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WHAT WE THINK WE KNOW ABOUT SECOND LANGUAGE ATTRITION:
EVIDENCE FROM JAPANESE CONTEXTS

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Introduction

1. Language attrition, the subfield of linguistics that examines second language forgetting, is now about fifteen years old. After a decade and a half, it is useful to take stock of the accumulated attrition research to see what we have learned.
2. This paper focuses especially on evidence gathered from attrition sites in Japanese contexts to provide outlines for an emerging picture of second language attrition. It highlights key issues in the new field and discusses variables which appear to be important in the loss of a second language.
3. A "returnee" family: predictable patterns of second language retention and loss

Hypotheses substantiated by language attrition research

1. **The more you know, the less you lose**
Bahrick, 1984; Hansen-Strain, forthcoming; Kurashige, forthcoming; Nagasawa, forthcoming; Weltens, 1989.
2. **Learning that reaches a 'critical threshold' level secures retention**
Hansen-Strain, forthcoming; Neisser, 1984; Ishiguro, 1994; Yoshitomi, 1992.
3. **Older is better for the language retention of children**
Cohen, 1989; Hansen, 1980; Hansen-Strain, 1990; Kurashige, forthcoming; Olshtain 1983, 1988; Yoshida, 1989; Yoshida and Arai 1990.
4. **The last learned is the first forgotten**
Hansen-Strain, 1993, forthcoming; Hayashi, forthcoming; Kurashige, forthcoming.
5. **There is a special status in memory for frequently used, pragmatically useful language which has been memorized holistically**
Cohen 1989; Olshtain 1986, 1989; Hansen-Strain, forthcoming; Kuhberg, 1992.
6. **Productive language skills are more vulnerable to loss than receptive or recognition skills**
Bahrick, 1984; Olshtain, 1989; Tomiyama, forthcoming.
7. **Attitudes and motivation relate to language attrition**
Nagasawa, forthcoming; Yoshitomi, forthcoming.

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Lynne Hansen-Strain, editor

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