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## REVEREND GROOTAERS'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO LINGUISTIC GEOGRAPHY IN JAPAN

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### Abstract

Reverend Grootaers (1911-1999) moved to Japan, became friends with leading Japanese linguists Takesi Sibata and Munemasa Tokugawa, and introduced Japan to the discipline of linguistic geography from Dutch-speaking areas. As a result, linguistic geography developed greatly in Japan, which can be seen as an ideal form of cultural exchange.

### Keywords

Itoigawa, *Linguistic Atlas of Japan* (LAJ), Kloeke, symbol, geographic number

### LAS CONTRIBUCIONES DEL REVERENDO GROOTAERS A LA GEOGRAFÍA LINGÜÍSTICA DE JAPÓN

### Resumen

El reverendo Grootaers (1911-1999) se trasladó a Japón, hizo amistad con los principales lingüistas japoneses Takesi Sibata y Munemasa Tokugawa e introdujo a Japón en la disciplina de la geografía lingüística desde las áreas de habla holandesa. Como resultado, la geografía lingüística se desarrolló en Japón en gran manera, lo que puede entenderse como una forma ideal de intercambio cultural.

### Palabras clave

Itoigawa, *Linguistic Atlas of Japan* (LAJ), Kloeke, símbolo, número geográfico

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## 1. Before Coming to Japan

Willem A. Grootaers was born in southern Belgium in 1911 (Grootaers 1999: 13). His father was Professor Ludvic Grootaers (1885-1956), who founded the discipline of linguistic geography in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium and established the Dialect Research Center (Zuidnederlandse Dialectcentrale) at Leuven University (Pauwels 1956: 262). Thus, linguistic geography was a field that Grootaers grew up with. He remembered how his mother and father drew a map of different words for “potato” at the kitchen table when he was 14 years old (Grootaers 1975: 172). Grootaers did not attend university because he was educated as a clergyman, but he frequented his father’s laboratory and learned linguistic geography directly from him.

As a priest of the Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae order, Grootaers was posted to China in 1938 and served as a pastor in Datong. He conducted studies on folklore there, as well as research in linguistic geography. His plan was to study linguistic geography throughout China. He became a professor at Fujen University in 1945 but was forced to return to Belgium because the Communist Party emerged victorious from its conflict with the Kuomintang.

## 2. Japan’s Introduction to Linguistic Geography

Grootaers hoped to be dispatched to Japan soon after returning home and was transferred to a church in Toyooka City, western Japan, in 1949. In 1951, Grootaers went to the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics in Tokyo (whose English name was the “National Language Research Institute” in those days). There, he met with the researcher (and later Tokyo University professor) Takesi Sibata and his colleagues and discussed linguistic geography. Sibata was fascinated by the concept of linguistic geography and planned to create a linguistic atlas of Japan. This project, *The Linguistic Atlas of Japan (LAJ)*, started in 1955. A survey was conducted from 1957 to 1964, and six volumes were published throughout a nine-year period from 1966 to

1974. It includes 2,400 localities, covering the entire Japanese archipelago including Okinawa, which was under American occupation at the time. It is Japan's definitive linguistic atlas.

To test linguistic geography in practice, Sibata, researcher (and later Osaka University professor) Munemasa Tokugawa, Grootaers, and Yoshio Mase (who participated in the study for one year and later became a Shinshu University professor) conducted three fieldwork sessions in 1957, 1959, and 1961 at Itoigawa in Niigata Prefecture. This linguistic research was a great success, and Sibata wrote *The Methods of Linguistic Geography* (Sibata 1965) based on the results in an attempt to systematize linguistic geography therein. Additionally, Tokugawa refined the theory of linguistic geography in several papers, and naturally, Grootaers also wrote several articles based on the survey results.

Adopting foreign academic disciplines based only on what has been written will usually result in a superficial adaptation of that discipline. For example, someone who has studied linguistic geography from a book might look at a beautiful linguistic map and have the misapprehension that it was drafted in a single attempt. In fact, many maps will have been discarded before a successful one is created.

Sibata advised his students to "keep drawing linguistic maps until you are satisfied with the result". Drawing a linguistic map involves pressing a large number of stamps of symbols onto a blank map, a process that Grootaers always seemed to enjoy.

Sibata and Tokugawa enjoyed drawing maps as well. It seems that this was not something that was taught verbally; rather, it was something that arose naturally through discussions and through their map-drawing sessions with Grootaers. Years later, Tokugawa said, "I felt intellectual excitement when I saw a language map in the Itoigawa Survey".

No one in Japan had previously performed such a series of tasks including conducting field surveys, expressing the results as a linguistic map, and deducing the history of words from that map. Grootaers passed on this approach to Sibata, Tokugawa, and Mase. He also spoke of the underlying philosophy of linguistic

geography, without which Japan's linguistic geography would have become a superficial academic discipline.

Sibata writes as follows (Sibata 1999: 23):

I had not been at all aware of the philosophical foundation of this method—an admirable love and sympathy for unnamed people that are rooted in the earth. This is what we learned from the priest.

Grootaers was a leading linguist who had been initiated into the linguistic geography discipline by his father Ludvic. Like Grootaers, Sibata and Tokugawa were highly intellectual and thus ideal candidates for interpreting a foreign academic discipline, and these three men maintained a friendship for nearly 50 years. Ludvic had also established a lifetime friendship with G. G. Kloeke, who was from the Netherlands (Daan 1964: 623), and together they established the field of Dutch linguistic geography. Thus, both father and child became linguistic geography pioneers working with friends from overseas.

### **3. Grootaers's Original Contributions**

Thus, although linguistic geography in Japan owes much to Grootaers, two particular contributions cannot be considered without referring to him. One is a system where a locality's geographical position is given as a combination of numbers, and the other is the method of stamping symbols instead of writing the word forms on the map. Both are rooted in the Netherlands' and Belgium's Dutch linguistic geography tradition.

Grootaers himself writes about how to specify a locality as follows (Grootaers 1967: 597):

The concept of a basic map which is planned for all future dialect surveys of Japan is noteworthy. It furnishes a system by which the geographical coordinates of every locality on the map are shown by a set of figures; this eliminates

cumbersome place names and places at the location of every surveyed locality. Based on an idea proposed first in 1926 by the Dutch dialectologist G. G. Kloeke and used by all linguistic work in Northern Belgium and the Netherlands, this system will provide the Japanese dialectal world with a great unity of method that is not found in other national atlases (France, Germany, and Italy).

This can be interpreted as if Kloeke was the inventor of the same method that was imported into Japan, but the reality is somewhat different.

In the case of the geographic numbers on the Japanese linguistic map, the squares created by latitude and longitude lines are divided by 10 vertical lines and 10 horizontal lines to make 100 squares, and each square is given a two-digit number. In the Japanese linguistic map, this first square is further divided into 100 equal parts, which are further subdivided into 100 equal parts, and this “mesh” is assigned a six-digit number. If six digits were not enough, the smallest square was divided again into 100 equal parts and assigned eight digits.

We can use the geographic number 56117496 to illustrate this.

First, consider a square in which the west end is  $122^{\circ}30'$  east, the east end  $147^{\circ}30'$  east, the north end  $45^{\circ}40'$  north, and the south end  $29^{\circ}$  north (Figure 1). Most of Japan fits in this square. The Ryukyu archipelago fits into the space if one makes a similar-sized square to the south of this one.

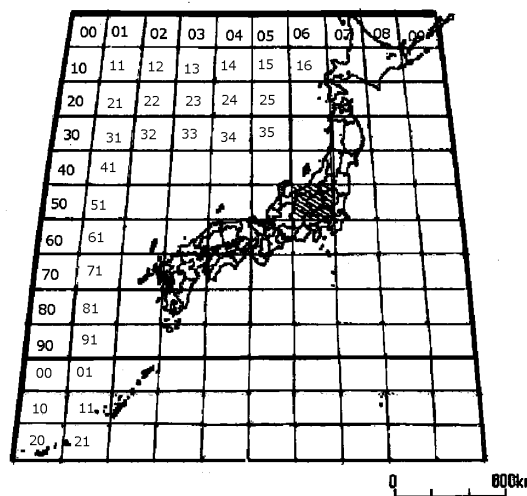


Figure 1. The square 56

This first square is divided into 10 equal parts in the north-south direction and 10 equal parts east to west, creating a mesh of 100 equal parts. The numbers are 00, 01, 02, 03... 09, proceeding in order from the northernmost western square. The westmost squares are numbered 00, 10, 20, 30... 90 from the north. The first of the two-digit numbers indicate the north-south position, and the second indicates the east-west position. The geographic point indicated by 56117496 is in the square numbered 56 in this large square. Figure 2 is an enlarged view of square 56. Square 11 in this figure is shaded and assigned the number 5611. Each of the squares within square 56 corresponds exactly to the Geographical Survey Institute's 1:50,000-scale topographic map, which covers all of Japan, and it is also available throughout Japan. The topographic map of area 5611 is named Itoigawa.

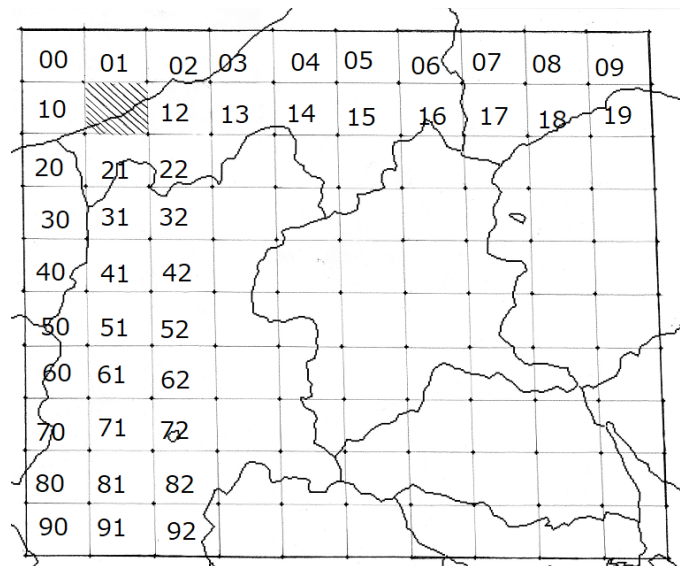


Figure 2. The square 5611

Figure 3 is an enlargement of square 5611 with square 74 shaded within it. This square is assigned the number 561174. If a 1:50,000 topographic map is divided into 100 equal parts, and the number of the square of the locality in question is checked, it will be possible to determine the six-digit number of that locality.

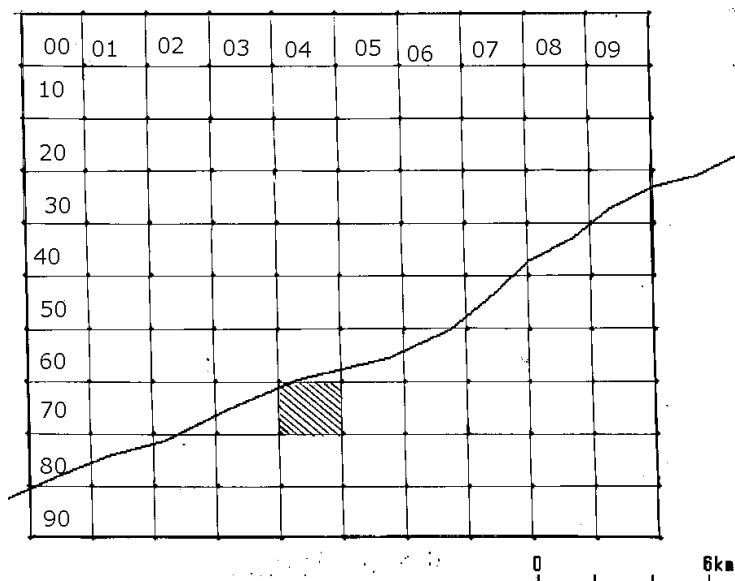


Figure 3. The square 561174

In the *LAJ*, a six-digit geographic number was sufficient, but in the Itoigawa Survey, because there were several points with the same number in the 1:50,000 topographical map, square 561174 was further divided into 100 equal parts. Thus, an eight-digit geographic number, 56117496, was obtained. The Itoigawa Survey uses these eight-digit geographic numbers. This way, densely packed geographical points can be expressed by increasing the number of digits used.

In the method proposed by Kloeke, Leuven equates to P88 and Leiden, E167 (Kloeke 1951: 131). The Japanese linguistic map system can cope with sparse or dense locality arrangements by changing the number of digits used, whereas Kloeke's method seems unable to accommodate this easily because of a lack of flexibility. Kloeke combined alphabetic characters and numbers whereas for the *LAJ*, only numbers were used.

Additionally, in Kloeke's method, the letters of the alphabet represent the east-west position, proceeding alphabetically from the westmost "A" toward the east. The numbers increase from south to north with the southernmost point as "1."

In Kloeke's system, A1, the origin, is in the southwest corner whereas in the Japanese linguistic map system, it is in the northwest corner, which has a mesh of 00.

This way, the Japanese linguistic map system is quite different from Kloeke's system. Therefore, although Grootaers may have proposed a system for Japanese linguistic maps as Sibata says, it seems that rather than proposing exactly what he had learned in Belgium, he arranged the system according to the situation in Japan. This appears to have been a method Grootaers devised for use in surveys across China (Sibata 1999: 25).

It seems that the tradition of the Netherlands and Belgium (the Dutch-speaking region) was to stamp symbols onto the map. While it was normal in 1950 to write word forms directly onto the map, as in the *Atlas Linguistique de la France*, in the linguistic geography that Grootaers brought to Japan, the geographic distribution of a word form is intuitively visible through stamps with symbols showing the word form.

#### **4. The Introduction of an Academic Discipline from Belgium**

Local dialect researchers in Japan went on to conduct linguistic geography surveys in their respective fields, stimulated by the preparation and publication of Sibata's and Tokugawa's writings based on the Itoigawa Survey and *LAJ*. Thus, linguistic geography flourished in Japan in the 1970s.

Since the Meiji era, there have been few examples of Japanese humanities taking on a Dutch or Belgian methodology and creating a new discipline. During the last 150 years, Japan has been strongly influenced by Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and France, but there appears to be no other examples of an academic discipline from Belgium being introduced to Japan.

#### **5. A Passionate Writer**

As a student, I was taught by Sibata in the 1970s, became a researcher at the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics in 1976, and was in close contact with Grootaers from that time onward. I feel a responsibility to let future



generations know about Sibata and Grootaers. Something Grootaers said made an impression on me: “If one has something to be announced, one is being arrogant rather than lazy if one does not write it in a paper and publish it.”

These were words of encouragement to a young researcher, as well as words by which to govern oneself. Grootaers was a prolific figure with a passion for writing papers. He also wrote many essays and books for the general Japanese audience.

## **6. A Bridge between Japan and the Rest of the World**

Grootaers and Sibata also represent a bridge between Japan and the West in aspects besides their original research. Grootaers started learning Japanese at the age of 39 but was able to read, speak, and comprehend Japanese without difficulty. He was also able to read specialized literature easily. As such, Grootaers contributed several English-language articles introducing Japanese linguistics in *Orbis*, the official publication of the Dialect Research Center at Leuven University (le Centre International de Dialectologie Générale de l’Université de Louvain). Papers by Mase (1964) and Tokugawa (Tokugawa & Kato 1966) were also translated into French and English as contributions to *Orbis*. In *Orbis* alone, the number of papers authored by Grootaers on the topic of Japanese linguistics is 13. He also presented and lectured at international conferences.

With the help of his students and Sibata, Grootaers also translated into Japanese several important works written in French and German on European dialects, such as the works of Gilliéron. An important part of Grootaers’ translation work was the shared writing of the *Linguistic Atlas of Itoigawa* (Sibata 1988-1995), which Sibata published 30 years after the Itoigawa Survey. It was no simple translation as it had been written in two languages, with Sibata responsible for the Japanese parts and Grootaers responsible for the English parts. Grootaers’s contribution to Japanese dialect research has been enormous; without him, there would also likely have been no *LAJ*, and Japanese dialect research would have been much poorer. We Japanese dialect researchers owe him a great debt of gratitude.

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