

Accent/dialect divides : Vernacular as a window to tradition

著者	Hattori Noriko
journal or publication title	Philologia
volume	40
page range	99-109
year	2009-02-01
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10076/10597

Accent/dialect divides: Vernacular as a window to tradition*

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1. Introduction

This paper begins with a brief summary of accent/dialect divides in England and Japan and then presents results of a questionnaire on vernacular given to students at Mie University, which is located west of a major accent divide in mainland Japan. The focus of examination is on the following three aspects: (i) morpho-syntactic characteristics, (ii) accentual system, and (iii) presence/absence of lengthening of one mora words. It turns out that the respondents share some western characteristics in (i), but they fall into two groups depending on whether they show eastern/western characteristics in (ii) and (iii). The results indicate that the younger generation follows the traditional accent/dialect divides in their vernacular, though they can be competent speakers of the standard language when the need arises. A detailed analysis of thirty responses shows that their distribution of variants conforms to what traditional accent/dialect divides predict.

2. Accent/dialect divides

Before making a brief summary of accent divides in England and Japan, I will make clear definitions of the terms used here. I adopt the definitions found in current sociolinguistics literature (e.g. Hughes and Trudgill 1979; Labov 1994). 'Dialect' refers to 'varieties distinguished from each other by differences of grammar and vocabulary,' while 'accent' refers to 'varieties of pronunciation' (Hughes and Trudgill, 1979: 2). 'Vernacular' is used in a Labovian sense. It refers to the 'least self-conscious style of speech used by people in relaxed conversation with friends, peers and family members' (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert and Leap 2000: 83).

2.1 The North-South accent divide in England

The oft-cited map of two traditional pronunciation variants in England, which is based on the *Survey of English Dialects (SED)*, is shown in Map 1 below (adapted from Chambers and Trudgill 1998: 107, with a note added by the present writer).



Note: Lines (A)(solid line) shows the northern limit of [ʌ] in *putt*, and line (B)(dotted line) shows the northern limit of [ɑ:] in *bath*.

Map 1: Distribution of two major pronunciation variants in England

Map 1 shows distribution of two major pronunciation variants that divide England into the North and the South linguistically¹. The lines (A) and (B) indicate the northern limit of two historical developments, that is, the FOOT-STRUT Split and BATH Broadening (after Wells 1982: 349), respectively. The former is a sound change by which Middle English short /u/ split into two phonemes /ʊ/ and /ʌ/. The area north of line (A) is the one to which the change has not reached, and *put* is a homophone of *putt* at least in the broadest local accents there (Wells 1982: 351). The latter is a sound change by which 'a/ preceding a voiceless

fricative, a nasal + /s, t/, or syllable-final /t/, was lengthened (e.g. from [baθ] to [ba:θ]) in the late 17th century, and then later retracted to [ɑ:] (giving [ba:θ]) sometime in the 19th century' (Altendorf and Watt 2008: 194). The area north of line (B) has not undergone the change, and *gas* and *glass* rhyme perfectly, [gas, glas] (Wells 1982: 349). It is worth pointing out that in spite of increasing mobility among the younger generation and the influence of multimedia, the most recent article on dialects in England written by British researchers mentions the existence of the North-South divide (e.g. Altendorf and Watt 2008).

2.2 The East-West accent/dialect divides in Japan

An accent divide similar to English North-South divide is observable in Japan. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate what is happening in the border areas linguistically, and only major dividing lines in mainland Japan will be dealt with here, though further subdivisions should be necessary on each side of the border.

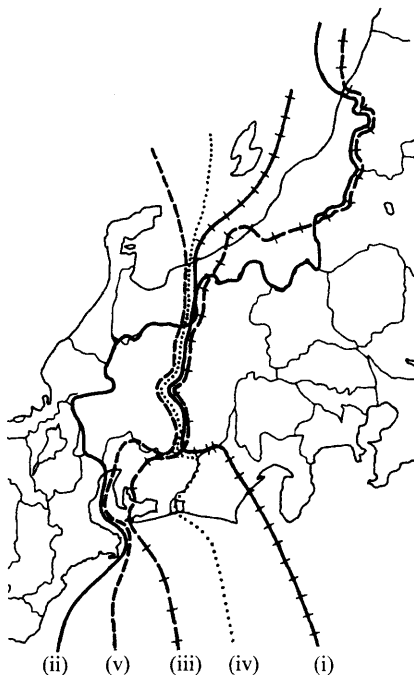
The East-West divide in mainland Japan is examined in terms of 'accent' and 'dialect'. Some of the items frequently cited in the morpho-syntactic domain, which distinguish the eastern system from the western system are as follows (Shibatani 1990: 196 in a simpler form; cf. Sugihara 2006: 29):

(1)

	features	East	West	glosses
i	the imperatives of the vowel-final verbs	<i>miro</i>	<i>miyo / mii</i>	'look'
ii	the <i>t</i> -initial suffix forms of the <i>w</i> -final verbs	<i>haratta</i>	<i>haroota</i>	'paid'
iii	the adverbial forms of adjectives	<i>hirokunaru</i>	<i>hiroonaru</i>	'become wide'
iv	the negative endings	<i>nai</i>	<i>nu / n</i>	
v	the copula forms	<i>da</i>	<i>zya / ya</i>	

Bundles of isoglosses formed by these features are shown in Map 2 (adapted from Shibatani

1990: 197 with a note added by the present writer; cf. Ono1957:102).



Note: (i) to (v) on the map correspond to those in (1)

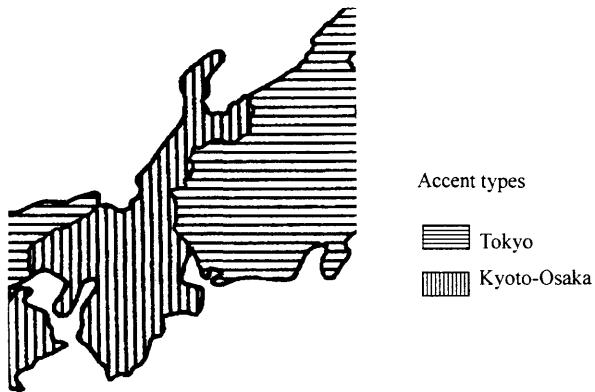
Map 2: The East-West divide in terms of morpho-syntactic features

Interestingly enough, these 'dialect' dividing lines slightly differ from 'accent' dividing line in Japanese. Phonological features such as follows characterize the eastern system and the western system (e.g. Shibatani 1990: 198).

(2)

	features	East	West
i	the labiality of /u/	(generally) unrounded	(generally) rounded
ii	lengthening of one mora words	N.A. (e.g. <i>ki</i> 'tree')	pronounced as two-mora words (e.g. <i>ki</i> → <i>kii</i> 'tree')
iii	the accentual system	so-called Tokyo system	so-called Kyoto-Osaka system

Map 3 below (adapted from Shibatani 1990: 211) shows part of Japan where the East-West accent divide in terms of (2)(iii) is observable. Shiro Hattori, having conducted fieldwork on accentual patterns in several areas starting at Odawara along the Tokaido westward to detect an area where eastern accentual patterns become western, discovered that part of the dividing line coincides with the Ibi River (and the Nagara River), which runs between Nagashima on the east side and Kuwana on the west side (S. Hattori 1930). The informants in Nagashima show so-called Tokyo system, while those in Kuwana show so-called Kyoto-Osaka system, though the two towns are just separated by the river. It runs along the areas where the borders of three prefectures, Aichi, Gifu and Mie meet. This geographical fact is crucial in later discussion.



Map 3: Accents in the Japanese dialects (part)

3. Methods

In order to examine the younger generation's vernacular, a questionnaire was prepared which consists of sentences including features in (1) (ii) - (v) and (2) (ii) (iii) above. The items in question are either morph-syntactic or phonological features that characterize eastern or western dialect/accents. Thirty-six students attending the present writer's linguistics class at Mie University were asked to fill out a questionnaire as follows.

(3) For each of the following situations (i) to (vi), how would you say the sentence(s) in single quotations in your vernacular? You can give more than one expression.

- (i) You have homework to do. You say to your family member, 'I'm too tired to do the homework today.'
- (ii) Unless it rains, you intend to go to a nearby shop to order digital prints, but you give up the idea because it has started raining. You say to your family member, 'I'm not going because it's raining.'
- (iii) You have thrown away a set of old sofas in your room. You find that 'the room seems as if it's become spacious.'
- (iv) You believed that the deadline for an essay was 31st, but your teacher said it was 28th. You say to yourself, 'Wow, the deadline is earlier (than I thought).'

Note: Please add *kana* to the Chinese character so that it is clear how you pronounce *earlier*.

- (v) You hear A-*chan* (or A-*kun*) has bought an iPhone. You say to your family member, 'A-*chan* (or A-*kun*)'s bought an iPhone.'
- (vi) You intend to treat a glass of juice to your junior. She/he is about to pay at a register without knowing that you have already paid for it. You say to her/him, 'I've already paid.'

For each of the following items (vii) to (vi), circle the ones you use in your vernacular.

- (vii) haru 'spring': $\overline{ha}ru$ or $\overline{ha}ru$
- (viii) (in a competition) san i 'the third prize': $sa \underbrace{\quad} n i$ or $sa \underbrace{\quad} n i$

(iv) (asked which hurts, your ear or your eye) me 'eye': me or mee

Respondents were also asked to give their language background by stating the name(s) of prefecture they spend ages between four and seventeen. This information is necessary to investigate the influence on their vernacular of the speech community where they spent their language-forming period (or critical period) (cf. Chambers 1992; Trudgill 1986: 31ff.).

4. Results

Among thirty-six respondents, thirty were speakers from Mie, Aichi, and Gifu prefectures. The breakdown of thirty respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of thirty respondents

prefecture in which the ages between 4 and 17 were spent	group	number of speakers	
(almost) Mie	hereafter 'Group A'	19	
(almost) Aichi	hereafter 'Group B'	10	11
Gifu		1	
Total		30	

Seven items are extracted for analysis. Variants with more than one respondent are presented in Table 2. The order of presentation corresponds to the order of isoglosses seen from the east to the west on Map 2 (the feature (1)(i) is not investigated in this questionnaire). Variants that show western features are shadowed in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of morpho-syntactic variants

	Group A	Group B
	(almost) Mie (N = 19)	(almost) Aichi, Gifu (N = 11)
(1) (iv)	<i>nu/n</i> (West) vs. <i>nai</i> (East)	
	ikahen (9)	ikantoku (wa) (4)
	ikantokuwa (5)	ikan (3)
	ikan (4)	ikanwaa (2)

- (1) (iv) *nu/n (West) vs. nai (East)*

shiyahen (5)	shinwa (3)
shiyantokuwa (5)	shinai (2)
shiyān (4)	yanwa (2)
sechen (4)	shin (2)
sentoku (2)	
yan (2)	

- (1) (iii) *hironatta (West) vs. hirokunatta (East)*

hironatta (16)	hirokunatta (9)
hirokunatta (4)	

- (1) (iii) *haya (or hayo) natta (West) vs. hayakunatta (East)*

hayanatta (11)	hayakunatta (3)
hayonatta (7)	hayakunattan (3)

- (1) (v) *ya (West) vs. da (East)*

(ame) yade (12)	(ame) dakara (4)
(ame) yakara (8)	(ame) dade (4)

- (1) (ii) *kootanyatte (West) vs. kattandatte (East)*

kattanyatte (12)	kattandatte (6)
kootanyatte (5)	kattannyatte (3)

- (1) (ii) *harota (West) vs. haratta (East)*

harattayo (4)	haratta (3)
harattade (3)	harattayo (2)
harota (3)	harattoitayo/wa (2)
harotayo (2)	haracchatta (kara) (2)
harotade (2)	
haratta (kara) (2)	
harattoitade (2)	

It is clear from Table 2 that responses from Group A show western characteristics in all the four morpho-syntactic features, while responses from Group B show eastern characteristics except in (1)(iv). The isogloss for (1) (iv), that is, use of *nai* or *n* for the negative ending, runs farther east than the rest three isoglosses (see Map 2). Roughly speaking, it runs along the border between Aichi prefecture and Shizuoka prefecture. Accordingly, Group B, that is, speakers from Aichi and Gifu, are expected to show the western type in this feature, and the result conforms to the prediction.

Table 3 shows the result of phonological variants. Again, those variants that show western features are shadowed.

Table 3: Distribution of phonological variants

	Group A	Group B
	(almost) Mie (N = 19)	(almost) Aichi, Gifu (N = 11)
(2) (ii)	<i>mee</i> (West) vs. <i>me</i> (East)	
	<i>mee</i> (17)	<i>me</i> (11)
	<i>me</i> (2)	
(2) (iii)	<i>haru</i> (West) vs. <i>ha'ru</i> (East)	
	<i>haru</i> (16)	<i>ha'ru</i> (11)
	<i>ha'ru</i> (3)	
(2) (iii)	<i>san' i</i> (West) vs. <i>sa' n i</i> (East)	
	<i>san' i</i> (17)	<i>sa' n i</i> (11)
	<i>sa' n i</i> (2)	

It is interesting to see that phonologically Group B show eastern features without any trace of western features. The accent dividing line runs farther west than the dialect dividing isoglosses. The three prefectures meet on their borders, and the respondents, that is, the students at Mie University, are either residents in Mie prefecture or commuting between Mie and Aichi (and Gifu) almost every day. Even such a quick examination can make it clear that the traditional accent/dialect dividing lines exist in the younger generation's vernacular.

5. Concluding remarks and remaining issues

Comments from the respondents suggest that they can be competent speakers of standard Japanese when necessary. The eastern features dealt with in this paper characterize standard Japanese. Current accent/dialect situations are in strata in two senses: (i) use of standard Japanese in formal situations and use of the vernacular in casual situations at an individual level; and (ii), coexistence of two linguistic systems without communication failure in geographically close speech communities.

This study takes the form of a questionnaire. As a further elaboration, a backup interview might be necessary to investigate possible variants that could not have been expressed in written responses.

*This work was supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (C)(2)(Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Grant No. 18520380).

Note

¹As a third regional indicator, we can add the isogloss of presence or absence of post-vocalic /r/ to these two. I do not take this feature into consideration, since it is not necessarily a marker of the North-South accent divide.

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