Social Roles of Language Proficiency Tests for Long-Term Foreign Residents in the Netherlands and the United States

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Recently in Japan, there has been an outbreak of discussion concerning the legitimacy of requiring foreigners desiring to stay in Japan for a long term to have a certain level of Japanese proficiency. When introducing tests to evaluate applicants' Japanese language proficiency, it is crucial to examine not only the technical aspects of these tests, but also social aspects such as their short- and long-term influence on the lives of the test takers and steps that can be taken to provide support in the Japanese social system.

The purpose of the paper is to provide an overview of the content and procedures used to administer language tests in the Netherlands and the United States, two nations with a long history of immigration, from the point of view of the role these tests play in the lives of the language learners and society. Although there are differences in the history and circumstances regarding admission of immigrants in these two countries, we observed the following similarities: 1) the tests functioned positively in the applicants' life planning and the self-supervision of their learning, 2) steps were taken to provide social support.

[Keywords] long-term foreign residents, language proficiency tests, Japanese for living, assessment criteria
Evaluations of Japanese Learners’ Linguistic Performance in Daily Life:
On the Need to Reconsider Individual Evaluation Standards

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In recent years, there have been increases in the numbers of foreigners learning Japanese not in the language classroom, but through the process of actual communication with Japanese people. In such cases, it is important to understand how the linguistic performance of Japanese learners is being evaluated by ordinary native Japanese speakers who are not language experts. However, it is not appropriate to use evaluations made by non-experts as learning guidelines, because such evaluations are likely to reflect arbitrary standards. Ordinary Japanese people need to reconsider the evaluation standards that they use.

This paper proposes three means of promoting the reassessment of evaluative standards: 1) to identify through quantitative research the perspectives employed in evaluating the Japanese language performance of foreign learners; 2) to present through qualitative research the diversity in the evaluation process; and 3) to discern whether there are any evaluation universals and to express them as an evaluation process model.

【Keywords】individual evaluation standards, evaluation process, variety in evaluations, ordinary native Japanese, value judgments