使用意識

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キーワード： 移民 言語使用意識 世代 年齢 使用場面

要旨

本稿では、アンケート調査の結果に基づいて、神奈川県内のベトナム系コミュニティにおける言語使用と言語意識のパターンについて検討した。結論は以下の通りである。1) 2世と1.5世は日本語の方を多く使用するが、1世はベトナム語の方を多く使用する。2) 1世の中でも、年齢と場面により言語使用は異なる。3) 1世は夢を見る時よりも数を数える時に日本語を使う割合が高い。

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