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Foreword and Acknowledgements

The 20th International Conference on Historical Linguistics (ICHL 20) held in Osaka, Japan, 25–30 July 2011 was unique in several ways. Most previous conferences have been held in Europe or in the USA. Although there was one conference held in the Pacific region (ICHL15 in Melbourne, Australia, in 2001), this was the first such conference to be held in an Asian country, specifically Japan. It was also the first such conference to be hosted by a Museum, in this case the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka that, in addition to being a museum, also comprises a research institute that has among its more than 60 permanent researchers several linguists interested in historical linguistics. The event was unique also in that it was held under the shadow of the Great East Japan Earthquake and associated disasters, such as the tsunami that claimed more than 20,000 lives and the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe that threatened Japan with radioactive fallout only months before the scheduled conference dates. Much thought was given to the possibility of canceling the conference, but daily readings of radioactive fallout in the Osaka region clearly indicated that conference participants would not be subjected to any danger, so the decision was made to proceed with the original conference plans. And the international community of historical linguists generally supported the decision, with 239 participants coming from 40 countries, and relatively few cancelling because of the events related to the Earthquake. Including Japanese participants, the total number of people registered was 319, with 309 papers being presented.

Another unique feature of the conference was that one of the workshops focused on Historical Sign Language Database Architecture and Historical Linguistics Methodology. The plenary speaker associated with this session was Professor Ted Supalla, University of Rochester, a Deaf linguist, who was unable to physically attend the conference, and who presented his paper via an internet connection from New York, using American Sign Language (ASL). Simultaneous interpretation was conducted into English, Japanese Sign Language (JSL), and Japanese. The workshop was also made open to the public, with about 120 participants from the general public attending, including a large number of users of JSL, sign language interpreters, students and researchers in linguistics. Supalla’s presentation on “The Role of Historical Research in Building a Model of Sign Language Typology, Variation, and Change” appears in this volume (pp. 15–42).

Being held in Japan, the conference also provided a suitable venue for discussion of the position of Japanese in respect to other languages of the world. In addition to a plenary presentation by Bjarke Frellesvig (Oxford) on “Corpus Based Studies of Japanese Historical Linguistics”, and thematic sessions on Ryukyuan and Japanese languages, a post-conference international symposium entitled Historical Linguistics in the Asia-Pacific Region and the Position of Japanese was held which was attended by many ICHL 20 participants. Some 150 linguists participated along with about 120 members of the general public. English and Japanese simultaneous translation services were available for those who needed them. Holding the conference in Japan was also a timely factor in bringing to fruition the interests of Japanese linguists that have resulted in the formation of a Japan Society for Historical Linguistics, the holding of the first national conference of Japanese historical linguists (17–18 December 2011), and the establishing of a new journal, *Historical Linguistics in Japan*.

We warmly acknowledge the following collaborating institutions for this event, the Japan Institute for Sign Language Studies, Tsukuba University of Technology, the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, and the National Institutes for the Humanities for its financial support.

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All workshop proposals and paper abstracts were reviewed by the Scientific Committee for whose heavy burden of work we hereby express our thanks: Peri BHASKARARAO (Research Institute for Languages and Cultures in Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), HIEDA Osamu (Research Institute for Languages and Cultures in Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), KIBE Nobuko (The National Institute for Japanese Language), KIKUSAWA Ritsuko (Department of Cultural Research, National Museum of Ethnology), MATSUMORI Akiko (Faculty of Humanities, Japan Women’s University), NAKAYAMA Toshihide (Research Institute for Languages and Cultures in Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), Robert RATCLIFFE (The Graduate School of Global Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies), SATŌ Tomomi (Graduate School of Letters, University of Hokkaido), WATANABE Honoré (Research Institute for

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