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“YASASHII NIHONGO” (EASY/PLAIN JAPANESE), 1985–2025

Contextual Developments and Public Attitudes as Indicators of Language Change — With Reference to the Swedish Case

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Abstract

Title: *"YASASHII NIHONGO" (EASY/PLAIN JAPANESE), 1985–2025: Contextual Developments and Public Attitudes as Indicators of Language Change — With Reference to the Swedish Case*
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Abstract:
This study examines the diachronic change of Yasashii Nihongo (1985–2025), originally created to support foreign residents during disasters and described in some official sources as extending to various everyday contexts, including Japanese children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Using a quantitative, replicable method, 634 newspaper articles including the term Yasashii Nihongo were analyzed through text mining. For qualitative perspectives, public discourse on Yasashii Nihongo was also analyzed. Three chronological phases were identified: Japanese Language Education (1985–1994), Dissemination (1995–2015), and Development (2016–2025), with discourse primarily focused on use for foreign audiences. Comparison with Sweden revealed differences in the development of easy-to-understand communication styles and societal values. The study indicates that the spread of Yasashii Nihongo has led native speakers themselves, as recipients, to increasingly seek simple and clear Japanese, while its conceptual boundaries become increasingly blurred. Introducing the idea of International Japanese could mitigate citizens' negative reactions to Yasashii Nihongo and help foster a society free from native-speaker dominance. Further research is needed to refine the concept and address underrepresented groups beyond foreigners.

Keywords:
Yasashii Nihongo, Japanese, Plain Language, Easy Language, Diachronic change, Language ideology, Text Mining, LDA Topic Modeling, Term Frequency Analysis

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
ACA	Agency for Cultural Affairs
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
IE	Inclusion Europe, a European network for people with intellectual disabilities and their families
IJ	International Japanese
ISA	Immigration Services Agency
LDA	Latent Dirichlet Allocation
SSW	Specified Skilled Worker
TF	Term Frequency
YN	Yasashii Nihongo

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1. Introduction

1-1. Background

In today's globalized society, where the movement of people across borders continues to accelerate, it is becoming increasingly common for individuals with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds to live and build communities together. In Japan, as of the end of 2024, the number of foreign residents reached a record high of 3,768,977 (Immigration Services Agency (ISA), 2024). These individuals come from an increasingly wide range of countries, and languages they use and understand are equally diverse. In such a context, ensuring accessibility to information and facilitating communication with people of varied linguistic backgrounds requires not only multilingual services but also a communication approach using Japanese, the nationally dominant language, in a more comprehensible form.

As a means of implementing such an approach, communication forms commonly referred to globally as "Easy Language" or "Plain Language" are often employed. Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition, Easy Language is applied to make written texts and oral speech easy to read and understand. Its target audience mainly includes people with various limitations in communicating in the standard language, particularly individuals with disabilities (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021). Plain Language, on the other hand, aims to ensure that the intended audience—mainly the general public—can easily find, clearly understand, and effectively use the information (Cutts, 2020a). This is often applied to institutional texts such as public and legal documents by clarifying and avoiding technical terms (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021). In terms of language form, Easy Language is fundamentally simpler than Plain Language (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021).

A concept closely related to Easy Language and Plain Language in Japan is "*Yasashii Nihongo*". While *nihongo* simply refers to the Japanese language, the term *yasashii* in Japanese carries a double meaning: 優しい (*yasashii*, kind) and 易しい (*yasashii*, easy) ("Interview Thoughts on Yasashii Nihongo", 2021). Yasashii Nihongo was reportedly developed in response to the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. At the time, many foreign residents were unable to understand emergency evacuation instructions given in Japanese. In light of this, a form of Japanese that could be easily understood even by those not proficient in the language was developed for use during disasters. This initiative was led by Professor Kazuyuki Sato at

Hirosaki University in Aomori Prefecture (Matsuda et al., 2000). The guidelines issued by Hirosaki University include specific rules, considerations, and examples. For instance, the Japanese sentence "ドアや窓を開けて、避難する場合に備えてください。(Open the door or window and prepare to evacuate.)" is rewritten as "ドアや　窓(まど)を　開(あ)けて　ください (Open the door or window)" and "逃(に)げる　準備(じゅんび)をして　ください (prepare to get away)" (Hirosaki University Sociolinguistics Laboratory, 2013). In these sentences, small characters called *rubi* or *furigana* are used to indicate the readings of *kanji*[1]. Additionally, since Japanese does not use spaces between words, Yasashii Nihongo employs spacing—called *wakachigaki*—to visually separate words. Moreover, sentences are often broken into shorter segments for greater clarity.

Today, Yasashii Nihongo is considered an essential tool for providing information during disasters, and its use has become institutionalized at both national and local government levels (Bannai, 2013). Beyond disaster contexts, the concept of Yasashii Nihongo has been implemented in a variety of settings (Iori, 2016). Japan's national public broadcaster NHK (*Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* or Japan Broadcasting Corporation) launched a pilot site in April 2012 called *NEWS WEB EASY*, offering news in Yasashii Nihongo aimed at foreign residents and Japanese young students; it became a permanent service in February 2013 (NHK, 2013; TIPS, 2024). In 2020, the Immigration Services Agency (ISA) and the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) jointly published *The Guidelines for Yasashii Nihongo for Resident Support*, followed by a supplementary version focused on spoken communication in 2022[2] (ISA & ACA, 2020; ISA, 2022).

While no universally accepted definition of Yasashii Nihongo exists, ISA (2020) describes it as: "Yasashii Nihongo is a form of considerate and easy-to-understand Japanese, created by rephrasing difficult words. It is not intended to devalue the beauty or richness of the Japanese language, but to communicate clearly using Japanese with various people such as foreigners, the elderly, and people with disabilities" (author's translation, p. 3). Similarly, while the earlier version of Shizuoka Prefecture's (2018) guidelines described it as "a simplified form

[1] The Japanese orthography uses three writing systems: hiragana, katakana and kanji. The number of *Jōyō kanji* (regularly used kanji characters) is around 2,000. Kanji are logographic characters with complex structures and multiple readings.
[2] In 2023, a separate publication entitled *The Guide to Training in Yasashii Nihongo* was also released (ISA, 2023).

of everyday Japanese modified to be understandable for foreigners" (p. 2), the 2025 revised edition expands the definition, stating: "Yasashii Nihongo is a form of considerate and easy-to-understand Japanese, created by rephrasing difficult words. It is a useful communication method for various people, including foreigners, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities" (author's translation; Shizuoka Prefecture, 2025, p. 2). This reflects a broadening of the intended audience.

Thirty years have passed since the concept of Yasashii Nihongo gained recognition following the 1995 earthquake. In that time, society has undergone significant transformations, especially in how people receive information and communicate, largely due to technological advancement. The meaning and scope of Yasashii Nihongo have also evolved, with the term exhibiting qualities of both Plain Language and Easy Language, sometimes leading to ambiguity or conceptual expansion. Although there is little academic research written in English on the topic, both the words "easy Japanese" and "plain Japanese" are used to describe Yasashii Nihongo—indicating the lack of a consensus (Saeki, 2023).

Given this context, it is meaningful to empirically examine and clarify the scope of the concept of Yasashii Nihongo both quantitatively and qualitatively. While many official sources and prior studies describe the initiative as beginning in 1995, there has been no research empirically tracing how the term and concept have spread throughout Japanese society. Therefore, clarifying the diachronic development of Yasashii Nihongo—including its potential roots before 1995—can make a significant contribution to the field.

Research on Yasashii Nihongo is highly interdisciplinary in nature; however, many studies have focused on its application and effectiveness within specific contexts. For example, Yuko Takeda of Juntendo University has published research specifically focusing on the promotion of Yasashii Nihongo in medical settings involving foreign patients (Takeda et al., 2020). Karakisawa (2023) has also explored its use in learning support for children with foreign backgrounds, based on interviews with volunteer tutors. While case studies based on qualitative data—such as interviews, observations, and document analysis—dominate the field, there is a notable lack of research grounded in quantitative and replicable methods. Therefore, this study employs text mining to demonstrate the potential for reproducible, data-driven analysis in this area of research.

Finally, while researchers such as Sugiyama (2007) have analyzed the legislative aspects of Plain English in the U.S., few studies have attempted direct comparison between Yasashii

Nihongo and overseas practices. Kimura (2024), for instance, compared Yasashii Nihongo with the German concept of *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language), and argued for the necessity of broader comparisons with other European languages as well. Therefore, this study contributes to the international comparative discourse by examining the Swedish case.

In this study, a total of 634 newspaper articles containing the term "Yasashii Nihongo" were collected from databases of *The Yomiuri Shimbun* and *The Asahi Shimbun*, the two most widely read newspapers in Japan, covering the 40-year period from 1985 to May 2025. Using LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) Topic Modeling and Term Frequency Analysis, the study investigates how the term has been discussed across different social contexts and topics over time. Additionally, by comparing this with the Swedish case—where the author resides—the study explores the characteristics of the language ideologies surrounding Yasashii Nihongo and considers the potential impact of this concept on the future of the Japanese language. To capture public attitudes toward Yasashii Nihongo, qualitative data such as citizens' opinions in newspaper letters-to-the-editor and discourse from *Togetter*, a curation platform of posts on X (formerly Twitter), are also analyzed to supplement the quantitative findings with deeper insights into language ideologies and emotions.

1-2. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to trace the diachronic changes in the social contexts in which the concept of Yasashii Nihongo has been discussed in Japanese newspaper articles from 1985 to 2025. By doing so, the research seeks to analyze how the concept reflects and potentially reshapes Japanese language ideologies and public perceptions of the Japanese language. Ultimately, the study aims to consider the potential impacts that Yasashii Nihongo may have on the Japanese language, and to provide insights into the possible future directions of the Japanese language and the functions that Yasashii Nihongo can fulfil. It addresses the following three research questions.

1. **What kinds of topics and social contexts are associated with newspaper articles that contain the term Yasashii Nihongo over the forty-year period from 1985 to 2025?**

To explore this, the study conducts a diachronic analysis of newspaper articles that include the term Yasashii Nihongo, covering not only the post-1995 period—when the concept is said to have originated—but also the preceding decade, from 1985 onward. Changes in the number of articles per year reveal trends in public interest and the process of conceptual diffusion. Using

LDA Topic Modeling, the study interprets the dominant topics that emerge in the articles. It then analyzes the distribution of these topics across different time periods to identify temporal characteristics. Additionally, through Term Frequency Analysis, the study investigates co-occurring vocabulary to examine shifts in target audiences of Yasashii Nihongo and links to major social events. These analyses collectively clarify the longitudinal transformation of the concept over four decades.

2. **What characteristics can be observed in Yasashii Nihongo and the surrounding language ideologies when compared to the Swedish case?**

This research compares Yasashii Nihongo in Japan with Easy Swedish and Plain Swedish in Sweden, focusing on each country's approach and the underlying social values reflected in their practices. Drawing on existing literature on the Swedish case, and analyzing both newspaper articles and citizen discourses on platforms such as Togetter in the Japanese case, the study identifies characteristics of the language ideologies surrounding Yasashii Nihongo. This comparative perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics and ideologies that inform simplified language practices.

3. **In what ways might Yasashii Nihongo influence the future of the Japanese language and shape language ideologies in Japanese society?**

Based on the findings of Research Questions 1 and 2, this study considers the possible influence of Yasashii Nihongo on the future development of the Japanese language and on the language ideologies in Japan. Recognizing that language change and ideological formation are shaped by a complex interplay of social and cultural factors, the study investigates how Yasashii Nihongo may contribute to shifts in public perceptions and communicative norms. It also draws upon prior research proposals and the challenges to examine a future vision for the Japanese language.

1-3. Structure of the Thesis

After this introduction, Chapter 2 provides a review of previous studies related to Easy Language and Plain Language in Western countries including Sweden, Yasashii Nihongo in Japan, and language ideology in Japan, including historical backgrounds. Methodology including methods of collecting data, the periodization of study years and the implementation of coding for text mining are outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the results of text mining and public attitudes towards Yasashii Nihongo found in newspaper articles and Togetter. In

Chapter 5, the answers to the three research questions are discussed based on the results. In response to the research aim, the final chapter concludes with a reflection on the importance of studying Yasashii Nihongo for the future of the Japanese language.

2. Previous Research

This chapter first overviews the historical development, conceptual frameworks, and critical debates on Plain Language and Easy Language in Western countries, including Sweden. It then examines the Japanese context, covering the formation of modern standard Japanese, Yasashii Nihongo, language ideologies, and research on the future of the Japanese language. In this chapter, Yasashii Nihongo is sometimes abbreviated as YN for convenience.

2-1. Plain Language and Easy Language in Western Countries

As discussed in Chapter 1, Plain Language and Easy Language are generally distinguished by their intended audiences and purposes. While Plain Language is designed to make specialized or technical documents comprehensible to the general public, Easy Language targets people who face difficulties in understanding standard language, aiming to make various forms of text and speech more accessible.

The modern Plain Language movement began in the 1970s in several countries. In the U.S., it was fueled by consumer advocacy groups who demanded that government and corporate documents—often criticized for their obfuscatory language—be made more understandable to the public. During this period, U.S. presidents expressed support for using clearer language in federal regulatory documents, and in 1979, New York State passed legislation requiring certain residential leases and consumer contracts to be written in plain, understandable language. This momentum led to further plain-language legislation at both the state and federal levels (Petelin, 2010). A major milestone came with the signing of the Plain Writing Act by President Barack Obama in 2010, which mandated that federal agencies use Plain Language in all new or substantially revised public documents[3] to ensure they are understandable and usable by citizens.

Schriver (2017) investigated the development of interest in plain-language communication in the U.S. over a 75-year period (1940–2015), using a qualitative literature

[3] Regulations are not included.

analysis of publications (e.g., books, journal articles, and magazines) produced by plain-language advocates and practitioners. The development was divided into three phases: Plain Language develops the roots (1940–1979), Plain Language gains strength (1980–1999), and Plain Language builds momentum (2000–2015). This review highlights how key issues and discourses surrounding Plain Language have evolved across scattered media sources.

In the UK, the Plain English Campaign began as a grassroots movement in the 1970s and was formally established in 1979. Since then, it has played a significant role in promoting the use of Plain English in public and commercial documents. In 1982, the UK government adopted Plain English for official formats, and since November 1998, explanatory notes have been attached to legislation to clarify legal terminology (Petelin, 2010). Inspired by these developments in the U.S. and the UK, other European countries also began promoting Plain Language in both public and commercial sectors. In 2023, the adoption of the ISO Plain Language Standard (ISO/FDIS 24495-1) further encouraged global alignment by providing an international benchmark for Plain Language practices.

Easy Language, on the other hand, developed primarily in European countries after the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006. It became recognized as a form of accessible communication for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021). International guidelines for Easy Language—also referred to as easy-to-read—have been published by organizations such as Inclusion Europe (IE), a European network for people with intellectual disabilities and their families (IE, 2010). With collaboration among researchers from various European countries, Easy Language initiatives expanded, and in 2020, May 28 was officially celebrated as International Easy Language Day, commemorating the founding of IE.

Because Easy Language emerged in the context of human rights and accessibility for people with intellectual disabilities, its intended users generally do not include adults with typical language skills or children with typical learning abilities. However, in some contexts—such as stress, illness, or emergency situations—Easy Language is considered helpful for everyone[4]. Countries like Australia support such a view. Whether second-language speakers

[4] Cutts (2020b) describes Easy Language as a form of "low-literacy plain language" and includes among its target users those who may experience temporary low literacy due to short-term stress—such as during medical appointments or police interviews—or long-term stress caused by life circumstances such as poverty.

should be considered target users of Easy Language also varies by country (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021). Bohman (2021) notes that many immigrants never fully acquire sufficient literacy in the standard language, resulting in a lifelong need for Easy Language resources.

In sum, both Plain Language and Easy Language have been promoted largely through consumer rights and disability rights movements in Western countries. However, definitions and implementations vary across regions, and there remains no universal consensus on the specific criteria for each.

2-2. Criticism of Plain Language

As this study also addresses public perceptions of Yasashii Nihongo, this section introduces several key criticisms that have been raised regarding Plain Language. Plain Language is the focus here, rather than Easy Language, because there is a significantly larger body of research and critical discussion available on the former.

One field where critical reflections on Plain Language are particularly active is law (Kimble, 1994). For example, Łuczak (2024) conducted a survey among undergraduate students in his legal English class and found that some respondents believed complex legal language helps maintain the professional status of legal practitioners, and that the spread of Plain Language may threaten their profession. In response to such concerns, Coshott (2014), writing from a legal professional's perspective, argues that using Plain Language does not simplify the substance of complex laws. Understanding intricate case law still requires deep legal expertise, and replacing legalese with Plain Language does not diminish the need for lawyers. In fact, he contends that clinging to legalese poses a greater risk to the profession.

Another criticism is that the simplification of language through Plain Language initiatives may lead to the erosion of traditional expressions and culturally significant vocabulary. For instance, in the UK, there has been a push to ban the use of obscure Latin-derived terms in council documents, which has drawn criticism from classics scholars who argue that such efforts undermine what they describe as "the world's richest language" (Petelin, 2010).

Finally, a common critique is that Plain Language represents a "dumbing down" of texts—a claim that has been widely refuted in the literature (e.g., Kimble, 1994). Related to this is the argument that the term Plain Language itself is misleading. Bryan A. Garner (2002, as cited in Petelin, 2010) points out that the word "plain" may evoke notions of "drab and ugly,"

and that because the term has already become established, advocates must take care to explain it clearly in order to avoid misunderstandings and criticism.

2-3. Plain Language and Easy Language in Sweden

In Sweden, both the Plain Language Movement and the Easy Language Movement began to develop in the 1960s (Bohman, 2021). Influenced by political movements and the United Nations Covenants on Human Rights, Swedish society experienced a growing interest in building a more egalitarian society that emphasized equality, social rights, and women's liberation. One symbolic example of this societal shift is the *du-reformen*[5], a linguistic reform that unified the formal second-person pronoun *ni* with the more informal *du*, reflecting a move toward less hierarchical communication (Bohman, 2021; Fremer, 2023).

In Swedish, Plain Language is referred to as *klarspråk*, and Easy Language is known as *lättläst*. For the purposes of this paper, these terms will be referred to as “Plain Swedish” and “Easy Swedish” respectively. As in other European countries, Plain Swedish refers to communication designed to be clear and accessible to the general population. A major milestone in its development was in 1967, when the Swedish government issued guidelines aimed at reducing the use of technical and bureaucratic language in legal and administrative documents (Bohman, 2021). This early institutional initiative demonstrates Sweden’s comparatively proactive stance in promoting linguistic accessibility. Later, the Language Act (SFS 2009:600), which came into effect in 2009, declared Swedish the primary language of the country and mandated that all public authorities use Plain Swedish in their official communications and informational texts[6].

As in other European contexts, Easy Swedish was originally developed to meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. The first initiative came in 1968, under a government cultural policy titled *Kultur åt alla* (Culture for All), which aimed to broaden public access to literary heritage. This initiative, supported by civil society movements advocating for reading

[5] Before the *du-reformen*, Swedish had the informal second-person singular *du*, the formal second-person singular *ni*, and the neutral plural address form *ni*. As egalitarian ideals spread, *du* became the universal singular form, a change known as the *du-reformen* (Fremer, 2023).
[6] In the commentary on Section 11 of the Swedish Language Act (SFS 2009:600), which states that "the language of the public sector is to be cultivated, simple and comprehensible," it is explicitly noted that this refers to the use of *klarspråk* (Plain Swedish).

opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, led to the publication of the first novel in Easy Swedish. In 1981, the adult education organization *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* produced informational materials in Easy Swedish for a national referendum on nuclear power (Bohman, 2021). In 1984, the newspaper *8 Sidor* (8 Pages) was launched and remains available online today, reaching a broad readership (8 Sidor, n.d.).

A key contributor to the development of Easy Swedish was the *Center for Easy-to-Read* (*Centrum för lättläst*), which operated as an advisory body from 1997 to 2014. In addition to publishing *8 Sidor* and literature in Easy Swedish, the Center provided rewriting services for legal and parliamentary documents. Over time, demand expanded beyond people with intellectual disabilities to include older adults and immigrants (Bohman, 2021). The Center also promoted the use of Easy Swedish materials in school education. According to Suzuki (2024), a study in the city of Gothenburg found that three different levels of Swedish-language textbooks were being used in regular subject classes for children with foreign backgrounds. An interview with a parent suggested that this system helped motivate children to improve their Swedish so that they could read higher-level textbooks.

Despite Sweden's early leadership and innovative efforts—which served as a model for many other European countries—the momentum behind Easy Swedish has waned in recent years. This decline has been attributed to the dissolution of the Center for Easy-to-Read[7] and the privatization of rewriting services, which has reportedly led to a decline in quality. For example, parliamentary minutes are now less frequently produced in Easy Swedish, and the Easy Swedish section has disappeared from the City of Stockholm's official website (Bohman, 2021). These situations highlight the challenges Sweden faces in maintaining institutional commitment to Easy Language and achieving lasting consensus on its necessity. Furthermore, scholarly attention to Easy Language in Sweden remains limited (Arle & Frondén, 2022; Bohman, 2021).

2-4. Brief History of Japanese Language

The standardization of the Japanese language, as it is understood today, began in the modern era during the Meiji period. Prior to this, regional dialects varied widely, often hindering mutual intelligibility. With the establishment of the Meiji government and the development of a modern

[7] For details on the specific circumstances that led to its dissolution, see Bohman (2021).

nation-state, the dissemination of "standard Japanese" was actively promoted through school education and mass media.

From the early Meiji period, various proposals and discussions concerning the form and status of Japanese were actively circulating. In 1872, Mori Arinori suggested that Japanese be replaced with a simplified form of English. This proposal received strong criticism both domestically and from Western observers, being considered unpatriotic, elitist, and potentially divisive for Japanese society (Heinrich, 2012). In early 1887, Basil Hall Chamberlain, the first professor of linguistics at Tokyo University, advocated using the Latin alphabet to write Japanese (Heinrich, 2012).

A crucial turning point in the development of modern Japanese was the *genbun itchi* movement. At the time, written Japanese differed significantly from spoken language, making it largely inaccessible to the general population outside the educated elite. In response, a cultural and literary movement emerged to shift written language closer to spoken language. Despite debate and controversy, the adoption of genbun itchi in government-issued textbooks during the Meiji period, the production of novels in the genbun itchi style by writers such as Futabatei Shimei and Tsubouchi Shōyō, and its eventual adoption in newspapers since 1921 during the Taisho period all contributed to its establishment (Kaneda & Miyakoshi, 2013; Heinrich, 2012).

The genbun itchi movement provided both the conceptual foundation and practical direction for the standardization of Japanese. Standard Japanese was thus developed with reference to spoken forms, a process that gained momentum in the 1880s. Language planning activities regarding standard Japanese were largely led by western-trained Japanese linguists, including Ueda Kazutoshi. They drew on European cases of national language standardization after the written languages moved away from Latin (Heinrich, 2012). In 1902, the National Language Research Council (*Kokugo Chosa Iinkai*), established as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, formulated policies for dialect surveys and other research to guide the selection of standard Japanese. The publication of *Kōgohō* in 1916 indicated that the spoken language used by educated residents of Tokyo would serve as the standard (Yoshimura, 2017). After World War II, further reforms were introduced. The *Tōyō kanji* list was promulgated in 1946, specifying kanji for general use. In the same year, the official unification of kana orthography was implemented, marking the transition from historical kana usage to modern kana usage (Kaneda & Miyakoshi, 2013).

These reforms aimed at national integration through the unification and simplification of Japanese. The state sought to enable all citizens to read and write in a common linguistic standard. Japanese thus became not only a tool for disseminating knowledge and building the modern nation-state but also a symbol of national identity. During these processes, minority languages, including Ryukyuan in Okinawa and Ainu in Hokkaido, were systematically excluded. Yoshimura (2017) critiques this history, arguing that the promotion of standard Japanese fostered the perception that local dialects and people's natural linguistic practices were inferior. Although Japan does not have legislation comparable to Sweden's Language Act, nor a formally articulated national language policy, Japanese functions as the de facto dominant language. Notably, the subject of Japanese language in schools is officially referred to as *kokugo* ("national language").

2-5. Previous Research on Yasashii Nihongo

Following the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, disaster-related Yasashii Nihongo was developed primarily by Sato at Hirosaki University, as mentioned in Section 1-1. Designed for users with Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) levels 3–4[8], Yasashii Nihongo (hereafter YN) is composed of roughly 2,000 basic vocabulary items and simple sentence structures commonly introduced in early stages of Japanese language education (Hirosaki University Sociolinguistics Lab, 2013). Sato demonstrated the effectiveness of YN in improving comprehension through an experiment conducted with international students, using original NHK news scripts and their YN-rephrased versions (Matsuda et al., 2000). As a "byproduct" of the study, it was suggested that YN could also serve as a beneficial communication tool for various groups of native Japanese speakers, including children, elderly people, individuals with hearing or visual impairments, and people in disaster-stricken areas experiencing confusion.

Japanese, in comparison to languages like English, is highly context-dependent, and speakers often omit information they believe can be inferred from the speech context (Shibatani

[8] The abilities at JLPT levels 3 and 4 include tasks such as arranging to meet a friend by deciding on a time and place, or explaining what one wants when shopping (Hirosaki University Sociolinguistics Lab, 2013). JLPT here refers to the old system before 2010, now replaced by levels N1 (most advanced) to N5 (most basic). The old level 3 approximately corresponding to the current N4.

& Kageyama, 2020). Additionally, to maintain the listener's "face" and smooth communication, indirect expressions such as *go-enryo kudasai* ("please refrain") are frequently used (Tsuda, 1993). In contrast, YN encourages more direct and explicit phrasing—e.g., *go-enryo kudasai* is replaced by *shinaide kudasai* ("do not do it"). These stylistic differences make YN challenging for Japanese native speakers to produce naturally, often requiring training.

The idea of simplified Japanese is not entirely new. For example, *Kiso Nihongo* (Basic Japanese) by Kouchi Doi was published in 1933 (Aiba, 2008), and *Kan'i Nihongo* (Simplified Japanese) proposed by Kikuo Nomoto gained media attention in 1988 and provoked mixed reactions (Nomoto, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997). They were designed for non-native learners, primarily serving as an initial stage of Japanese language learning. However, neither of them was conceived as a communication style used by both native and non-native speakers. To date, no study has systematically investigated how the term Yasashii Nihongo (YN) was used prior to 1995, or whether the phrase—combining the adjective *yasashii* with the noun *nihongo*—functioned as a concept in itself. Thus, diachronic empirical studies on the discursive contexts in which YN has been discussed hold significant scholarly value.

Saeki (2023) briefly explores the issue of how to represent the YN concept in English. Based on a database search, he found that both "easy Japanese" and "plain Japanese" are in use, though the former is more prevalent. Drawing on parallels with the use of Plain English in medical interpretation, Saeki advocates for standardizing the English term as Plain Japanese. However, as outlined in Section 2-1, Plain Language typically targets general audience, native speakers of the language, to make complex or specialized content more accessible, while Easy Language was originally designed for people with intellectual disabilities and has since expanded to include second-language speakers. Medical communication with foreign patients arguably involves both Plain and Easy Language elements. Therefore, given the current conceptual ambiguity surrounding YN, it is premature to standardize its English label as Plain Japanese.

As an international comparative study, Kimura (2024) analyzed *Leichte Sprache* (hereafter "Easy German") and YN. Kimura pointed out that while Easy German is based on clearly defined rules, YN emphasizes mindset over skills and lacks standardized guidelines, leading to a diffusion of the concept. This conceptual diffusion may enable broader application, but at the same time, setting clearer boundaries could help clarify its scope as a linguistic right

(Kimura, 2024). Building on this discussion, the present study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the characteristics of YN through a comparison with the Swedish case.

2-6. Target Audiences of Yasashii Nihongo in Previous Studies

As noted earlier, Easy Language initially targeted people with intellectual disabilities, but in Japan, communication strategies for this group remain under-researched. Ayako Uchinami, a scholar in disability welfare studies, consistently uses the phrasing "「わかりやすい」(*Wakariyasu*i, easy-to-understand)" in hiragana with quotation marks[9]. Uchinami et al. (2017) argue that YN has been treated as a tool for foreigners and has rarely intersected with "Wakariyasui" communication. Their comparative study of YN news articles and *Stage*[10]—a magazine for people with intellectual disabilities—demonstrates that there are some differences in understandability of Japanese texts between second-language speakers and people with intellectual disabilities.

Aside from the work of Uchinami, there is little research on communication styles for people with intellectual disabilities. While discourse such as ISA's (2020) guidelines suggests that the target audience of YN is expanding, YN research on users other than foreigners remains limited. Given this background, it is highly meaningful to examine how the target users of YN are represented in newspaper articles, which to some extent reflect real-world society.

2-7. Language Ideology and Public Sentiment in Japan

This section provides an overview of prior research on language ideology in Japan and public responses to YN. Hino (2020) argues that Japanese language education for foreigners, as well as English education in Japan, is founded on an ideology that upholds the authority and superiority of native speakers. This stance is likely influenced by the standard language ideology centered on standard Japanese, as discussed in Section 2-4. Furthermore, it is pointed out that there exists a belief that the Japanese language embodies a unique spirit absent from other languages (Miller, 1982, as cited in Chapple, 2014). Considering Japan's prolonged

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[9] The phrasing "Wakariyasui" first appeared in Uchinami's foundational study conducted between 2009 and 2010, titled *A Basic Study for Improving Information Accessibility for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities*.

[10] *Stage* is a quarterly magazine inspired by *8 Sidor*, a Swedish Easy Swedish newspaper. Therefore, the concept of "Wakariyasui" can be understood as aligning with that of *lättläst* (Easy Swedish).

period of national isolation, Chapple (2014) calls for a critical reassessment of these deep-seated traditional and idealistic attitudes toward the Japanese language.

As an example of negative reactions toward YN, Iori (2021) cites a comment made by *rakugo*[11] performer Shiraku Tatekawa on a 2018 news program:

> During the earthquake disaster, yes, that was understandable. But in other cases, when they say it's for the elderly or children, I want them to learn words like '*momiji*' (autumn leaves), but if everything is explained like this, it feels like all Japanese people are becoming a little stupid (studio laughter). Difficult words are also important after all. Of course, I understand simplifying language in public spaces for foreigners. But for Japanese people, if a child asks 'What is *ōin*?', teaching them that 'it means putting your seal on' is also part of education. If everything becomes like this, children will stop learning difficult words. Thinking only about foreigners is not kindness. I know this sounds very conservative, but since this is Japan, I hope there's some consideration for Japanese people as well. (author's translation, Iori, 2021, p. 125)

Iori (2021, 2023) interprets Tatekawa's comment as revealing what he calls "the Cult of Difficulty (*Muzukashisa eno shinkō*)." This concept refers to the belief that more difficult language carries greater value, and that official language must include Sino-Japanese vocabulary to be considered legitimate—a sentiment shared by both language producers and receivers. However, other discussions of the Cult of Difficulty in his argument focus solely on contexts such as court interpreting or administrative documents, where experts communicate with non-experts, and they have different nature from Tatekawa's comment.

Moreover, Tatekawa's remarks are not merely a discomfort with "things not sounding difficult enough." His emphasis on the importance of difficult words and concern that children might fail to learn them if everything is simplified reveals a desire to preserve the Japanese language and pass down linguistic knowledge. Researchers should not dismiss such honest and natural reactions as mere symptoms of the "cult of difficulty," but rather engage seriously and scientifically with the underlying public attitudes that give rise to such critical responses.

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[11] *Rakugo* is a traditional Japanese form of storytelling performed by a solo comedian.

Joshua A. Fishman (1991) emphasizes that in the context of language shift leading to language endangerment, language is not merely a tool for communication but lies at the core of an individual's cultural and ethnic identity. Fishman regards the desire to protect ethnic identity, culture, and language as "the basically normal affiliative expression" (Fishman, 1991, p. 393). This perspective can also be applied to language changes such as simplification that arise from factors other than language shift. Valuing one's cultural identity and concern over its loss are two sides of the same coin. The guideline by ISA (2020) says "Easy Japanese … does not disregard the beauty and richness of the Japanese language" (author's translation, p. 3) can be interpreted as an acknowledgment of the concerns about changes in Japanese expressions that shape the identity of native Japanese speakers.

2-8. Towards International Japanese: Concepts and Challenges

English education scholar Hino (2020) critiques traditional English teaching that seeks to replicate the language use of native speakers, and instead advocates for teaching English as a tool for communication among people, including non-native speakers—a concept often referred to as "International English" (*Kokusai Eigo*). Hino argues that, in communication within International English, it is acceptable to organize ideas according to logical structures other than the Western format that prioritizes linear logic and argumentation (introduction–body–conclusion). Pronunciation influenced by Japanese intonation and nuances is likewise considered acceptable, as these features are viewed as expressions of the speaker's identity.

In this framework, proximity to native speaker norms is not the standard for evaluation. Rather, the approach respects the speaker's linguistic and cultural roots, embraces the language practices of non-native speakers more broadly, and emphasizes equitable communication between native and non-native speakers as equal users of the language. Building on this perspective, Hino (2020) applies the concept to the Japanese language, calling it "International Japanese" (*Kokusai Nihongo*)[12]. Similarly, Kimura (2016, as cited in Iori, 2021) distinguishes between "Ethnic English" (*Minzoku Eigo*), which is tied to the cultures of English-speaking countries such as the U.S. and the UK, and "International English" (*Kokusai Eigo*), which exists

[12] Attempts to reconceptualize Japanese as an international language can be found as early as the 1980s or even earlier.

independently of native speakers. Drawing on this latter concept, Kimura proposes the idea of "International Japanese" (*Kokusai Nihongo*).

Since International Japanese (IJ) does not have a concrete linguistic form, its actual language practices—such as the level of vocabulary used and sentence construction—are assumed to be essentially the same as those of YN. Nevertheless, as a perspective that regards language as a tool for international communication and moves away from native-speaker–centric values, the concept offers meaningful insights for thinking about language ideologies and the future vision of the Japanese language.

Iori—one of the most prominent scholars of YN—positions YN as the most promising candidate for IJ (Iori, 2021). However, the YN model by Iori retains an inherent degree of native-speaker centrism. Iori defines YN as a level of Japanese in which native speakers simplify grammar and vocabulary, intersecting with the minimum level of grammar and vocabulary acquired by foreigners. He illustrates this structure with a diagram that places native Japanese speakers at the top and foreigners at the bottom, positioning YN at the intersection point of arrows moving both upward and downward (Iori, 2021, p. 123; Iori, 2023, p. 56). This "top-down and bottom-up" dynamic reflects an asymmetry in power and control over the language, highlighting that YN is still fundamentally shaped by native-speaker authority. From the perspective of IJ, which emphasizes equitable communication among all users, this top-down adjustment suggests that YN falls short of fully embodying the principles of IJ.

Taken together, these considerations highlight the difficulty of eliminating native-speaker centrism in Japanese. While YN helps bridge communication gaps, its reliance on native-speaker adjustment shows that putting the principles of International Japanese into practice remains a significant challenge.

3. Methodology

3-1. Data Collection

3-1-1. Newspaper Articles

Newspapers have existed long before the spread of the internet and social media, and they have consistently reported on current events. For this reason, they are an ideal medium for tracing developments over several decades, which is the objective of this study. Although many newspapers are published in Japan, this study uses articles from *The Yomiuri Shimbun* and *The*

Asahi Shimbun. These are both national newspapers and are the first and second most read newspapers in Japan, respectively, and are considered to have a high degree of reliability (Graphl, 2023). Differences between the two newspapers are not discussed here, as doing so would go beyond the scope of this paper. Article data were obtained using *Yomidasu* (Yomiuri Database Service) and *Asahi Shimbun Cross-Search*, both of which are subscription-based digital archives. Table 1 summarizes the target period and search methods.

Table 1

Search Conditions and Target Periods for Newspaper Article Collection

Archives	Yomidasu. Yomiuri Database Service	Asahi Shimbun Cross-Search
Search Period	1874 (Meiji 7) to May 31, 2025	1985 (Showa 60) to May 31, 2025
Search Conditions	"+ Specify detailed conditions" > Check "Condition expression"; input やさしい日本語 (without quotation marks)	"Keyword search" > Input やさしい日本語 (without quotation marks); uncheck "Include variant characters" and "Include synonyms"
Filters	None	• **Publications**: Asahi Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun Digital (uncheck default boxes for *AERA* and *Weekly Asahi*) • **Search Scope**: Change default to "Headline and Body"
Number of Articles Found	318	334
Unavailable or Image Only	18	0
Articles Used	300	334

A total of 634 articles were identified as suitable for data analysis. The oldest article among the target data appeared in *Yomiuri Shimbun* on August 16, 1988, and in *Asahi Shimbun* on June 14, 1985. Accordingly, this study analyzes newspaper articles spanning a 40-year period, from 1985 to 2025. In the *Yomiuri Shimbun* dataset, 16 out of 300 articles did not explicitly contain the term Yasashii Nihongo, based on the author's manual inspection. However, manually excluding these articles would not only present practical difficulties but also risk compromising the reproducibility of the study by introducing inconsistency in classification criteria. In contrast, the use of search engine-based article extraction, which avoids human intervention during data

processing, enhances reproducibility. Therefore, all 634 articles—including headlines and full text—were included for text mining analysis.

For analytical purposes, the collected articles were grouped by historical period. The grouping was based on a timeline of milestone events focusing primarily on key policy shifts, disasters, and events related to foreign nationals, as summarized in Table 2. Although the target groups of Yasashii Nihongo have since expanded to include Japanese speakers such as the elderly and those with disabilities, this focus is justified because Yasashii Nihongo was originally developed to enable communication with foreign people.

Table 2

Chronology of Key Policy Shifts, Disasters, and Events Related to Foreign Nationals

Year	Events
1970	Osaka Expo (Expo '70) – Japan's first world exposition
1981	Japan joins the Refugee Convention[13]
1982	Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act enacted (abbreviated as Immigration Act; *Nyūkan hō* in Japanese*)*
1983	Plan to accept 100,000 international students by 2000
1990	Major revision of the Immigration Act[14]
1993	Technical Intern Training Program established
1995	Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake
2002	FIFA World Cup co-hosted by Japan and South Korea
2004	Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake
2005	Aichi Expo (Expo 2005)
2007	Niigata Chuetsu Offshore Earthquake
2008	Global Financial Crisis (Lehman Shock)
	New plan to host 300,000 international students by 2020
2011	Great East Japan Earthquake (Tohoku earthquake and tsunami)
2012	Visa relaxation policy introduced; Japan promotes itself as a "tourism-oriented country"

[13] Japan accepted more than 10,000 Indochinese refugees between the late 1970s and 2005 (Refugee Assistance Headquarters, n.d.).

[14] The major revision of the Immigration Act in 1990 allowed many second- and third-generation descendants of Japanese emigrants—known as *Nikkei*—from Brazil and Peru to come to Japan.

	Highly Skilled Foreign Professional System launched
2016	Kumamoto Earthquake
	Goal announced to attract 40 million foreign tourists by 2020 and 60 million by 2030
2018	Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) Program established in December – Seen as major migration reform to address labor shortages
2019	SSW program begins (April)
	Reiwa era begins (May) – Start of a new imperial era in Japan
	International student target met (310,000 students)
	Rugby World Cup hosted
2020	COVID-19 pandemic
	ISA released *The Guidelines for Yasashii Nihongo for Resident Support*
	The revised versions of *the Comprehensive Measures for the Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Human Resources* and *the Regional Multicultural Coexistence Promotion Plan* explicitly include the utilization of Yasashii Nihongo
2021	Tokyo Olympics
	Record-high number of refugee recognitions for Myanmar nationals
2022	Begins accepting displaced persons from Ukraine
2023	The Immigration Act amended regarding treatment of undocumented foreign residents
2024	Noto Peninsula Earthquake
	Decision made to abolish Technical Intern Training Program (since 1993) and replace it with a new Development Employment System by 2027
2025	Osaka Expo

The attention given to Yasashii Nihongo likely varies depending on the nature of the events. For example, earthquakes tend to increase focus on Yasashii Nihongo in the context of post-disaster information dissemination, whereas large-scale events such as Expos or the Olympics are more likely to generate discussion about its use during the preparation period before the event. Considering these differences, the timeline was divided into the following seven periods.

Table 3

Periodization of the Time Frame for Analysis

Era	Period of time	The number of years
Era 1	1985–1994	9 years
Era 2	1995–2000	6 years

Era 3	2001–2006	6 years
Era 4	2007–2010	4 years
Era 5	2011–2015	5 years
Era 6	2016–2019	4 years
Era 7	2020–2025 (May 31st)	6 years

The earliest articles in the dataset date from 1985 to 1994, which are grouped as Era 1. Starting from 1995, when the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake—considered a catalyst for the development of Yasashii Nihongo—occurred, the timeline is divided into roughly five-year periods.

3-1-2. Material as Citizens Awareness

This study incorporates citizens' perceptions and reactions to Yasashii Nihongo by utilizing data from X (formerly Twitter) and public opinions submitted to newspaper articles. Drawing on the concept of the Online Disinhibition Effect coined by Suler (2004), it is expected that people are more likely to express their true feelings in anonymous online environments such as social media compared to in-person interactions. Omoya (2021) analyzed sentiments toward foreign residents in Japan on Japanese-language Twitter through text mining, aiming to uncover unfiltered public opinion by focusing on Twitter as an informal platform for expression.

Since Twitter's transition to X, its API (Application Programming Interface) has become fully paid, limiting direct tweet extraction. Instead, this study uses Togetter, a tweet curation service. Although Togetter's content reflects selection bias by curators and does not cover all tweets comprehensively (Duh et al., 2012), a search for Yasashii Nihongo on June 30, 2025, yielded six curated collections, including user comments accessible for analysis. These tweets and comments serve as a window into citizens' perceptions.

Notably, the user base of X and Togetter tends to be younger, while comment sections of newspaper articles often feature contributions from senior generations. By combining data from Togetter and newspaper article comments, this study aims to observe reactions to Yasashii Nihongo across a broad age range in a complementary manner. These insights will be linked to the results of text mining analysis on newspaper articles to enrich the discussion.

3-2. Analysis

As the first step of the analysis, the number of extracted articles was categorized by year of publication to examine longitudinal trends. This approach allowed us to capture how the term Yasashii Nihongo gradually became established in newspapers. Next, text mining was conducted using two methods: LDA Topic Modeling and Term Frequency Analysis.

3-2-1. LDA Topic Modeling

Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), a topic modeling method proposed by Blei et al. (2003), was used to identify latent thematic structures within the corpus. While this study does not delve into the mathematical details of the algorithm, its probabilistic approach is well-suited to capturing patterns of word co-occurrence across documents. The purpose of using LDA is to clarify the broad topics in which newspaper articles containing the term Yasashii Nihongo have appeared over the past 40 years. Classifying each article manually is subjective, but text mining enables results free from the analyst's personal bias or intentions.

In addition to LDA, topic classification methods exist that categorize documents into predefined topics. However, LDA is an unsupervised learning technique and does not assign explicit topic labels such as "medical." Instead, it groups frequently co-occurring words, and the analyst interprets the topics by examining representative words for each group. Although interpretation by the analyst is necessary at this stage, the approach is reproducible because the same coding applied to the data will yield the same results.

LDA outputs the proportion of topics contained within each article, allowing for the representation of multiple topics per article rather than assigning a single topic label. For example, an article about foreign tourists visiting medical facilities may belong to both "medical" and "tourism" topics. In this study, after analyzing each article, average topic proportions were calculated for each Era to characterize the topical features of that period.

Selecting the number of topics is critical, as it greatly affects model interpretability and validity. However, there is currently no standard statistical method to determine the optimal number of topics uniquely, so selection is inevitably empirical and exploratory (Maier et al., 2018). This study employed the two-step approach proposed by Maier et al. (2018). First, LDA models with multiple topic counts were created and compared based on intrinsic coherence scores. Next, the outputs of candidate models were qualitatively evaluated for consistency with theoretical frameworks related to the concept of Yasashii Nihongo. As a result, the five-topic

model demonstrated the best internal coherence and balanced reflection of the social contexts of Yasashii Nihongo, and was therefore adopted for this study.

3-2-2. Term Frequency Analysis

Term Frequency (TF) Analysis is a method that counts how often each word appears in a text. In this study, the top 20 most frequent nouns for each Era were visualized using Word Clouds. Because Word Clouds display more frequent words larger and near the center, they provide an intuitive way to grasp the characteristics of each Era. Additionally, TF Analysis lists all words and their frequencies, allowing examination beyond just the most frequent terms. This enables detailed checking of how closely keywords related to specific events appear together with the term Yasashii Nihongo in articles, or whether they do not. Moreover, TF Analysis helps identify words that may not be directly related to LDA topics but still appear frequently, supporting more nuanced contextual analysis.

3-2-3. Coding and Adjustment

Text analysis in this study was conducted using Python and Jupyter Notebook. The code was developed with reference to Ishida (2022) in Tokushima University, *An Introduction to Text Mining with Python*. As a preprocessing step for text mining, morphological analysis was performed on the article texts to extract nouns only. The morphological analyzer used was MeCab, in combination with both the Neologd dictionary and a custom user dictionary. Compared to the default IPA dictionary, Neologd is more effective in recognizing contemporary proper nouns (Ishida, 2022). The user dictionary was configured to treat multi-word expressions that would otherwise be split by Neologd—such as 新型コロナウイルス感染症 (*Shingata koronauirusu kansenshō*, novel coronavirus infection / COVID-19)—as single tokens.

A custom stopword list was also applied to exclude high-frequency words with low analytical value, such as やさしい日本語 (Yasashii Nihongo), わたし (*watashi*, I), and 担当者 (*tantōsha*, officer), which could otherwise obscure more meaningful terms. Furthermore, a word replacement setting was used to standardize terms with similar meanings and prevent frequency dispersion that might affect the results. For example, terms such as 在日外国人 (*zainichi gaikokujin*), 在留外国人 (*zairyū gaikokujin*), 在住外国人 (*zaijū gaikokujin*), and 外国人市民 (*gaikokujin shimin*) were all unified under the term 外国人住民 (foreign residents).
The details of the text mining implementation are provided in Appendix A.

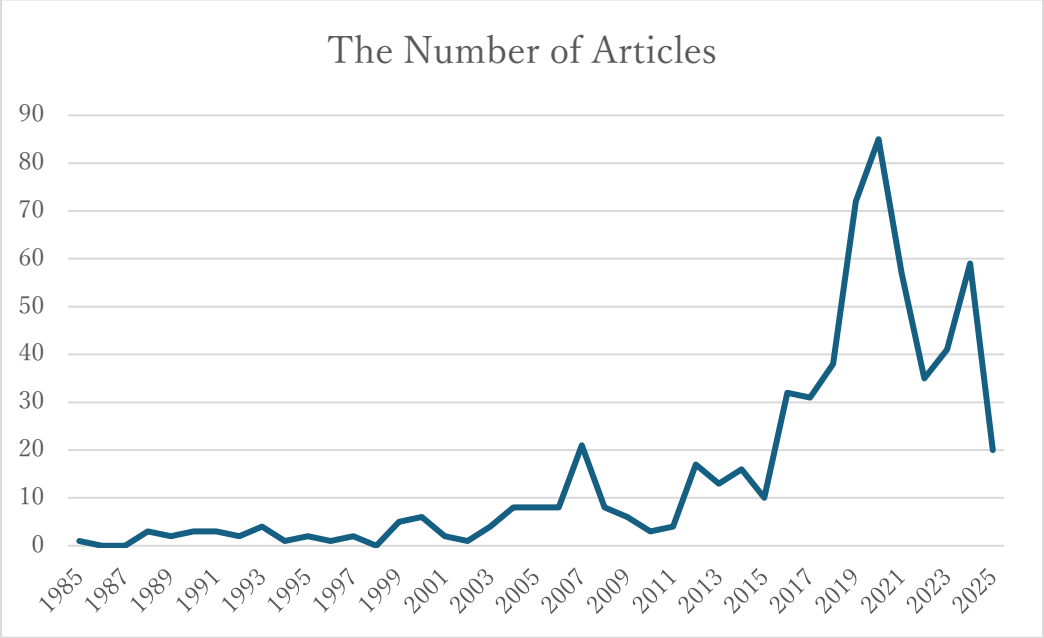
4. Results

4-1. The Diachronic Changes of the Number of Articles

The diachronic trend in the number of newspaper articles that include the term Yasashii Nihongo is shown below.

Figure 1

Trends in the Number of Newspaper Articles (Yomiuri & Asahi Combined)



Overall, the number of articles has shown a gradual increase since the 2000s, with a sharp rise beginning around 2016. It is important to note that the term Yasashii Nihongo did not immediately become common in newspaper articles following the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Instead, its use has notably increased only in the past decade. Looking retrospectively, there were only 19 articles containing the term in the ten years prior to 1995. Although the number began to grow after 1995, it remained relatively flat until around 2005, with fewer than ten articles per year across both newspapers. In 2007, the number temporarily surged to 21[15], more than double the previous year, but it declined again soon after. A modest

[15] The increase in 2007 can be attributed to a series published by *Yomiuri Shimbun* titled *Shin Nihongo no Genba Manual* (Field Manual for New Japanese). Of the 21 articles published that year, 16 were part of this series. However, the specific reason why this series was launched remains unclear.

upward trend began after 2011, but clear turning points occurred in 2016 and 2019. In 2016, the number of articles jumped from 10 in the previous year to 32, more than tripling. The count remained in the 30s until another significant increase in 2019, reaching 72 articles. The number peaked at 85 in 2020, then declined slightly, though it rebounded to 59 in 2024. The count for 2025 is currently 20, but since this figure is based on data up to May 31, it is expected that the annual total will reach a similar average as other years in the 2020s.

4-2. The Diachronic Changes of the Topics

The results of the LDA Topic Modeling are presented. The five main topic groups identified, along with their most frequent keywords, are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Five Topic Groups and Their Frequent Words

Topic 0	避難 (evacuation), 障害者 (persons with disabilities), 災害 (disaster), 防災 (disaster preparedness), 高齢者 (elderly), 障害 (disability), 講演 (lecture), ガイド (guide), 訓練 (drill), 講演会 (seminar)
Topic 1	災害 (disaster), 避難 (evacuation), 防災 (disaster preparedness), 地震 (earthquake), 英語 (English), 翻訳 (translation), 多言語 (multilingual), 自治体 (municipality), 弘前大学 (Hirosaki University), 津波 (tsunami)
Topic 2	相談 (consultation), コロナ (COVID-19), 生活 (daily life), 外国人住民 (foreign residents), 医療 (medical care), 行政 (administration), 多文化共生 (multicultural coexistence), 自治体 (municipality), 技能実習 (technical intern training), 通訳 (interpretation)
Topic 3	講座 (course), ボランティア (volunteer), 講師 (instructor), 参加者 (participant), 国際交流 (international exchange), ルビ (ruby annotation), 財団 (foundation), イベント (event), 体験 (experience), 同市 (the city)
Topic 4	子ども (child), 英語 (English), 学校 (school), 生徒 (student), 授業 (class), 社会 (society), 子供達 (children), 教育 (education), 文化 (culture), 高校 (high school)

Based on the top frequent words, the five extracted topics were interpreted as follows.

Topic 0 consists of terms such as elderly people (高齢者), persons with disabilities (障害者), lectures (講演), guides (ガイド), and drills (訓練), along with evacuation (避難), disasters (災害), and disaster preparedness (防災). These terms suggest that Topic 0 is in the context of

vulnerable populations such as the elderly and people with disabilities, and primarily Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)[16] practices and training for them.

Topic 1 also features many DRR-related terms like disaster (災害), evacuation (避難), earthquake (地震), and tsunami (津波), but also includes English (英語), translation (翻訳), multilingual (多言語), and local governments (自治体). This indicates a focus on multilingual communication efforts by local governments during disasters, particularly aimed at foreign residents.

Topic 2 includes foreign residents (外国人住民), technical intern training (技能実習), multicultural coexistence (多文化共生), daily life (生活), consultation (相談), and interpretation (通訳), which suggests that Topic 2 is about residency support for foreign resident. Additionally, terms like COVID-19 (コロナ) and medical care (医療) point that the context often involves health services.

Topic 3 is defined by terms such as workshops (講座), instructors (講師), participants (参加者), events (イベント), and experiences (体験). This topic reflects grassroots-level activities such as training sessions and outreach events related to Yasashii Nihongo, often organized by volunteers or foundations. The term ruby (ルビ)—phonetic annotations for kanji—underscores the linguistic accessibility aspect. The inclusion of international exchange (国際交流) supports the interpretation that Yasashii Nihongo are in the context for foreign people.

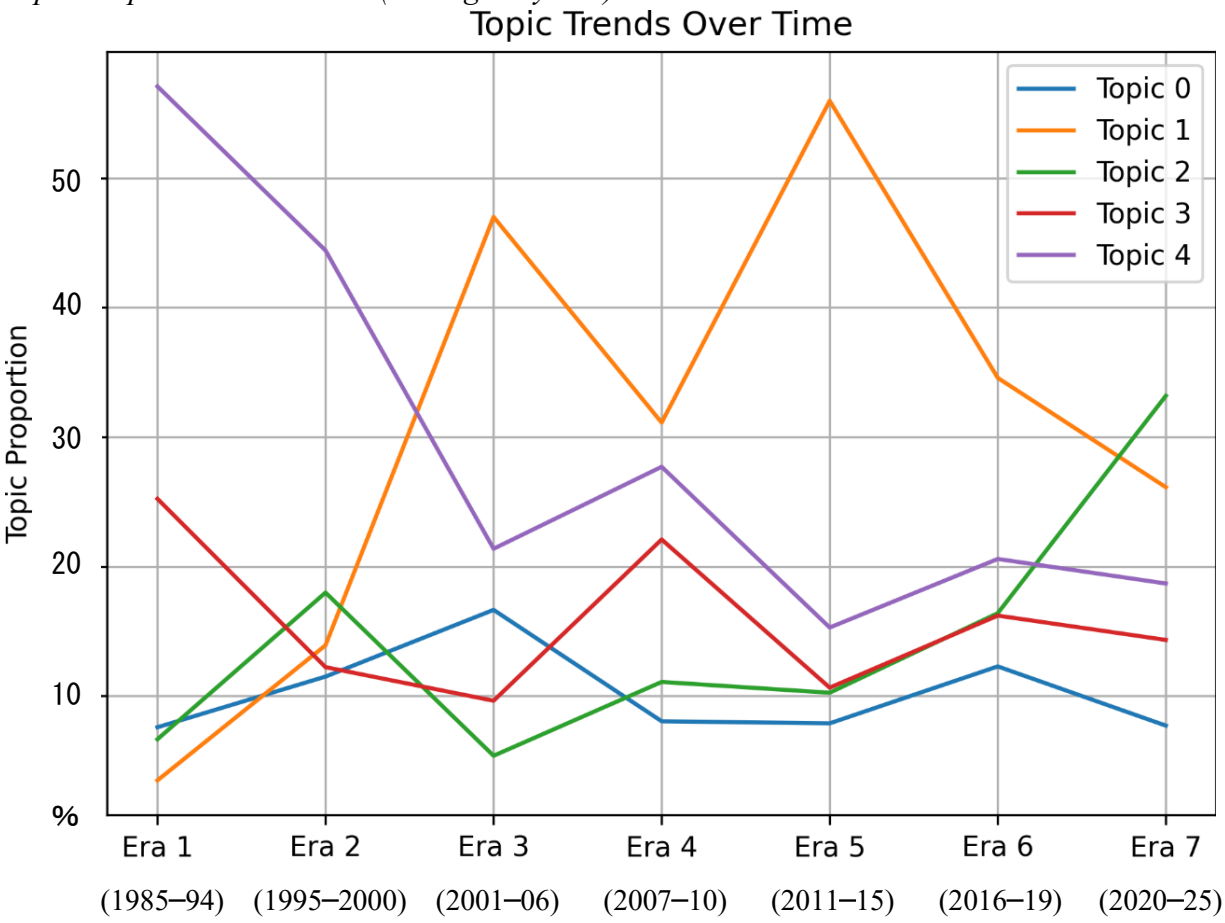
Topic 4 includes children (子ども), school (学校), classes (授業), students (生徒), and education (教育), clearly indicating a focus on school education. The co-occurrence of English (英語) and culture (文化) suggests that this topic primarily deals with educational support for children with foreign backgrounds.

Among the five topics, Topics 1 through 4 are all closely tied to foreign residents, whereas only Topic 0 focuses on support for other vulnerable populations. The diachronic changes in the proportions of these topics by Era are shown in Figure 2.

[16] Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) means a set of actions aimed at reducing the risks and impacts of natural disasters by preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from them.

Figure 2

Topic Proportions over Time (Averaged by Era)



A brief summary of the topics for reference is provided below.

Topic 0: Guides and DRR for the elderly and persons with disabilities

Topic 1: DRR communication for foreign residents

Topic 2: Residency support for foreign residents, with emphasis on medical contexts

Topic 3: Practices and dissemination activities of Yasashii Nihongo for foreigners

Topic 4: School education for children with foreign backgrounds

Topics that show an increasing trend over time are Topic 1, related to DRR for foreigners, and Topic 2, which focuses on residency support for foreign residents particularly in the medical context. Topic 1 had the lowest proportion in Era 1 but has consistently held a relatively high share in subsequent Eras. The two peaks seen in Era 3 and Era 5 may reflect the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, respectively. Topic 2 surpasses Topic 1 in Era 7, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020, which brought increased attention to the use of Yasashii Nihongo in the context of medical care for

foreigners.

In contrast, Topic 4, concerning school education for children with foreign backgrounds, shows a decreasing trend. While it accounted for nearly half of the articles in Era 1 and Era 2, its proportion steadily declined from Era 3 onward, largely being replaced by Topic 1. Topic 0 (lectures and DRR for the elderly and persons with disabilities) and Topic 3 (practices and promotion of Yasashii Nihongo) have remained relatively stable over the past 40 years. Topic 0 consistently accounts for around 10%, the lowest among all topics, while Topic 3 fluctuates around 20%. Despite their lower proportions, both topics appear as steady, ongoing themes in newspaper coverage.

4-3. The Diachronic Changes of the Term Frequency

The results of TF Analysis are summarized. For each Era, the 20 most frequently appearing nouns were visualized using Word Clouds. The diachronic changes from Era 1 through Era 7 are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Word Clouds Showing Topic Transitions Across Seven Periods

Era 5 (2011–2015)

Era 6 (2016–2019)

Era 7 (2020–2025)

Across all Eras, the most frequently occurring words over time were “foreigners” (外国人) and “disaster” (災害). The word “foreigners” consistently ranked among the top 20 across all Eras, while the word “disaster” appeared prominently in all Eras except Era 1. This aligns with the results of the LDA analysis, where Topic 1 Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for foreigners showed a strong diachronic presence.

The following examines the distinctive features of each Era, beginning with the earliest. In Era 1 (1985–1994), “foreigners” (外国人) was among the most frequent terms; however, the top three most frequent words were “China” (中国), “Asia” (アジア), and “international students” (留学生). “Korea” (韓国) also appeared within the top 20. This indicates that references to foreigners during this period were primarily focused on individuals from Asian countries. Additionally, although not within the top 20 in frequency, terms such as “Indochinese refugees” (インドシナ難民) and “Japanese Brazilians” (日系ブラジル人) were also observed, suggesting a broader, if less prominent, scope of foreigner-related discourse.

The rise of terms such as “international students” (留学生) and “study abroad” (留学) likely reflects Japan’s 1983 plan to host 100,000 students by 2000, and the increase in Chinese students after the 1978 Japan–China Peace and Friendship Treaty (“Japanese in an International Context”, 1988). No DRR-related terms appear, while “children” (子ども), “school” (学校), and “students” (生徒) are present, consistent with Topic 4’s prominence in the LDA results.

Figure 3a

Word Cloud for Era 1

Next, in Era 2 (1995–2000), DRR-related terms, including the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in January 1995, appear frequently. From this Era onward, both "foreigners" (外国人) and "disaster" (災害) consistently rank high. The university name "Hirosaki University" (弘前大学) known for its research on Yasashii Nihongo for disaster communication targeting foreigners, appears in the top 20. In addition, medical terms such as "medical care" (医療) and "doctor" (医師) rank among the top 20. Related words—including "hospital" (病院), "illness" (病気), "medical interpretation" (医療通訳), "pharmacist" (薬剤師), and "pharmacy" (薬局)—appear just outside the top 20. An article in 2000 notes challenges in medical support for the growing number of Nikkei residents following the 1990 Immigration Act revision ("Medical Care for Foreign Residents", 2000). This focus on medical issues in both disaster and foreign resident contexts aligns with the LDA findings.

Figure 3b

Word Cloud for Era 2

In Era 3 (2001–2006), DRR-related terms remained prominent, likely influenced by the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake. Terms such as "Hirosaki University" (弘前大学) and "Great

Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake” (阪神淡路大震災) continued to appear frequently, as they were repeatedly referenced when explaining the concept of Yasashii Nihongo. This suggests that the concept of Yasashii Nihongo was still in the process of becoming established among newspaper readers.

Figure 3c

Word Cloud for Era 3

In this Era, terms related to “elderly” (高齢者) and “persons with disabilities” (障害者) appeared in the top 20 for the first time, with words like “hearing impaired” (聴覚障害者) and “information disadvantaged” (情報弱者) also ranking highly outside the top 20. This suggests that Yasashii Nihongo began to be recognized not only as a communication tool for foreigners but also for vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled. Additionally, alongside “English” (英語), which appeared in Era 2, the term “multilingual” (多言語) entered the top 20 in Era 3, indicating increased awareness of non-English-speaking foreigners. Thus, Era 3 is characterized by an expansion of the target audience for Yasashii Nihongo.

In Era 4 (2007–2010), the terms “kanji” (漢字) and “ruby (furigana)” (ルビ) were prominently featured. Several articles covered discussions among volunteers about the appropriate use of furigana in creating information in Yasashii Nihongo. Additionally, words such as “foreign languages” (外国語), “foreign residents” (外国人住民), “living information” (生活情報), and “daily life” (生活) appeared in the top 20, while terms like “national pension” (国民年金), “childcare” (多言語), “health insurance card” (健康保険証), “garbage” (ごみ) and “ward office” (区役所) appeared just outside the top 20. Together with words like “field” (現場), “teaching materials” (教材), and “manual” (マニュアル), the Word Cloud suggests this era emphasized practical usage and grassroots activities focused on producing materials for supporting the daily lives of foreign residents using foreign languages and Yasashii Nihongo.

This trend also aligns with the increase in Topic 2 (residency support for foreign residents) and Topic 3 (practice and promotion activities) as identified by the LDA analysis.

Figure 3d

Word Cloud for Era 4

In Era 5 (2011–2015), DRR-related terms overwhelmingly dominated due to the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. The names of "Hirosaki University" (弘前大学) and Professor "Kazuyuki Sato" (佐藤和之) reappeared among the top 20, with many articles explaining the role of Yasashii Nihongo in the context of the disaster and its background. Although the 2012 relaxation of tourist visa regulations aimed to promote Japan as a tourism-oriented country, tourism-related terms were scarcely found even outside the top 20.

Figure 3e

Word Cloud for Era 5

In Era 6 (2016–2019), DRR-related terms such as "earthquake" (地震), "evacuation" (避難), and "tsunami" (津波), continued to dominate, likely influenced by events like the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake. However, unlike previous Eras, terms such as "Hirosaki University" and "Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake" did not rank among the top 20 and appeared

infrequently. Many of the remaining terms overlap with those already appearing in the Word Clouds of previous Eras, particularly those related to foreign residents.

An examination of the frequency list below the top 20 revealed that tourism-related terms—which had been largely absent from Eras 1 through 5—appeared for the first time with relatively high frequency in Era 6. These included “tourism” (観光), “foreign tourists” (外国人観光客), “foreign travelers” (外国人旅行者), “tourists” (観光客), “Tokyo Olympics” (東京オリンピック), and “hospitality” (おもてなし). For instance, the term ranked 20th, “translation” (翻訳) in the Word Cloud, occurred 60 times, while “foreign tourists” (外国人観光客) appeared 41 times, a frequency comparable to that of terms within the top 20.

Figure 3f

Word Cloud for Era 6

Finally, in Era 7 (2020–2025), the term “COVID-19” (コロナ) appears prominently, with related words such as “infection” (感染), “spread” (感染拡大), “vaccine” (ワクチン), and “vaccination” (接種) also frequently appearing outside the top 20. Due to the impact of events like the Noto Peninsula Earthquake in 2024 and increasing awareness of the potential Nankai Trough earthquake, terms related to earthquakes and DRR remain prevalent. Additionally, terms such as “foreign residents” (外国人住民), “multicultural coexistence” (多文化共生), and “technical intern training” (技能実習) rank highly. This reflects the 2024 decision to abolish the Technical Intern Training Program and transition to a new Development Employment System, indicating that Yasashii Nihongo is frequently discussed in the context of coexistence with foreign residents. Also, as in Era 5, tourism-related terms continued to appear, albeit outside the top 20.

Figure 3g

Word Cloud for Era 7

In summary, by employing TF Analysis, detailed content and Era-specific characteristics are successfuly observed.

4-4. Discourses on Citizens' Perceptions of Yasashii Nihongo

In this section, discourse extracted from newspaper articles and Togetter, a curation site on X, was qualitatively analyzed to examine public attitudes and perceptions towards Yasashii Nihongo. Due to space limitations, not all discourse can be introduced here; instead, key points are summarized. Translations from Japanese comments into English were performed by the author. Since 90% of the extracted discourse originates from Era 6 (2016–2019) and Era 7 (2020–2025), a correlation was observed between the period of heightened public interest in Yasashii Nihongo and the surge in newspaper articles containing the term.

A 2015 Togetter collection about NHK news written in Yasashii Nihongo about heavy snowfall in Sapporo revealed contrasting public reactions, reflecting varied levels of understanding and recognition of Yasashii Nihongo among Japanese citizens (Togetter, 2015).

(1) "Just write it in English, lol."

(2) "That's why you should just write it in English..."

(3) "Other than concerns about possible misinterpretations in English or wanting to help with Japanese language study, I can't think of any reason to use simplified Japanese for foreigners."

(4) "Maybe I guess they chose to go with just simple Japanese because if they used English, they'd also have to provide versions in Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, etc."

(5) “Criticizing this for not being in English misses the point. It shows a strange assumption that foreigners can’t read even simple Japanese but can all read English.”

(6) “What about foreigners living in Japan whose native language isn’t English—mightn’t Japanese be more useful for them? Do all foreigners understand English?”

(7) “Not all foreigners are from English-speaking countries.”

(8) “They’re not necessarily native English speakers.”

As seen in comments (1) to (4), there appears to be a prevailing ideology assuming that all foreigners can use English, along with considerable skepticism toward the idea of using Japanese—rather than English—for communicating information to non-Japanese residents. Discourse extracted from 2016 onward revealed not only contexts targeting traditionally information-vulnerable groups such as foreigners, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, but also an increasing number of voices from general Japanese citizens themselves expressing a desire to be addressed in Yasashii Nihongo as information recipients. For example, a 79-year-old man submitted a letter to *Asahi Shimbun* criticizing the use of the katakana term “shake-out” (シェイクアウト), arguing that the concept already existed in Japanese as “disaster drill” (避難訓練) (“Voice What is Shake Out?”, 2016). A 46-year-old woman pointed out the difficulty in understanding evacuation instructions during natural disasters due to complex kanji expressions (“Voice Convey Disaster Information Simply”, 2018). A 71-year-old man criticized a politician for using the obscure term “*negutte iru*” (“ignoring”) in a press conference and argued that the government should take the lead in adopting Yasashii Nihongo (“Voice With Foreign Residents”, 2021).

In newspaper articles, opinions were presented from both foreign residents and Japanese citizens, and no negative comments toward the use of Yasashii Nihongo were found. However, on Togetter, while supportive reactions were more common overall, some negative or critical perspectives were also observed. For example, in a compilation about NHK’s *NEWS WEB EASY*, most tweets praised its clarity, though one critical comment was noted (Togetter, 2019).

(9) “This raises a very complex issue. As the number of foreigners (tourists/workers) in Japan increases, there is a growing tendency to simplify all Japanese expressions. However, this risks undermining the richness and complexity inherent in the Japanese language. While

intellectuals who read authors like Soseki and Ogai may be able to adapt, what will happen to those who rely solely on television and the internet?"

This comment (9) drew responses questioning whether the view was overly extreme, with others suggesting that Yasashii Nihongo could serve as an effective stage in Japanese language learning.

In another Togetter collection on signage using pictograms along with Yasashii Nihongo, the following tweet was posted (Togetter, 2021).

(10) "If Yasashii Nihongo becomes widespread throughout Japan, there may no longer be a need to learn more complex Japanese, which could lead to its decline."

Among the six Togetter compilations analyzed, a 2022 collection stood out with the highest number of comments and shares on platforms like X (Twitter) and Facebook. The curated collection detailed an initiative at an elementary school in Osaka, where the increase in students from abroad prompted the school to switch its letters to parents into Yasashii Nihongo (Togetter, 2022). This initiative involved omitting traditional seasonal greetings like "梅雨の候、保護者の皆さまにおかれましては (*Tsuyu no kō, hogosha no minasama ni okaremasite wa*, As we enter the rainy season, dear parents and guardians)," simplifying difficult expressions, adding furigana to kanji, and replacing euphemistic phrases like "ご遠慮ください (*go-enryo kudasai*, please refrain)" with more direct expressions "しないで下さい (*shinaide kudasai*, do not do it)."

In response, many Japanese citizens from parenting generations expressed positive reactions, stating that simplified Japanese was also very helpful for themselves. This trend reflects a preference for short and concise sentences, likely influenced by the widespread everyday use of online chat platforms such as Slack and LINE, where brief messaging has become the norm.

(11) "With tools like Teams and Slack becoming widespread, there's a shared understanding that long texts can be a burden for readers."

(12) "School handouts are mostly just notices, so it's better to keep them simple and easy to understand rather than using elaborate expressions. Concise writing is clearer than overly polite in Slack messages."

(13) "Isn't the idea to write like you do on LINE?"

On the other hand, some comments express critical perspectives.

(14) “It’s definitely not a good thing, but I guess it can’t be helped.”

(15) “This is how cultural destruction happens.”

(16) “As a former student, I used to think these adult-style writings were cool.”

(17) “Since not everyone will agree anyway, let’s just go with the more efficient way.”

(18) “At my children’s school, because there are many foreigners, all emails are entirely in hiragana, which makes them extremely hard to read.”

Comments such as “definitely not a good thing” in (14) and “cultural destruction” in (15) indicate that these changes are perceived negatively. Other remarks also reflect a position of partial disagreement with the shift of all school letters into Yasashii Nihongo. The most common point of criticism concerns that traditional Japanese expressions and culturally rich phrasing are being excluded in Yasashii Nihongo texts because they are seen as obstacles to clarity, raising various worries about the broader effects of this exclusion.

(19) “There are pros and cons. School handouts serve as an opportunity for children to directly experience and learn traditional Japanese culture through letter-writing styles and expressions. Losing that would be concerning unless proper follow-up support is provided. Ideally, having the original version, this vesion, and an English translation would be best—but that’s unrealistic.”

(20) “While I think this is a good approach, it also raises the question of how to compensate for the reduced opportunities to encounter seasonal greetings and similar expressions.”

(21) “Demanding the complete elimination of seasonal greetings, euphemisms, and idioms from Japanese could lower public intelligence, cause cultural decline, and even hinder effective communication. As others have said, it’s better to separate formal notices from greetings, adjust language according to necessity, and remove non-essential parts. It’s not about ‘stopping difficult language’ but about ‘using each language style appropriately.’”

These comments commonly regard seasonal greetings, euphemistic expressions, and traditional

letter-writing styles as “Inherited Cultural Values” or “Symbols of Cultivated Intelligence.” This perspective overlaps with the concerns raised in comments (9), (10), and (14)–(18).

There was also concern that readers might find the texts in Yasashii Nihongo rude, potentially causing trouble. As noted in Section 2-5, elements removed for clarity in Yasashii Nihongo often play important roles in Japanese communication—such as preserving the listener’s face, showing respect, and fostering smooth relationships—so their unconsidered omission may result in complaints or misunderstandings.

(22) “It is about manners or clarity. This might turn into a longer debate than expected.”

(23) “It’s tricky because there is a case which cause a complaint like ‘lacking dignity!’ at my child’s school.”

(24) “They can do this precisely because ‘there are many foreign students and their parents.’ If this happened at a typical Japanese school, there could be some parents probably storm in, yelling that it’s ‘destroying long-standing traditions’ and ‘extremely rude not to include seasonal greetings.’”

These comments reflect an understanding that elements omitted in Yasashii Nihongo function as “Agents of Communicative Politeness”.

Given the significant public attention on this curated collection, it is evident that these issues resonate with many Japanese citizens. For native speakers, the omission of such linguistic features in Yasashii Nihongo raises genuine concerns about the decline of Japanese based on commonly shared values for Japanese language such as Inherited Cultural Values, Symbols of Cultivated Intelligence, and Agents of Communicative Politeness.

Finally, some users expressed a vague sense of discomfort with the term “Yasashii Nihongo.”

(25) “The initiative itself is excellent, but the term Yasashii Nihongo feels somewhat off to me. I can’t quite say what a better term would be, though…”

► (26) “It’s not 優しい (*kind*), but 易しい (*easy*) Japanese, so I think it’s actually a perfectly accurate expression.”

►►(27) “They probably intended it as a double meaning, but including that nuance makes me question whether it’s really the best possible word choice. If the goal is to say ‘easy,’ then something like *kantan-na Nihongo* might get the message across more clearly.”

Comment (27) shows an awareness of the dual meanings of Yasashii—“kind” and “easy”—and questions whether the latter is more fitting in this context. This reflects a subtle unease with the connotation of “kindness” in describing the linguistic framework designed primarily to enhance “clarity” and “accessibility.”

5. Discussion

5-1. The Diachronic Development of Yasashii Nihongo over Four Decades

This section examines Research Question 1 (What kinds of topics and social contexts are associated with newspaper articles that contain the term Yasashii Nihongo over the forty-year period from 1985 to 2025?). For convenience, Yasashii Nihongo is occasionally abbreviated as YN in this chapter, although the full term is used when clarity is needed.

5-1-1. Three Phases in the Trajectory of Yasashii Nihongo

First, analysis of article frequency over the 40-year period revealed that the number of newspaper articles containing the term Yasashii Nihongo has surged dramatically, especially within just the past decade, beginning around 2016 (Figure 1). This approach allowed us to trace how the term gradually gained recognition and became established in newspapers, ultimately highlighting that this notable rise is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Text mining results indicated that YN has been discussed predominantly in contexts targeting foreigners. According to the results of LDA, Topic 0 (YN for elderly people and persons with disabilities) accounted for only around 10% of the data, maintaining the lowest proportion across the entire period (Figure 2). In contrast, Topics 1 through 4 were all concerned with contexts involving foreign people. While it is possible that other minor topics exist other than the five topics, the data suggest that newspaper articles overwhelmingly discuss YN in relation to foreigners. TF Analysis results also support this interpretation, as the term “foreigners” (外国人) appeared prominently in the Word Clouds for all Eras (Figure 3). As noted in Section 2-6, academic research on YN has exclusively focused on non-native speakers of

Japanese. Therefore, the analysis confirms that YN, both academically and in practice, is still largely confined to a framework centered on foreigners as its primary audience.

In terms of context, the results of LDA and TF Analysis indicate that, since the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, the term Yasashii Nihongo has most frequently appeared in the context of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and this trend has continued consistently to the present. The second most common context is that of residence support for foreign residents, particularly in medical settings.

Following the diachronic framework used by Schriver (2017) in summarizing the evolution of Plain English in the U.S., the 40-year period of Yasashii Nihongo from 1985 to 2025 can be broadly divided into three phases: the Japanese Language Education Phase, the Dissemination Phase, and the Development Phase.

(1) Phase for Japanese Language Education: Era 1 (Prior to 1995)

Although the number of articles was very small, the term Yasashii Nihongo was already in use before 1995, primarily within the context of Japanese language education. The majority of foreign nationals discussed in this Era were from Asian countries. Moreover, the LDA results showed that Topic 4 (school education for children with foreign backgrounds) accounted for over 50% of the articles in this Era, and TF Analysis ranked words such as “children” and “school” highly. A reading of the articles revealed that the term’s usage during this period included titles of Japanese language education courses implemented by municipalities, names of Japanese language learning programs broadcast by Korean public television, and titles of textbooks for learning Japanese.

In addition, an article reported on a report compiled by the National Language Council, an advisory body to the Minister of Education, which stated that “the necessity of Yasashii Nihongo to assist foreign learners of Japanese, explicitly mentioned in the interim report, was omitted from the final report and replaced with a more abstract expression regarding ‘response to the international spread of Japanese’” (“Is the ‘Ra-Nuki’ Form Correct Japanese?”, 1993). This indicates that although the concept of Yasashii Nihongo was considered at the national advisory level within the context of Japanese language education, concrete initiatives had yet to materialize.

Additionally, the Word Cloud for Era 1 (Figure 3a) includes the term “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (世界人権宣言). This reflects the newspaper articles covering a contest held by Amnesty International that invited submissions of translations of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights into easy-to-understand Japanese. One article stated, “Would you like to try translating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into easy *Yasashii Nihongo* (*wakariyasuku yasashii nihongo*)?” (“Translation Contest”, 1991). Similarly, another article in 1993 reported the contest for translations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The aim of these initiatives was to create Japanese translations accessible to anyone and thereby encourage consideration of “human rights”. In other words, the intended audience here was the general public (native Japanese speakers), indicating that Yasashii Nihongo at this point functioned as a form of Plain Language. At this phase, it is unclear whether Yasashii Nihongo was regarded merely as a string of an adjective and a noun or as an established concept; however, it is likely that it had not yet developed into a fully formed concept and was rather a descriptive phrase. In any case, as in Europe where the idea of human rights contributed to the development of Easy Language, it can be confirmed that in Japan, too, there were occasions when easy-to-understand language was emphasized in the context of “human rights.”

(2) Dissemination Phase: Era 2–Era 5 (1995–2015)

The concept of YN spread primarily through practical implementation and outreach activities between approximately 1995 and 2015. During the Phase for Japanese Language Education (Era 1), all 19 relevant articles were reviewed, and none related to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). This empirically confirms that the association of the term Yasashii Nihongo with DRR first emerged and developed after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995.

TF Analysis results revealed that explanations of the term Yasashii Nihongo frequently appeared with keywords such as “Hirosaki University” (弘前大学) and “Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake” (阪神淡路大震災). Furthermore, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake once again brought attention to the history and role of YN in disaster situations. Additionally, the Word Cloud for Era 3 (2001–2006) (Figure 3c) showed the emergence of terms like “elderly” (高齢者) and “disabled” (障害者), as well as “multilingual” (多言語) alongside “English” (英語), suggesting an expansion of YN’s target audience. Era 4 (2001–2006) also featured frequent discussions on practitioners’ trial-and-error experiences implementing YN.

However, during this period, there is some evidence that the term and concept of YN had not yet fully penetrated society. For example, between 2010 and 2017, inconsistencies in the notation of Yasashii Nihongo appeared. As seen in a 2014 article titled “*Saigaijōhō Kantan Nihongo de* (Disaster Information in Simple Japanese)” (“Disaster Information in Simple Japanese”, 2014), alternative expressions such as “*Kantan Nihongo*”, “*Kantan na Nihongo*” or

"*Kan'i Nihongo*"—all of which mean "simple Japanese"—were used in headlines, while the term Yasashii Nihongo appeared within the article accompanied by brief explanations. Moreover, comments collected in the 2015 Togetter, such as comments (1)–(4), indicate that the purpose and significance of YN were still not widely understood, demonstrating that the conceptual recognition of YN remained at an intermediate stage.

(3) Development Phase: Era 6–Era 7 (2016–present)

Since 2016, the number of newspaper articles that include the term Yasashii Nihongo has increased rapidly, with 2016 and 2019 emerging as key turning points in this growth. In particular, *Asahi Shimbun* ran a series titled *(To the Field!) Yasashii Nihongo* from July 1 to July 5, 2019. It was also around this time that YN began to attract the attention of the general Japanese public. Among the six relevant Togetter collections extracted for this study, four were created between 2021 and 2023. The Development Phase will be explored in more detail in the next sub-section 5-1-2.

To summarize the developments over the past 40 years, in the early priod, the term Yasashii Nihongo appeared occasionally in the context of Japanese language education. Around the same time, initial connections between Yasashii Nihongo—or easy-to-understand communication style—and human rights discourse also began to emerge as a medium for conveying human rights principles, which can be interpreted as having the nature of Plain Language aimed at the general Japanese public. While the number of foreign residents increased due to the revision of the Immigration Act and the acceptance of international students, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake occurred in 1995. As a result, Yasashii Nihongo was conceptualized and its context shifted toward Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), particularly targeting non-native speakers of Japanese. This trend was reinforced by the increasing presence of foreign residents and the resulting expansion of practical support initiatives. Also, Japan's high seismic activity further contributed to the frequent appearance of Yasashii Nihongo in media coverage related to disaster communication. Consequently, the term has become strongly associated with "foreigners" (外国人) and "disasters" (災害) in the public discourse.

5-1-2. The Development Phase of Yasashii Nihongo

This subsection provides a detailed examination of the Development Phase beginning in 2016. The analysis revealed that 2016 and 2019, both falling within Era 6, were key turning points in

the frequency of newspaper articles containing the term Yasashii Nihongo. During this Era, the number of articles, which had previously remained relatively stable, began to increase rapidly.

Firstly, the societal entrenchment of the concept of YN allowed it to be applied in new contexts beyond its original scope. TF Analysis shows that references to “Hirosaki University” (弘前大学) where Sato—one of the central developers of YN—is affiliated, decreased in Era 6. This may reflect a decline in explanatory articles on the background and development of YN, suggesting that media outlets had begun to assume a certain level of reader familiarity with the concept after two decades of public dissemination.

As YN became more widely recognized, it began to appear in new discursive contexts beyond its original association with DRR and residency support. In the LDA line graph (Figure 2), Era 6 and 7 show a relatively balanced distribution across multiple topics, indicating that the discourse was no longer dominated by certain topics. This diversification, together with the cumulative layering of discourse over time, likely contributed to the increase in article volume. Concrete examples of these new contexts include its use in business settings, a company conducting internal communication training using YN. From 2019 and 2022 the uses of YN as a communication tool between schools and parents also were reported, overlapping with the 2022 Togetter collection that drew significant public attention. Additionally, slightly before the Development Phase start, YN was used as a form of Plain Language targeting the general Japanese public in political and legal contexts. For example, a 2015 article discussed demands that political manifestos be written in YN during opposition to the security legislation (“Security Legislation”, 2015). A 2011 article reported on efforts to rewrite the Dementia Basic Law in YN to improve public understanding (“Reading the Dementia Basic Law”, 2024).

In addition, TF Analysis reveals that tourism-related words, which had not been observed previously, appeared during the Development Phase, Eras 6 and 7. One possible reason why YN has not been widely utilized in the context of tourism is that many foreign tourists are not expected to have beginner-level Japanese proficiency, and that the tourism and hospitality industries can generally secure personnel who are already capable of providing multilingual support.

Considering these backgrounds, in 2016, the Japanese government announced its goal of increasing the number of inbound tourists. That same year, a new initiative titled *Yasashii Nihongo Tourism* was launched in Yanagawa City, Fukuoka Prefecture. This project was based on the expectation that many tourists from countries and regions such as Taiwan—where a

relatively high number of people study Japanese—would seek an immersive experience using the Japanese language in Japan. The initiative aimed to provide such tourists with *Omotenashi* (hospitality) through YN (Yasashii Nihongo Tourism, n.d). Such efforts may have supported the application of YN in tourism-related contexts, which had previously received little attention.

Finally, the sharp increase in article numbers—from 38 in the previous year to 72 in 2019—appears to coincide with a major turning point in Japan's immigration policy. In 2018, the government introduced the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) system to address labor shortages in key industries, and the full-scale acceptance of foreign workers began in April 2019. This policy shift was widely regarded as a de facto move toward the acceptance of migrants. The anticipated rapid increase in the foreign resident population likely contributed to a surge in public and media attention toward YN. Indeed, multiple articles including the term YN between December 2018 and 2019 referenced the SSW system.

For instance, a 2019 article titled "Japan at a Turning Point in Accepting Foreigners" discussed the start of the new imperial era, Reiwa, on May 1, and linked it to the rising number of foreign workers under the SSW system, framing it as part of a broader societal transformation ("Japan at a Turning Point", 2019). In addition, a government plan in 2016 to host 300,000 international students by 2020 had already been achieved by 2019, with approximately 310,000 students. These overlapping developments made the coexistence with foreign nationals increasingly visible in public discourse. The symbolic beginning of a "new era" under the Reiwa name may have further encouraged this shift in public consciousness, contributing to heightened attention to YN across various social domains.

5-2. Comparison with Sweden and Features of Yasashii Nihongo

This section discusses Research Question 2 (What characteristics can be observed in Yasashii Nihongo and the surrounding language ideologies when compared to the Swedish case?). As described in Sections 2-3, Sweden has established the use of Plain Swedish for clear communication from government agencies to the general public through the Language Act (SFS 2009:600). Easy Swedish books have been produced since 1968, and the Easy Swedish media outlet *8 Sidor* has been published since 1984. In contrast, in Japan, YN as a single concept began to spread after 1995, later expanding into various contexts and thus becoming somewhat ambiguous in its definition. While this difference should be attributed to various historical and social factors, this section focuses on the differing approaches of each concept and the

contrasting social values deemed important, in order to highlight the features of YN in comparison to the Swedish case.

First, in Sweden, both Plain Swedish and Easy Swedish originated in contexts targeting the everyday situations of the general population, Swedish nationals. It was only later that immigrants from abroad became included as a target audience for Easy Swedish. This approach led early recognition by the majority population and facilitated the development of these communication styles. In contrast, YN in Japan began in a highly limited context: providing information to foreigners during disasters. Because the majority population rarely perceived it as relevant to themselves, its dissemination and development in society have taken more time compared to Sweden.

However, the analysis of discourse extracted from newspaper articles and Togetter posts (Section 4-4) reveals that in recent years, native Japanese speakers increasingly recognize the convenience of YN in contexts where they themselves are the recipients of information. For example, opinions submitted to newspapers called for the use of YN as an easy-to-understand language in newspaper expressions, disaster information, and politicians' speeches. Similarly, on Togetter, there are numerous positive comments regarding the use of YN in letters sent from schools to parents. This can be interpreted as a sign that, like Plain Swedish in Sweden, the majority—native Japanese speakers—are beginning to appreciate the effectiveness of YN.

Next, social values also influence how Plain Language and Easy Language are perceived by society. In Sweden, there is a background of egalitarian ideals supporting the class system abolition, women's liberation, and the human rights of people with disabilities. The value that equal access should be guaranteed to all people is also reflected in the natural right to enjoy nature and the principle of information transparency, which holds that documents and information held by the government should generally be open to the public. These social values have likely facilitated the relatively smooth dissemination of Plain Swedish and Easy Swedish, which aim for information transparency and accessibility.

Negative discourse or opposition toward Plain Swedish and Easy Swedish is rarely found in the literature reviewed by the author. The only example identified was when the Centre for Easy-to-Read introduced Easy Language materials for school education: some educators were initially skeptical, viewing them as inferior and potentially limiting students' vocabulary development. As their use increased, however, acceptance grew and demand for these resources also rose (Bohman, 2021).

Regarding social values in Japan, discourse on Togetter revealed citizens' negative or critical opinions toward YN. Section 4-4 interprets these opinions as reflecting various issues related to the exclusion of traditional expressions and culturally nuanced phrases by YN. These opinions commonly share some ideology in the Japanese language which can be regarded as "inherited cultural values," "symbols of cultivated intelligence," and "agents of communicative politeness." Tatekawa's comment in Section 2-7 can be seen as including "inherited cultural values" and "symbols of cultivated intelligence." which are not be fully captured by Iori's framework of "the Cult of Difficulty (*Muzukashisa eno shinko*)."

When compared with the Swedish case, the initial reactions of educators to Easy Swedish materials can be understood as involving "symbols of cultivated intelligence," since they viewed the use of Easy Swedish in school education as potentially limiting students' vocabulary development. Similarly, in the UK example introduced in Section 2-2, the criticism of Plain Language that prohibited the use of Latin-derived words in council documents argued that it diminishes the richness of language, reflecting "inherited cultural values."

These cases indicate that similar social values may underlie negative reactions to Plain Language and Easy Language not only in Japan but also in Sweden and other countries. In Japanese, expressions and communication styles that may function as "agents of communicative politeness" are also important, suggesting that features such as euphemistic forms and politeness strategies could constitute a distinctive point of discussion.

The findings indicate that, despite growing recognition of YN's accessibility, persistent social values and language ideologies continue to influence critical perceptions. In this context, attempting to enforce YN through top-down or artificial measures would be unrealistic and could lead to societal division. Consequently, careful consideration and thoughtful approaches are essential for promoting YN effectively.

5-3. Potential Impact of Yasashii Nihongo on the Japanese Language

This section considers Research Question 3 (In what ways might Yasashii Nihongo influence the future of the Japanese language and shape language ideologies in Japanese society?). The potential impacts of the spread of Yasashii Nihongo can be broadly categorized into two main aspects: the possible simplification of Japanese itself, which would also affect native speakers, and the further blurring of the conceptual boundaries of YN. This section also considers measures to address the risks associated with these developments.

Previous discussions make it clear that the use of YN has spread across diverse contexts, and as more native Japanese speakers encounter YN, an increasing number of them are evaluating its clarity and effectiveness from a personal perspective—that is, as part of their own linguistic experience. This trend suggests the potential simplification of the standard Japanese and the possible development of a new linguistic style akin to Plain Japanese. Factors contributing to this include not only the spread of YN itself but also the widespread use of online chat communication like Slack and LINE as seen in Togetter comments (11)–(13), the fragmented information dissemination via social media, and the rise of generative AI capable of automatic summarization.

At first glance, these trends might suggest that Japanese citizens hold a positive view toward the simplification of the Japanese language. However, as seen in Section 5-2, shared values regarding the Japanese language give rise to critical opinions as well, making it by no means easy to eliminate expressions rooted in the language for the sake of clarity and simplification. The Togetter collection regarding the use of YN in letters from schools to parents attracted various critical responses and high attention. In contrast, a collection concerning a restaurant chain's use of YN in recruitment targetting foreign staff showed no critical opinions (Togetter, 2023). This difference suggests that the use of YN in contexts targeting only foreigners is generally unproblematic, whereas issues arise when it is adapted for communication involving native Japanese speakers as well. Therefore, the deliberate promotion of simplification of the Japanese language may provoke social backlash and confusion. In order to avoid the risks, it is desirable to introduce the idea of IJ, which distinguishes between Japanese as their identity and the target of language ideologies, and Japanese as a tool for intercultural communication, detached from the ethnic and cultural identity of native speakers. This detachment could contribute less criticism.

Furthermore, the philosophy of IJ could serve not only to mitigate critical reactions from native Japanese speakers toward YN, but also to help create a society in which non-native speakers are not disadvantaged by their non-nativeness. Concrete ways to promote the principles of IJ might include incorporating them into moral education or Japanese language classes in schools, as well as including them in public-sector training on intercultural communication.

Another potential impact of the development of YN is the further blurring of the concept of YN. As Kimura (2024) points out, while its use continues to expand, there is a risk that the

rights of those who should benefit from its convenience remain unclear. The analysis of newspaper articles confirmed that YN is overwhelmingly discussed in contexts targeting non-native speakers, while other groups, such as the elderly or people with disabilities, receive little attention. Academic research has similarly concentrated on the context targeting foreign people. Even after 20 years of the dissemination phase and 10 years of the development phase, YN has not expanded beyond this scope in practice. One possible reason for this is the conceptual ambiguity of YN itself.

Moreover, as Uchinami et al. (2017) noted, the features that make Japanese "easy to understand" are likely to differ depending on the intended audience. Therefore, while it may be useful to continue using Yasashii Nihongo as an established umbrella term, there is a growing need to develop more finely differentiated concepts and to promote empirical research, especially for non-foreigner contexts such as persons with disabilities and the elderly.

6. Conclusion

This study was designed to investigate the diachronic change of "Yasashii Nihongo" over a forty-year period (1985–2025). Yasashii Nihongo was originally developed as a communication approach following the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995, in response to the difficulty many foreign residents faced in understanding emergency instructions in Japanese. Since then, it has evolved into a communication tool used not only in disaster contexts but also in various everyday settings. Governmental and municipal documents now describe Yasashii Nihongo as a form of Japanese targeting not only foreigners, but also Japanese children, elderly people and persons with disabilities.

This research adopted an empirical approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. As primary data, 634 newspaper articles containing the term Yasashii Nihongo were collected from the Yomiuri and Asahi Shimbun databases, which are the most widely circulated newspapers in Japan. These articles, covering the period from 1985 to May 2025, formed the corpus for analysis. In addition to examining annual article frequencies, text mining techniques—LDA Topic Modeling and Term Frequency Analysis—were applied to reveal diachronic shifts in the topics and contexts in which Yasashii Nihongo has been discussed.

Moreover, a comparative perspective was introduced by referencing the case of Sweden to highlight the language ideologies and communicative approaches. To capture public discourse not readily accessible through quantitative methods, citizen's opinion pieces in newspapers and commentaries of X (formerly Twitter) from the curated platform Togetter were qualitatively analyzed. Ultimately, this study aims to consider the potential impacts that Yasashii Nihongo may have on the Japanese language and Japanese language ideologies, as well as to provide insights into the possible future directions of the Japanese language.

This chapter briefly summarizes the answers to the three research questions, acknowledges methodological limitations, and outlines directions for future research. The significance of examining Yasashii Nihongo in the context of Japan's linguistic future is also reaffirmed.

Research Question 1: What kinds of topics and social contexts are associated with newspaper articles that contain the term Yasashii Nihongo over the forty-year period from 1985 to 2025?

The analysis identified three distinct chronological phases of Yasashii Nihongo: the Phase for Japanese Language Education (1985–1994), the Dissemination Phase (1995–2015), and the Development Phase (2016–2025). A key finding is that over the entire forty-year span, the target group of the concept Yasashii Nihongo was overwhelmingly framed in relation to foreign nationals, with very few instances related to other groups like the elderly or people with disabilities. Following the 1995 earthquake, discourse became heavily centered on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), followed by contexts such as resident support services—especially healthcare—for foreign residents. Notably and somewhat unexpectedly, the rapid increase in article volume and public interest occurred primarily within the past decade, with 2016 and 2019 emerging as key turning points.

Although article counts were minimal, the term Yasashii Nihongo appeared even before 1995 in contexts related to Japanese language education. The increase in foreign workers and international students following the 1990 amendment to Japan's Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act set the stage for its emergence. With the 1995 earthquake, the concept transitioned to DRR discourse. Over the ensuing 20 years, Yasashii Nihongo became a recurring theme in disaster communication. From 2016, as the term became more embedded in public awareness, its application diversified and expanded into new contexts, thereby increasing its visibility. The launch of the Specified Skilled Worker visa in 2019 also intensified discourse

around coexistence with foreign residents and contributed to renewed interest in Yasashii Nihongo.

Research Question 2: What characteristics can be observed in Yasashii Nihongo and the surrounding language ideologies when compared to the Swedish case?

Significant differences were found in the historical development of accessible communication in Japan and Sweden. In Sweden, Plain Swedish (*klarspråk*) for general citizens and Easy Swedish (*lättläst*) for those with intellectual disabilities developed in parallel, with both being used in everyday contexts. This likely contributed to their broad acceptance and integration into Swedish society. In contrast, the development of Yasashii Nihongo started from a limited setting specifically for foreigners during emergencies, which constrained its wider diffusion.

Differences in societal values were also evident. Sweden's long-standing commitment to equality and institutional emphasis on accessibility helped facilitate the acceptance of plain and easy language strategies. In Japan, this study identified three types of shared values regarding the Japanese language: it is regarded as a bearer of inherited cultural values, a symbol of cultivated intelligence, and an agent of communicative politeness. The first two values have also been observed in other countries' attitudes toward their national languages. The deeply rooted identities associated with the language have led to concerns that changes brought about by Yasashii Nihongo might undermine these traditional linguistic ideals. These language ideologies present a cultural challenge, requiring careful and culturally sensitive engagement when promoting Yasashii Nihongo.

Research Question 3: In what ways might Yasashii Nihongo influence the future of the Japanese language and shape language ideologies in Japanese society?

With the wide spread of Yasashii Nihongo, the study confirmed a growing tendency among native Japanese speakers to appreciate its convenience from their own standpoint as recipients. This trend suggests the potential simplification of the standard Japanese and the possible emergence of a form of Plain Japanese for native speakers. At the same time, concerns remain about changes of the Japanese language, and simplification can provoke critical reactions, particularly when Yasashii Nihongo is applied in contexts involving native speakers. To mitigate these risks, introducing the concept of "International Japanese"—which distinguishes between Japanese as a marker of ethnic or cultural identity and Japanese as a tool for intercultural communication—can be effective. It can also help foster a society where non-native speakers are not disadvantaged by their non-nativeness.

As the contexts for Yasashii Nihongo broaden, its conceptual boundaries may become increasingly blurred. Although its use continues to expand, there is a risk that the needs of those who are intended to benefit from it may not be fully addressed. The study revealed that over the past four decades, Yasashii Nihongo has largely focused on foreign audiences, leaving other groups, such as the elderly or people with disabilities, underrepresented. This limitation can be attributed to the conceptual ambiguity of Yasashii Nihongo. While maintaining it as an overarching term, there is an increasing need to develop more precisely defined concepts and to advance empirical research in contexts and for target groups beyond its original scope.

Methodologically, the exclusive focus on newspaper articles constitutes a limitation. Future studies should examine a wider range of materials, such as academic papers and policy documents, to enhance validity. Additionally, while this study incorporated public sentiment, generalizations should be made with caution—particularly given the selective nature of Togetter curation. Despite these limitations, this thesis demonstrates that data-driven text mining methods can produce replicable and insightful results. It thus contributes a new methodological approach to Yasashii Nihongo research, which has been dominated by qualitative case studies.

Future research should continue to monitor the development of Yasashii Nihongo, and it requires paying close attention to evolving language ideologies and shifting social values as well. Multilingual support remains crucial; Yasashii Nihongo should not serve as a substitute for comprehensive multilingualism. The provision of information in multiple languages is an important recognition of the identities and dignity of people from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, as Japan becomes increasingly multicultural, research into multiethnolects may offer valuable insights into how the Japanese language is changing.

Understanding the Japanese language environment through the lens of Yasashii Nihongo offers a crucial perspective for imagining the future of Japanese. Even among native speakers of Japanese, values and perspectives can differ. In this context, it is crucial to consider how a society can be built that avoids divisions caused by differing social views and positions, while ensuring that all people can live comfortably. The key to addressing the challenge of how to ensure equitable access to information for a diverse population—while respecting the cultural values, traditions, and identity historically associated with the Japanese language—may lie in the continued study of Yasashii Nihongo.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Text Mining Procedure and Code

A.1 Morphological Analysis

```
import MeCab
import re

path = '-r /etc/mecabrc -d /usr/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/mecab/dic/mecab-ipadic-neologd -u ./custom.dic'

tagger = MeCab.Tagger(path)

stopwords = ['する', 'いる', 'ある', 'こと', 'これ', 'さん', 'して', 'それ', 'ため', 'よう', 'もの', 'という', 'など', 'なっ', 'ので', 'から', 'まで', 'また', 'そして', 'ただし', 'なら', 'でも', 'られ', 'ような', 'なり', 'でき', 'いく', 'くる', 'おり', 'さらに', 'その', 'この', 'あの', '私', 'あなた', '彼', '彼女', 'です', 'ます', 'ました', 'ません', 'でした', 'だっ', 'じゃ', 'なる', 'の', 'ん', 'できる', 'れる', 'ば', 'O', 'ゾ', 'もづ', 'わが国', 'われわれ', '私たち', 'そのため', '行なう', 'おこなう', 'やさしい日本語', '関係者', '例文', '日本', '日本語', '日本人', '集', 'もと', '地', '人達', '人', '計画', '取り組み', '関心', 'コーナー', '同県', '県', '市', '投稿', '今回', '面', '記者', 'ぶり', '州', '連載', '使用', '表記', '方', '通常', '普通', '本来', '正常', 'ひとつ', '原因', '提供', '年度', '今年度', '年', '目', '耳', '・', '手', 'ほか', '中', 'やすい', '者', '的', 'HP', 'FM', '一', '二', '四', '三', '五', '七', '六', '八', '九', '十', '○', '百', 'おく', 'くださる', 'ここ', 'やさしい', 'にほんご', '物', '確認', 'いう', '週', '日', '歳', '問合せ', '写真', '撮影', '説明', '言葉', 'わたし', '前', 'ない', 'たち', '問題', '０', '１', '２', '３', '４', '５', '６', '７', '８', '９', '多く', 'ら', 'いい', '以上', '時', '%', '自分', '今', '国', '代', '万', '何', '点', '支部', '語', '対象', '皆さん', '後', 'とき', 'さ', '市立', '小', 'ヘーゲル', 'おじいちゃん', '話', '今年', '代表', '会', '部', '学', '昨年', '時間', '県内', 'ページ', '作品', 'テーマ', '教授', '気持ち', '研究室', '実施', '大学', '研究', 'センター', '対応', 'ところ', '向け', 'NPO', '展', '場合', '記事', '課', 'ｈｔｔｐ', 'ｊｐ', '問い合わせ', '例', '作成', '無料', '際', '協会', '担当者', '難しい', '表現', '出身', '内容', '数', '女性', '男性', '化', '現在', '意味', '仕事', '理解', '書き換え', '情報', '作文', '文章', '勉強', '佐藤', '声', '外国', '必要', '支援', '伝達', '社会言語学', '研究会', '言い換え', '電話', '広報', '参加', '紹介', '簡単', '活用', '用語', '職員', '地域', '指導', '交流', '誘導', '住民', '市民', '在住', '言語', '嫌い', '弘前', '弘前市']
# Modularized the preprocessing code, and named it ‘my_mecab_stopwords_for_lda’
```

For Term Frequency Analysis, '会員', '室', '語彙' were added; modularized and named it ‘my_mecab_stopwords_for_wc’

```
replace_dict = {
    '南海トラフ地震': '南海トラフ',
    '南海トラフ巨大地震': '南海トラフ',
    '能登地震': '能登半島地震',
    '新潟中越地震': '中越地震',
    '新潟県中越地震': '中越地震',
    '新潟県中越沖地震': '中越沖地震',
    '阪神大震災': '阪神・淡路大震災',
    '愛・地球博': '愛知万博',
    '東京五輪': '東京オリンピック',
    '東京オリンピック・パラリンピック': '東京オリンピック',
    '東京 2020 オリンピック・パラリンピック': '東京オリンピック',
    '新型コロナ': 'コロナ',
    '新型コロナウイルス': 'コロナ',
    'コロナウイルス': 'コロナ',
    'COVID-19': 'コロナ',
    'COVID': 'コロナ',
    '新型コロナウイルス感染症':'コロナ',
    '入管法改正': '改正入管法',
    '特定技能制度': '特定技能',
    '特定技能外国人': '特定技能',
    '技能実習制度': '技能実習',
    '技能実習生': '技能実習',
    '出入国管理及び難民認定法': '入管法',
    '出入国管理法': '入管法',
    '日系二世': '日系',
    '日系三世': '日系',
    '日系人': '日系',
    '子供': '子ども',
```

```
    'こども': '子ども',
    '年寄り': '高齢者',
    '弘大': '弘前大学',
    '弘前大': '弘前大学',
    '移民の受け入れ': '移民受け入れ',
    '外国人の受け入れ': '外国人受け入れ',
    '大阪・関西万博': '大阪万博',
    '関西万博': '大阪万博',
    '高度人材': '高度外国人材',
    '在日外国人': '外国人住民',
    '在留外国人': '外国人住民',
    '外国人市民': '外国人住民',
    '在住外国人': '外国人住民',
    '災害時': '災害',
    'お年寄り': '高齢者',
    '避難所': '避難'
}

def is_number_like(term):
    return re.fullmatch(r'[0-9０-９一二三四五六七八九十百千万億兆〇]+', term) is not None

def normalize_text(text):
    for k, v in replace_dict.items():
        text = text.replace(k, v)
    text = re.sub(r'[0-9０-９一二三四五六七八九十百千万億兆〇]+[^\s　。、．！？!?「」]*', '', text)
    return text

def tokens(text, pos=['名詞']):
    text = normalize_text(text)
    node = tagger.parseToNode(text)
    word_list = []
    while node:
```

```
    if node.surface != '':
        elem = node.feature.split(',')
        term = elem[6] if elem[6] != '*' else node.surface
        if (len(pos) < 1 or elem[0] in pos):
            if term not in stopwords and node.surface not in stopwords:
                if not is_number_like(term):
                    word_list.append(term)
    node = node.next
return word_list
```

A.2 Custom User Dictionary

0	南海トラフ地震
1	大阪・関西万博
2	関西万博
3	高度人材
4	東京オリンピック・パラリンピック
5	東京 2020 オリンピック・パラリンピック
6	新型コロナウイルス感染症
7	入国規制緩和
8	ビザ緩和
9	改正入管法
10	入管法改正
11	外国人受け入れ
12	外国人の受け入れ
13	移民の受け入れ
14	特定技能外国人
15	日本語学習
16	外国人市民
17	外国人住民
18	在住外国人
19	生活情報
20	社内コミュニケーション
21	外国人材
22	外国人患者

A.3 LDA Topic Modeling

```
import my_mecab_stopwords_for_lda as mcb

import numpy as np
import re
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import CountVectorizer
from sklearn.decomposition import LatentDirichletAllocation

folder = "/home/sayo/text_mining_materials/all"

files = sorted([os.path.join(folder, f) for f in os.listdir(folder) if f.endswith('.txt')])

vectorizer = CountVectorizer(
    input='filename',
    lowercase=False,
    tokenizer=mcb.tokens,
    token_pattern=None,
    max_df=0.5,
    max_features=1000
)

dtm = vectorizer.fit_transform(files)

lda = LatentDirichletAllocation(n_components=5, max_iter=20, random_state=42)
topic_matrix = lda.fit_transform(dtm)

for i, dist in enumerate(topic_matrix):
    print(os.path.basename(files[i]), dist, "max_topic=", dist.argmax())

era_dict = {
    '1': (1985, 1994),
    '2': (1995, 2000),
    '3': (2001, 2006),
```

```
    '4': (2007, 2010),
    '5': (2011, 2015),
    '6': (2016, 2019),
    '7': (2020, 2025),
}

era_topics = {k: [] for k in era_dict}

for file, dist in zip(files, topic_matrix):
    match = re.search(r'(\d{4})', file)
    if match:
        year = int(match.group(1))
        for era_key, (start, end) in era_dict.items():
            if start <= year <= end:
                era_topics[era_key].append(dist)
                break

for era_key, topic_dists in era_topics.items():
    if topic_dists:
        avg = np.mean(topic_dists, axis=0)
        print(f"Era {era_key} avg topic distribution:", avg)

labels = [f"Era {k}" for k in era_dict]
topic_counts = [np.mean(era_topics[k], axis=0) if era_topics[k] else np.zeros(5) for k in era_dict]

topic_counts = np.array(topic_counts).T

for i, topic_dist in enumerate(topic_counts):
    plt.plot(labels, topic_dist, label=f"Topic {i}")

plt.title("Topic Trends Over Time")
plt.xlabel("Era")
plt.ylabel("Topic Proportion")
plt.legend()
plt.grid(True)
```

```
plt.tight_layout()

plt.savefig("wordcloud.png", format="png", dpi=300, bbox_inches="tight", pad_inches=0)

plt.show()

n_top_words = 10
feature_names = vectorizer.get_feature_names_out()
for topic_idx, topic in enumerate(lda.components_):
    top_words = [feature_names[i] for i in topic.argsort()[:-n_top_words - 1:-1]]
    print(f"Topic {topic_idx}: {', '.join(top_words)}")
```

A.4 Term Frequency Analysis

```
import my_mecab_stopwords_for_wc as mcb

text=‘’
#Insert texts from all articles from each era

from collections import Counter
cnt=Counter(mcb.tokens(text))
print(cnt)

from wordcloud import WordCloud
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt

cnt = Counter(mcb.tokens(text))

top20 = dict(cnt.most_common(20))

wordcloud = WordCloud(
    width=800,
    height=400,
    background_color='white',
    font_path='/usr/share/fonts/opentype/noto/NotoSansCJK-Regular.ttc'
).generate_from_frequencies(top20)

plt.figure(figsize=(10, 5))
plt.imshow(wordcloud, interpolation='bilinear')
plt.axis('off')
plt.tight_layout()

plt.savefig("wordcloud.png", format="png", dpi=300, bbox_inches="tight", pad_inches=0)
plt.show()
```