

The portrait of a young linguist at the age of 65

Once again Jiří now describes himself simply as a “linguist”. When we lived in Australia, he liked to be called a “sociolinguist” or a “communication scientist”. Now he wants to say that it is all “linguistics” and that we must protest against the misappropriation of that word by a handful of grammatical myopes. Still, in a way it is true that he has a split personality.

When the American linguist Einar Haugen lectured in Tokyo in the 1970s on language planning, he introduced the name Jiří Neustupný to his audience as one of the outstanding theoreticians of the discipline: little did he realize that this name was already well known to his listeners, but as a specialist in Japanese linguistics. Jiří's attentions moved from phonology to sociolinguistics, then to the theory of language planning, then to the study of Japanese-Australian communication problems and finally to Japanese language teaching as a means of solving such problems. The most important book on which he is now working summarizes all his linguistic experience - language as a human problem.

This is not the first time his work has extrapolated from linguistics to culture and society in general. And of course his administrative work at Monash University covered the whole of Japanese studies.

1. The Prague Years

He was born in 1933 in Prague. I knew his father, an archaeologist, and his mother, who spoke beautiful Czech. His twin brother is also an archaeologist, and their older sister is now retired. He went, at his own request, to the Alois Jirásek “klasické gymnásium” (so-called “classical grammar school”), and later to the gymnasium in the Kubelík Street, when the former was closed. He excelled in German, later in Latin and Classical Greek, and was a good student of Russian. He often sarcastically says that he owes his good pronunciation of Japanese and English to Adolf Hitler, who attuned his ear by making him study a language (German) at an early age. His English was acquired from a private teacher, because even the curriculum at the “klasické gymnásium” did not allow for so many languages.

His career plans changed with the time. His aspirations included becoming a naval officer, a Jesuit priest or a lawyer - and these are only the ones he has told me about!

But these never came to fruition. Instead he entered Charles University and ended up in the Department of Philology and History of the Far East studying Japanese. As to his former resolves: he is still a poor swimmer, is not religious (although tolerant toward all religions) and I believe that he would be a disaster as a lawyer.

In Japan people constantly ask foreigners why they study Japanese. Jiří's story is as follows. When he was at grammar school, he attended evening classes at the School of Oriental Languages in Hindi and Urdu. He wanted to continue at university but the department did not take new students in 1952 when he was a first year student. They offered him Chinese, Korean, Japanese and a few other Asian languages, and among these he selected Japanese because he could not forget a picture in Sven Hedin's travel book, which showed a geisha in a Kyoto garden. "Imagine how backward I was then", he says. "I selected Japanese because of the garden, not the geisha". I have never been convinced of the veracity of this story, but it may be true. His interest in Hindi and Urdu was, however, true, and he has always retained an affection for India.

2. The Oriental Institute

Jiří became a postgraduate scholar ("aspirant") at the Oriental Institute in the autumn of 1957. He liked the atmosphere and he says that this period was one of the happiest of his life - but so were, he says, his study in Japan, his first twenty years at Monash, and his working years in Japan.

Everyone at the Oriental Institute represented a discipline and everyone was taken seriously. There was no excessive specialization. So, as his bibliography shows, he wrote widely on various aspects of Japanese culture.

However, his most concerted efforts were directed towards language. During his undergraduate years he was a student of Professor Skalička, perhaps the most enlightened (though not the best known) member of the Prague Linguistic Circle. Skalička directed him to the study of indeterminacy in language and Jiří took up this theme focusing on the phonology of the Japanese accent. Skalička himself believed that all language was indeterminate, except for phonology.

Jiří did a lot of experimental work in this area and it is a shame that some parts of his candidate's (PhD) dissertation remain unpublished.

3. The Japanese Interlude

In 1960 Jiří was the first Czech to be awarded the Mombusho Postgraduate Scholarship after the war. He studied at the University of Tokyo, officially in the Department of the Japanese Literature and Language, but in fact he spent most of his time in Professor Shiro Hattori's Department of Linguistics.

There were two courses which had a profound influence on him. The first was by Professor Tokieda on the language of Genji Monogatari. Tokieda reputedly said after almost every sentence "Kore wa nan da? Mattaku wakannai!" ("What does this mean? I don't understand a thing!") - professors in Europe who specialized in Genji could understand everything!

The other course was by Mr Oki Hayashi on the form of characters, discussing the significance to human culture of minutiae such as whether a stroke was "stopped" or "brushed up". What a magnificent (and sometimes absurd) phenomenon this language was!

In Japan his interest in the social aspects of language was multiplied. As a student in Prague he had already ventured into what later became known as sociolinguistics. But his sojourn in Japan definitely further contributed to his full conversion to sociolinguistics after returning to Prague in 1962.

Also in Japan at this time, Jiří and I got married. Later, when asked why he married a Japanese, he retorted "I married Reiko Kakihara. Is she Japanese?" His sense of categorizing people is certainly underdeveloped. Ethnomethodologists would have problems if they decided to study him.

4. Back in Prague

Back in Prague, Jiří finished his dissertation, but not without problems. At one stage he considered giving up. At the same time he organized amongst his contemporaries within the Institute a discussion group on language policy and the social aspects of language. Among them only Petr Zima remained faithful to the topic. Life was vibrant at the Institute, where I also had the opportunity to work. In 1964 Dell Hymes stopped over and this was an event which had a considerable influence on Jiří's future research, which adopted Hymes' ethnography of communication - more so, he says, than anyone else in the world.

At this time most of Jiří's papers were still on the phonology of accent. However, at the same time he started developing his typology of the treatment of language problems and this is where he was already independent of his teachers. Note that it took him almost 10 years to achieve independence from Skalička.

5. In Japan Again

In 1965 an opportunity arose for both of us to spend half a year on exchange in Japan again. Since our Czech money was not convertible, we were poor and Jiří had to think whether it was cheaper to return home each day from the National Language Research Institute by bus or by train. However, his work proceeded satisfactorily.

While in Japan, he got a note from Professor Reginald de Bray of Monash University in Melbourne encouraging him to apply for the position of a Professor of Japanese at that university. Jiří decided to do so and he got the job. Monash was obviously giving him a "loan". They expected that he would be a good administrator and that he would increase his research output. I think Jiří honoured both these conditions.

While Jiří returned to Prague for half a year (before the Monash job was finalized) I stayed in Japan, where in July 1966 our daughter Marika was born. Our son Peter followed four years later.

6. Monash

When applying for the Monash position, Jiří knew almost nothing about the university. His intention was to improve his English and go home after two years. Of course, this did not happen. Jiří always emphasizes that he was not a political refugee. It is a fact that after the Prague Spring in 1968 we decided to stay in Australia. However, this was not because we felt that our political ideas would be more incompatible with those of the authorities in Prague than the ideas of other people. Millions of people were there and could not emigrate, so why should we claim special treatment? Rather, we discovered, after a few years in Australia, that a third country held certain benefits for an international marriage: neither of us had an undue advantage, and I could of course communicate better in English than in Czech.

Several facts became clear. Monash was a "real" university of a standard comparable to almost any other university we knew about. And Jiří's opportunity to create a new department was paramount.

So he became the Chairman of a Department, an administrator, and according to my observations and to the judgement of others, he used the opportunity to create the most balanced department of Japanese studies in Australia, and perhaps even beyond. Of course, there are departments in the US where the university can attract, due to financial conditions, first class established scholars. This was impossible at Monash both because of the remoteness of Australia from the academic crossroads, and also because the salaries, though good, could not match salaries in the US.

However, the department blossomed. By the time Jiří left Monash in 1993, there were 25 full time members of staff representing not only linguistics but disciplines such as sociology, history of science, cultural history and economics. Japanese language teaching was very strong and people from Japan as well as other countries were coming to inspect the Monash model. Former members of staff are now professors at Harvard, Cambridge, University of Tokyo and other leading universities. Jiří's former students hold leading positions not only at universities in Australia but also in Japan at Nagoya, Chiba, Waseda and many others. They are young and their careers are progressing apace. Monash, though undergoing a natural evolution, is still going strong.

So, Monash was a big success for Jifí, and this was reflected in his election in 1980 to the Australian Academy of the Humanities as its first Japan-related scholar. He is grateful both to those who made it possible for him to work at Monash and to his colleagues and students.

7. Moving to Japan

By the 1980s, Jifí had for some time been considering moving to Japan. Whatever he says about his motives, I think the decisive factor was that it was the country of his youth where he felt comfortable, and the only one where everyone spoke Japanese. He has a genuine attachment to the language which, after all, has been the language used by his wife and his children and so many friends - apart from being the object of his study.

Of course, prior to transferring his base to Japan in 1993, he had spent about four years there in total, but he was a guest, not an active participant. Now it was different. He hated to act as an "advisor", though at the same time he also felt that he should not take on the role of a foreign guest.

So he ruled out the option of becoming a visiting professor, although this would have brought him considerable financial advantage. It was thus that he became the first foreign scholar this century to be appointed to a chair in a Faculty of Arts at a Japanese national university. He was teaching applied Japanese linguistics (not Japanese) to ordinary Japanese students (not foreign students) and, of course, in Japanese (not in English).

Since he participated in all aspects of his professorial appointments, his periods at Osaka University and Chiba University were not without incident. I hope that one day he will write a book to analyze what he witnessed during his 5 1/2 years within the national university system. Now he has just commenced a new appointment at Obirin University in Tokyo. This is a small private university where he will be teaching language acquisition, sociolinguistics, language planning and intercultural communication, almost exclusively to postgraduate students. He is looking forward to this new challenge.

8. Research Work

In an interview published in the journal *Gengo* (Language), Jifí said that he considered himself an artist. From time to time he would go overseas on a "concert tour"; and he went through his blue, pink, green and other colour periods.

What he has done so far will be clear from his bibliography to be found in this volume. I asked him what he considered his greatest academic achievement: he answered without hesitation that it was his theory of language problems. This theory, which with the help of Bjorn Jernudd was christened "language management theory", goes back to his 1973 paper entitled "Outline of a Theory of Language Problems" and was developed through *Towards a Paradigm for Language Planning* (1983) and its application in various areas of study through the 1980s and 1990s. In Japanese his masterpiece so far is undoubtedly *Gaikokujin to no komyunikeeshon* (*Communication with Foreigners*), which has sold over 150 thousand copies and is still going strong.

9. A World Citizen

After 1989 he offered several times to return to Czechoslovakia, but these offers were not greeted enthusiastically. Even if he had returned he would never have become a Czech or a European. He stands astride many continents, and this stance is firm and cannot change. Asia, including of course Japan, is not only culture for him (although he repeatedly cries over the *Six Stories of the Floating Life*), it is also people and societies. He has African friends, and many in the Americas. And each year he looks forward to returning to Melbourne, which has given him so much.

In the last fortnight he lost 3 kg and he is determined to lose more. He is finishing editing or writing four books at this moment. What is all this fuss about turning 65?

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