

# L2 Japanese learner awareness and attitudes towards dialectal variation

Madeline Clark

mrc155@georgetown.edu

Department of Linguistics, Georgetown University



## Background

- Japanese
  - Standardized Japanese established in the 1900s
  - Anti-dialectal attitudes within formal spaces
  - Osaka dialect - controversial among Japanese (dependent on age, location, etc.)
- L2 learner attitudes
  - Large focus on romance language learners
  - Study abroad/immersion contexts

## Research Questions

1. What awareness or attitudes do L2 Japanese learners have towards dialectal variation in Osaka?
2. What kinds of exposure do L2 Japanese learners have in or outside the classroom that may make them aware of such dialects in Japanese?
3. Do teacher biases or attitudes towards dialects relate to their students' attitudes?

## Part 1 – Teacher Interviews

- Intermediate JPN instructors ( $n = 3$ )
- Semi structured interview
  - History with dialects in Japan
  - Feelings towards Osaka dialect
  - Thoughts on standard Japanese
  - Thoughts on teaching dialects

## Part 2 – Student Survey

- Intermediate JPN students ( $n = 19$ )
  - Class 1 ( $n = 7$ ), Class 2 ( $n = 7$ ), Class 3 ( $n = 5$ )
  - Online questionnaire
- Introduced Osaka variant
  - hen (negative suffix)
- 5-point Likert scales
- Activities interacting with Japanese

## Part 3 – Student Case Studies

- Selected students (Part 2) familiar with dialectal variant ( $n = 3$ )
- Follow-up questions
  - Feelings on Osaka dialect
  - Willingness to learn dialects in class rather than standard

## Results – Teacher Interview

### Teacher #1

- Originally born in Kanegawa, but spent most time in Chiba (town near Tokyo) before moving to the U.S.
- Knew some lexical items/phrases in the Kanegawa dialect, but does not consider herself a dialect speaker
- Osaka dialect – mostly familiar through *manzai* (type of comedy), considers speakers to be “emotional,” “warm,” and “direct”
- Assumes that her students are aware of dialects through their interactions with Japanese media (songs, shows, etc.)
- Believed learning a dialect at intermediate level would be too difficult – standard first, then dialect
- Would not want to teach a dialect class as a non-dialect speaker

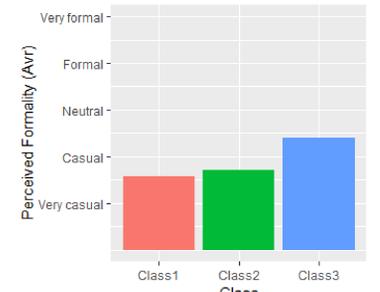
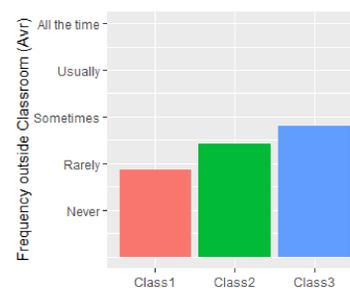
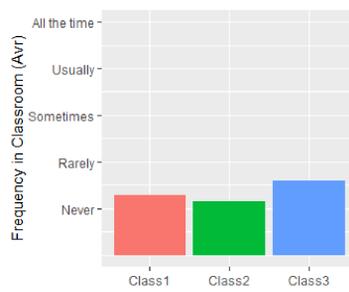
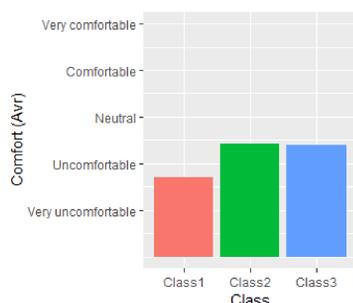
### Teacher #2

- Originally from Tawanishi (suburb near Osaka)
- Osaka dialect speaker, even in schools growing up
- Feels that the Osaka dialect sounds more casual – “dialect of comedians”
- Students sometimes ask her how to say certain phrases in her dialect
- Doesn't believe learning a dialect is necessarily harder than learning the standard
- Believes that students learning dialects would enrich their cultural understanding, but admits that it depends on the language needs of the learner

### Teacher #3

- Nonnative speaker, originally from Georgia but lived/worked in Tokyo
- At one point married to a Kansai dialect speaker – influenced by the dialect early on
- Tries to introduce dialect features very infrequently (especially if students will study abroad in Kyoto)
- “Would love” to teach in a dialect – doesn't think it would be any more difficult than standard, but native speakers may find it strange
- Current teaching practices don't allow time to teach dialects – standardized testing doesn't allow dialectal variations

## Results – Student Survey



- “I'm familiar with the word *hen* which is used to describe something as weird.”
- “I believe it's a suffix usually used in Kansai”
- “Family mostly spoke Tokyo dialect and am generally unfamiliar with rural styles”

- “Being asked to do something I don't know how to do wouldn't make me uncomfortable, I just wouldn't be able to do it.”
- “We have not learned it in my Japanese class, so I would not know how to use it.”
- “I don't feel competent enough in my Japanese skills to be able to correctly use the grammar *hen*.”

- “The teacher is always formal in the classroom.”
- “We do not learn casual Japanese in our classroom setting.”
- “In my class hardly anyone uses the term (...)”

- “In anime”
- “I usually listen to tv shows/radio held involving people from Kansai in my spare time”
- “(…) at times I hear Japanese students outside using the term more often.”

- “Since the Japanese I'm taught in college is formal, I assume the suffix is used in casual conversation.”
- “I think Japanese only use the dialect with familiar people, so dialects are really casual.”
- “I have no idea.”

## Results – Student Case Studies

### Student #1

- Originally from Thailand
- Studied abroad in Japan and visited the Kansai region significantly
- “Fascinated by dialects” – “amount of dialect diversity in Japanese strikingly curious especially considering how ethnically homogenous the country is as a whole”
- Learning a dialect would allow him/classmates the ability to “deepen their cultural understanding of the Japanese people”
- Understood that “everything formal is done through standard Japanese”

### Student #2

- Originally from Shanghai, China
- Found Japanese dialects to be “cute” and “vivid” – “Kansai people are easy to approach!”
- Bidialectal in Mandarin and the Shanghai dialect – “dialects are the connections between the last generation and us”
- Very interested in being taught the dialect – be able to “mingle with the local people, feel their life”

### Student #3

- Originally from Beijing, China
- Showed no interest in learning a Kansai dialect, despite being familiar
- “I always find myself proud of speaking the most official, dialect-less version of Chinese [Mandarin] and I'm definitely not a fan of any other Chinese dialects” – “probably generated my resistance towards dialects”
- Finds learning the standard “more useful” and “more comfortable”
- Would be willing to learn only a dialect for short period of time – no more than a “week or two”

## Future Research Areas

- Transfer of dialectal beliefs/attitudes across languages (e.g. Mandarin-speaking JPN learners vs. Chinese dialect-speaking JPN learners)
- Pedagogical practices, including textbook usage and custom learning materials (2/3 instructors in Part 1 made their own textbooks)
- More advanced learners – is there a point where they develop more awareness?

## Conclusions

1. Students overall don't have a strong awareness of Japanese dialects, but assume they're casual since they're not used in classrooms
2. Despite multiple interactions with Japanese media and sometimes even dialects, they don't have a strong sense of how they're used
3. Teacher attitudes don't seem to strongly affect how their students perceive dialects (larger factors seem to be geographic origin and L1 dialectal feelings)

### References

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