

Obituaries / Nécrologies / Nachrufe

Takesi Sibata: July 14, 1918 – July 12, 2007

Two days before he would have turned eighty-nine, Professor Takesi Sibata passed away peacefully in Tokyo. He was born in Nagoya City and studied at the University of Tokyo, the most prestigious university in Japan, from where he graduated in 1942. During the war years, he taught Mongolian and Turkish and also published repeatedly on these languages, as well as on Korean and some of the languages spoken in China (for details see his lengthy bibliography in Tetsuya Kunihiro, Fumio Inoue and Daniel Long (eds), *Takesi Sibata: Sociolinguistics in Japanese Contexts*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1999, 417–471; and that does not even include what he published after 1996). In 1945, Sibata was appointed assistant at his alma mater. Four years later, he became a member of the National Institute for Japanese Language Research, shortly after its inception, and, in 1955, he started work there on the Linguistic Atlas of Japan that was to elicit material in 2400 localities all over the country with the help of a questionnaire. During the whole period the survey was conducted, Sibata was head of the project. The 300 coloured maps of the atlas appeared in six large volumes between 1966 and 1974. In addition, an extensive introductory volume was published in 1966.

In 1957, Sibata began fieldwork together with three colleagues on one of the five regional atlases, namely the Linguistic Atlas of Itoigawa, Niigata Prefecture, a project that was, again, supported and published by the National Institute in Tokyo in 1988, 1990 and 1995 in three considerable volumes with a total of 932 maps in three colours. The first two volumes consist of four parts each: 1. *The Atlas* by Takesi Sibata, 2. *The Data* by Takesi Sibata, 3. *Introduction and Map Explanations* by Takesi Sibata and 4. *Introduction and Map Explanations in English* by Willem A. Grootaers, another important name in Japanese dialectology. To the third volume a fifth part was added, *Indices*, which was compiled by both scholars. In total, 186 localities were surveyed in the Itoigawa region with regard to its lexicon, phonetics, tones and verbs; the questionnaire also includes some extralinguistic aspects. The atlas also marked a new stage in the geographical study of Japanese dialects because, through this bilingual edition, dialectologists outside of Japan were, for the first time, able to take cognizance of the methods and results of Japanese dialect geography. This atlas is a truly remarkable achievement.