

## The Japanese Language

The Japanese language is often simplified to being the language of the people residing in Japan. Gottlieb argues that like other languages, Japanese should not be prefigured as a monolithic entity. At first glance it may seem as if the language can be based on geography alone, but through the article we learn about some of the complexities hidden beneath its oversimplification.

Japanese is a language that is primarily composed of characters from China and a few loan words from other languages. It has different levels of formality called honorifics and speech patterns can differ by gender. Although Japanese is spoken primarily in Japan, it can also be found in areas of North and South America, including Hawaii. Furthermore, just as there are varying dialects across the world for English, dialects exist within the scope of Japan. Standard Japanese is classified as the accent primarily used around central Japan and Tokyo. As such it's the language that national broadcasts use and serves as a language that can commonly be understood all across Japan. For this reason standard Japanese is what is taught to foreigners that learn the language.

One thing that sets apart Japanese from that of English is how close the language is tied to the people and Japanese society itself. According to the Nihonjinron view, Japanese is a language that is uniquely different in important functions from other languages. This view is based on the notion that race, language, and culture cannot be separated. In this sense I come to see why nationality is viewed differently from the way it is in the United States. I've often seen online that those who have naturalized to Japan are not considered Japanese. This is sometimes also the case for biracial people who were born and raised in Japan. This can also be seen by the analysis done by Fukuoka.

As this concept is vastly different from the way I view language, I would love to learn more about Nihonjinron perspective. I'm also curious about how this perspective became so common in Japan. I'm also interested in learning more about Japanese dialects. I think it would be beneficial to know what is and isn't considered standard Japanese.

## Standard vs Dialects

As Japan opened up to the world and started to modernize, a need for a standard language that could be used throughout the nation became recognized. During this time where people started to mingle, a de facto dialect was increasingly used. This dialect came to be classified as Standard Japanese. Alongside the standardization, stigmatization towards other regional “dialects” arose. Dialects of Japanese were labeled as inferior and an improper way of speaking in comparison to the new standard. As such, for those unable to speak Standard Japanese, a feeling of inferiority became nothing out of the ordinary. Despite negative attitudes against dialects, towards the later years of the 1960s, the way dialects were viewed started to improve. Dialects became something to be tolerated and those able to speak standard Japanese as well as their local dialects became increasingly more common. In comparison to the past, dialects have started to boom and those who only speak standard Japanese sometimes develop an inferiority complex towards those who are bilingual (able to speak two forms of Japanese).

When asked why dialects have increasingly become more popular in Japan, four reasons are stated in Masataka Jinnouchi’s “Dialect Boom in Japan”. First is a result of linguistic factors. Outside of areas where Standard Japanese is widely spoken such as Tokyo, most Japanese are able to speak Standard Japanese as well as their local dialect. In these regions dialects are used as a way to communicate casually with family and friends, while the standard language is used often in formal situations. In this sense code switching is a dominant characteristic. Secondly is via Socio-cultural factors. As a result, diligence has become less popular and the importance of communication and personal life has become more widespread. Lastly is as a result of educational factors, particularly due to the influence of characteristics found in the United States. An individualistic way of thinking has brought about a need for those to differentiate themselves from others and thus a dialect renaissance occurred as a symbol of regional identity.

As attitudes towards dialects continue to improve in Japan, the diversity of what’s spoken will continue to increase as well. In modern day Japan, expressions and characteristics of regional dialects have started to mix with those of other dialects. Such things can be seen through studies that show how teens may use phrases from a dialect they don’t know to communicate with friends in a casual manner. Outside of dialects there are other languages in Japan such as the language spoken by Ainu people and the Ryukyuan language primarily spoken in Okinawa. Furthermore, effort is being made to teach students English, and there are Chinese and Korean language schools for the purpose of helping Chinese and Korean residents of Japan.

As for my reaction towards these articles, I find it interesting how those who don’t speak a certain dialect add some phrases of other dialects to their vocabulary. What instantly came to mind is how in recent years, slang coming from AAVE (African American Vernacular English) and slang from the LGBT community has become increasingly common with younger crowds. It’s interesting to see that no matter where you go, new forms and ways of using a language are always in development.

## English and other Languages in Japan

Of foreign languages seen and spoken throughout Japan, English is the language that holds the most prominence in the country (outside of Japanese), manifesting in primarily two domains: English education in schools, and English as seen in public spaces. In regards to education, the study of English is a requirement by the Japanese government from grades 5-12, but even outside of formal education, English is a course that is often taken by learners who attend cram school. The desire to globalize Japan and the influence of the United States occupation of Japan are two important reasons for the prevalence of English in modern day society. The extent of this influence can also be seen through adult learners who enjoy learning for no reason other than self satisfaction.

Up until the 1990s, Japanese first language speakers (J1) were primarily studied in the field of Japanese sociolinguistics and why they speak in the way that they do. First wave sociolinguistics approached this question using an inside perspective using the concept of social variables and language. This relates to age differences as well as gendered differences. The second wave approaches the question by evaluating regional differences between the usage of large scale empirical surveys.

In addition to first language speaker studies, research regarding in between speakers or those who don't fully fit into masculine language or feminine language has been conducted. Within this group is another category. One common view of the Japanese language is based on the notion that race, language, and culture cannot be separated. As such a speaker of Japanese is commonly viewed as a monolingual person who is a Japanese national. Stemming from this is a contrasting concept, in-between speakers, or households that primarily used Japanese overseas but have returned to Japan.

In addition to these, two other categories of Japanese speakers exist: J2 and JFL. J2 speakers are regarded as the children that have immigrated to Japan due to circumstances outside of their control and have minimal to no exposure to Japanese. And JFL speakers are those who study Japanese language abroad similar to how students study English in Japan for respective reasons.

As the language has these various categories of Japanese speakers, it is easy to see how important the conversation of multilingualism has become. This is accentuated even more so with the presence of both the indigenous languages of the Ainu as well as the Ryukyans. As more and more immigrants and workers continue to come to Japan, multilingualism will continue to be a topic at hand and we may eventually see it follow the salad bowl theory where languages have regional sections or the melting pot theory in which they coexist.

In regards to these articles, I found it most interesting the many categories that speakers of Japanese can be divided into. As a JFL speaker it's also interesting to see how my method of studying gradually shifts from one category to another. By this I mean the shift in learning materials targeted towards JFL speakers, towards learners in Japan, and the usage of native content.

## Gender and Language

The Japanese language has some words and grammatical nuances that differ between men and women. These differences are often called gendered language and are a huge part of how those who speak Japanese express themselves.

When it comes to women's language, approaches to study it vary. Two approaches are called the difference and dominance approach. The difference approach emphasizes that women and men belong to separate subcultures, and as a result the language used by men and women are affected by their respective subcultures. The dominance approach, however, emphasizes the idea that women are an oppressed group and the language used is a reflection of their subordination towards the dominance of men. As the vast majority of gendered speech has focused on women, men's language has been argued to be a baseline for the study of gendered language, causing it to be studied in direct comparison rather than as an individual concept.

On the other hand, Masculine language expresses assertiveness and strength. As a result, it is often associated with physicality, violence, and/or sensuality, especially within a fictional society. This is shown through data that reveals, "masculinity is tied to authenticity and that some Japanese novelists depict East Asian male characters as manly and sexy" (Suzuki 227). When it comes to these novels, Non-East Asian male characters are shown to use masculine language and dialects to a lesser extent than those who are. This is made more prominent when the focus is on the fluency of central characters. Characters within these dramas and novels also reflect what research has revealed about how language is perceived within the social life of individual societies, which can be seen through how often heroines in the romance genre speak standard Japanese or other dialects associated with prestige and class.

I believe small details like these show that more constraints are often placed on women in Japanese society. In Ohara's studies, it was observed that on average, women speak with a higher pitch while communicating in Japanese when compared to that of communicating in English. These constraints are hinged on the belief that women should appear more feminine and as a result, femininity is viewed as a concept that provides women with certain advantages. Overall although gendered language is an endless and complex topic, I like to simplify it as another tool for self expression. They allow you to break the norm of assumed gendered roles which can be seen by girls using the more masculine first person pronoun using *boku* and vice versa for males that use *atashi*. One question I have is regarding whether or not gendered language is prevalent in honorific and humble speech as well.