

A Sense of Inclusiveness Through Japanese Dialect: Preliminary Results of a Pilot Study on Non-Native Japanese Language Speakers' Attitudes Towards Learning the Local Dialect in Fukui City

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Abstract

In November 2015, the authors conducted a pilot study to investigate the level of desire by non-native Japanese speakers to learn the local dialect in Fukui City, Japan and to assess non-native Japanese speakers' attitudes towards Fukui dialect. Research data was collected using a semi-structured interview method to interview 10 non-Japanese residents of Fukui City, Japan. The interview specifically asked about: (1) ability to identify Fukui dialect when heard, (2) knowledge of characteristics of the Fukui dialect, (3) desire to be able to hear or understand Fukui dialect, and (4) desire to be able to speak Fukui dialect. The results indicate that a majority of participants have a desire to hear or understand Fukui dialect, while at the same time indicating there is not a strong desire to be able to speak Fukui dialect. Furthermore, deeper analysis of the interviews suggests that the desire to be able to understand the local Fukui dialect may be contingent on the level of desire to be included in the local Fukui community.

Keywords: regional Japanese language education, perceptual dialectology, dialect consciousness, community development, Fukui dialect

1.0 Introduction

The authors first began collaborating on the issue of teaching Fukui dialect to non-Japanese speakers in Fukui in early 2015 for a number of reasons. First, both authors had very different, but important reasons to pursue this topic. One researcher is a non-native Japanese language speaker who found himself in situations where he could not understand local Fukui residents due to Fukui dialect. The other researcher is a Japanese native speaker who teaches Japanese and found herself in situations where students would often ask about Fukui dialect. In addition, the non-native Japanese speaking researcher experienced a number of conversations with younger native Fukui residents in which they indicated that Fukui dialect was disappearing in use among younger Fukui people. Also, there is research that indicates that non-native Japanese speakers in Fukui are interested in learning Fukui dialect (Nagata 2007). Finally, looking at all the dialects of Japan, it seemed that many of them had materials to supplement their learning, but similar learn-

ing supplements were sorely lacking with regards to Fukui dialect.

These above reasons led to the initial meetings between the researchers on this topic. In these initial meetings, the researchers determined three things they needed to understand before fully engaging in the development of learning materials for Fukui dialect. First, they needed to understand non-native Japanese speakers' active perception level of Fukui dialect. Particularly as many studies have been done in the field of perceptual dialectology (often referred to as 'dialect consciousness' in the Japan-related literature in English) for the Japanese language among native speakers of Japanese over the years (Maze 1964; Inoue 1992; Aizawa 2010), but not among non-native speakers of Japanese. Second, they needed to know if there was a real need and desire among non-Japanese language speakers living in Fukui to actually learn Fukui dialect. Finally, they needed to know what attitudes these same non-Japanese language speakers hold towards Fukui dialect. Without knowing the answers to these questions, the authors would not be able to gauge if such learning material development and creation would be a worthwhile effort. This paper answers seeks to answer these questions and also to add some new dimensions to the research the authors have begun upon.

2.0 Basic Characteristics of Fukui City Dialect

Fukui City is located in the northern part of Fukui Prefecture, Japan about 180 km north of Kyoto City. The dialect is divided largely into two types: north and south. The south dialect is best represented by that of Tsuruga City and shares many characteristics of Western Japanese dialect (Kansai dialect). The north dialect, which is where Fukui City falls, is classified as a Hokuriku dialect. Hokuriku represents a region of Japan that encompasses three prefectures: Fukui, Ishikawa, and Toyama. This north Fukui dialect is the dialect that is the focus of dialectal questions within this paper and any reference to Fukui dialect from herein refers to this form of the Fukui dialect.

The accent of Fukui City is described as accentless, meaning accent is not a determinant in the meaning of words as it is for most other dialects of Japanese (Sato 2004). Fukui's north dialect also has a distinctive intonation that often occurs at the end of phrases, called '*yusuri* intonation.' Grammar in many aspects reflects that of Kansai dialect, however there are many grammatical changes that are peculiar to Fukui dialect. For example, *-nema* in Fukui dialect compared to *na-sai* (translation: please) in standard Japanese. Fukui dialect also has a number of unique lexical items.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research method

The authors utilized a qualitative research method through the use of the semi-structured interviews to interview participants. Particularly, the authors tried to utilize a research interview method with a phenomenological theme of "lived experience" as defined by Seidman (2013) in order to understand as best as possible the actual circumstances of interviewees in a Japanese language environment. Interviews were recorded using IC recorders and ranged in length from around 10 minutes to one hour. Interviewing was chosen over other forms of qualitative research methods to allow the authors not only to obtain desired information formulated in questions beforehand, but also to allow the freedom to follow up on or clarify any other seemingly important information obtained from participants. As Seidman (2013) suggests "interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience."

3.2 Interview content

10 interviews were conducted from November 13, 2015 to November 25, 2015. Five interviews were conducted in Japanese and five were conducted in English. The interviews asked about initial background information including: (1) gender, (2) native language, (3) school year/major/occupation, (4) time lived in Japan, (5) time lived in Fukui City, (6) time spend studying Japanese within Japan, (7) time spent studying Japanese outside of Japan, (8) situations where participant uses Japanese, and (9) frequency of Japanese use.

This background information was followed by four basic questions on the Fukui dialect: (1) ability to identify Fukui dialect when heard, (2) knowledge of characteristics of the Fukui dialect, (3) desire to be able to hear/understand Fukui dialect, and (4) desire to be able to speak Fukui dialect. The semi-structured method of interview also allowed interviewers to freely follow-up on these questions as needed.

3.3 Participants

The authors interviewed 10 participants using the semi-structured interview content outlined in Section 3.2. Participants were affiliated with the University of Fukui either as exchange students or employees at the university. Basic information on participants is indicated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Basic Biographical Data of Participants on Studying and Living in Japan

	Sex	Native Language	Time Lived in Japan	Time Lived in Fukui City	Total Time Spent Studying Japanese
Participant A (J)*	Female	Chinese	2 years	2 years	2 years
Participant B (J)	Female	Chinese	1 year, 6 months	1 year, 6 months	5 years, 6 months
Participant C (J)	Female	Chinese	1 year, 6 months	1 year, 6 months	5 years, 6 months
Participant D (J)	Female	Chinese	7 months	7 months	5 years, 1 month
Participant E (J)	Male	Chinese	7 months	7 months	5 years, 5 months
Participant F (E)	Female	Indonesian	4 years, 8 months	1 year, 8 months	4 years, 8 months
Participant G (E)	Male	Malaysian	3 years, 7 months	3 years, 7 months	4 years
Participant H (E)	Female	Malaysian	4 years, 8 months	1 year, 8 months	6 years
Participant I (E)	Male	Italian	1 year, 8 months	1 year, 8 months	6 years, 8 months
Participant J (E)	Male	Italian	1 year, 9 months	1 year, 9 months	1 year, 8 months

* (J) indicates interview conducted in Japanese, (E) indicates interview conducted in English

4.0 Results

In this section, the authors share the results to the questions posed in the semi-structured interview discussed in above [Section 3.2](#). Specifically, participants' answers to the questions relating to Fukui dialect are discussed: (1) ability to identify Fukui dialect when heard, (2) knowledge of characteristics of the Fukui dialect, (3) desire to be able to hear/understand Fukui dialect, and (4) desire to be able to speak Fukui dialect. Initial results to questions (1), (3), and (4) are indicated in the figure below:

Figure 2: Participant Response Breakdown to Questions 1, 3, and 4 of Interview Guide

	Yes	No	Not sure
Question 1: Ability to identify Fukui dialect	7	3	0
Question 3: Desire to be able to hear/understand Fukui dialect	6	4	0
Question 4: Desire to be able to speak Fukui dialect	3	6	1

As for (1) ability to identify Fukui dialect when heard, seven participants indicate they are able to identify the Fukui dialect. Three indicate they are not able to identify Fukui dialect. Six participants indicate (3) a desire to be able to hear or understand Fukui dialect compared to four who had no such desire. Finally, three indicate a (4) desire to be able to speak Fukui dialect against six who had no such desire, and one who is not sure whether they want to be able to speak Fukui dialect or not.

As for question (2) on knowledge of characteristics of the Fukui dialect, only Participant G indicates no knowledge whatsoever of characteristics of Fukui dialect. The rest of the participants indicate some limited knowledge. The characteristics of Fukui dialect that appear to be known to the remaining participants can be broken down into three parts: (1) vocabulary [mentioned by six participants], (2) intonation [mentioned by five participants], and (3) phonological changes compared to standard Japanese [mentioned by four participants].

4.0 Interpretations of Results through Emerging Themes

In this section, the authors attempt to interpret the meaning of the results of the interview questions. In addition to the question of awareness of Fukui dialect as well as desire by non-native Japanese speakers in Fukui City to be able to hear or speak Fukui dialect, the authors also discuss possible motivations for wanting (or not wanting) to learn Fukui dialect by deeply analyzing conversations using representative comments made by participants and to pull out emerging themes (Tesch 1987; Wolcott 1994). Many such themes have been tentatively identified in this initial investigation, including (1) *effect on Japanese-speaking ability*, (2) *Kansai dialect*, (3) *lack of desire to invest time*, (4) *non-positive image of Fukui dialect*, (5) *older people*, and (6) *inclusiveness*. All of these tentative themes will be touched upon in the analysis below, however, the last theme listed in particular, which the authors label *inclusiveness*, has been identified by the authors as possibly being important in shaping the learning desire and attitudes of the participants towards the local Fukui dialect and is written about in greater detail below.

4.1 Fukui dialect perception and desire to learn Fukui dialect

The results from (1) ability to identify Fukui dialect when heard and (2) knowledge of characteristics of the Fukui dialect suggest the participants are fully conscious of Fukui dialect and, even if they cannot understand it when hearing it, nine of 10 participants were able to identify some aspect of Fukui dialect. The results also suggest there is a desire by some participants to have learning opportunities for Fukui dialect, at least with regards to being able to understand or hear the dialect as six participants indicate responded affirmatively to (3) desire to be able to hear/understand Fukui dialect compared to four who indicate no such desire. Furthermore, only three participants show a desire to (4) be able to speak Fukui dialect compared to six who show no such desire and one who is not sure whether she wants to be able to speak Fukui dialect. Therefore, any learning opportunities created in response to these results should reflect a focus on listening ability for Fukui dialect and steer away from spoken instruction in Fukui dialect.

4.2 Reasons against learning Fukui dialect

Many reasons are given on lack of desire to learn Fukui dialect, but one in particular that stands out as an emerging theme is *effect on Japanese-speaking ability* (Participants A, B, C, F). Specifically, these participants are concerned about unwittingly adopting Fukui dialect as their main form of spoken Japanese and an inability to codeswitch between standard Japanese and the Fukui dialect in such a scenario. They envision negative consequences that might ensue if they were to leave the Fukui area and speak with Fukui dialect.

It is interesting, though, that Participants A, B, and C, while indicating anxiousness on the effect of a local dialect on their standard Japanese, also exhibit a seemingly contradictory desire to learn *Kansai dialect*, which was another emerging theme. Furthermore, Participants A, B, and C indicate two more important emerging themes related to reluctance in studying Fukui dialect: *lack of desire to invest time* and *non-positive image of Fukui dialect*. In the former, the participants indicate simply they do not want to invest any time in studying Fukui dialect. In the latter, Participants A and B indicate they have no particularly positive or negative impressions of the Fukui dialect, while Participant C indicates a distinctly negative image of Fukui dialect. This non-positive image of Fukui dialect may help explain the above-described contradictory stance of these participants when indicating interest in learning *Kansai dialect*, yet at the same time having anxiousness on the *effect on Japanese-speaking ability* when learning a non-standard Japanese dialect. In other words, these participants are willing to risk negative effects on their spoken standard Japanese if it is for a dialect for which they hold a positive image, which includes *Kansai dialect* but does not include Fukui dialect.

4.3 'Inclusiveness' as the main driver for learning Fukui dialect

From the authors' point of view, the most outstanding tentative theme uncovered was that which the authors have labeled '*inclusiveness*.' Every participant in this study in one way or another spoke of either a desire to be included in the local community or not. Participants who have a desire to be included in some part of the local Fukui community tend to be the ones who also have a desire to be able to understand Fukui dialect. On the opposite end, participants who seem to have no desire to be included in some part in the local Fukui community also indicate little to no desire to learn Fukui dialect. This is best exhibited through representative statements of the participants during their interview:

- (1) Participant D: バイト先でも、自分には標準語で話してくれるから、分からなくて困ったことはない。でも、日本人同士が話している時は福井弁で30%ぐらいしか分からない。だから、分かるようになりたい。

(Translation by authors) At my part-time job, [my coworkers] speak standard Japanese to me, so there is never a problem understanding. But when my Japanese coworkers speak among themselves it is in Fukui dialect and I understand only 30%. So I want to be able to understand.

- (2) Participant E: 日本人同士が話している時、福井方言で話していると分からないことがある。そういう時はつらいし、参加しにくい。

(Translation by authors) There are times when I don't understand [my Japanese coworkers] when my Japanese coworkers are speaking due to them speaking Fukui dialect. It's tough at those times and hard to participate.

- (3) Participant F: I don't have much chance to speak to neighborhood people so I want to speak Fukui dialect.

- (4) Participant J: I plan to live in Fukui for some time so in order to participate in the community I want to be able to understand Fukui dialect.

All of the above comments indicate a desire to somehow join in some community aspect within Fukui City where Fukui dialect is being spoken. Therefore, the need and desire to at least understand Fukui dialect arises within the above participants. In comparison, other participants who indicate a lack of desire to study Fukui dialect also indicate in their interviews a lack of desire to be included in the local Fukui community. Take the example of Participant H, who does not have an interest in learning Fukui dialect:

- (5) Participant H: When I go to the bike shop the old guys speak in Fukui dialect and I have no idea what they are talking about. It's probably Fukui dialect. It might be Kansai dialect, I don't know. But what I do know is I have no idea what they are talking about.

Interviewer: What do you do when they speak in Fukui dialect to you?

Participant H: I just give them a look of not understanding.

Interviewer: And what do they do?

Participant H: Ignore me.

[Later in the interview]

Interviewer: Do you want to be able to speak Fukui dialect?

Participant H: No, I am not really interested. There is no benefit for me.

Interviewer: What about when you go to the bike shop you just mentioned?

Participant H: No, I have no interest.

What Participant H is indicating in this exchange is not only a lack of desire to learn Fukui dialect, but also a lack of desire to want to participate in the local community. To keep with the idea of *inclusiveness*, it might be better stated that because Participant H does not want to participate in the local community in Fukui she does not want to learn Fukui dialect. This analysis is further bolstered by Participant A, who also shows no interest in learning Fukui dialect yet speaks of conditions where she might want to be able to understand Fukui dialect:

(6) Participant A: 周りの人が福井方言を使ったら、仲よくなりたいなと思って、興味を持つと思う。今、生活の中で福井方言を聞かないから興味が持てない。

(Translation by authors) If the people around me used Fukui dialect and I thought I want them as good friends, I think I would have an interest [in learning Fukui dialect]. For now, I don't hear Fukui dialect in my daily life so I don't have any interest in it.

Participant A is imagining herself where she had some investment in a community of people who spoke Fukui dialect. In that case, she would like to be included and therefore would have motivation to learn Fukui dialect.

The above examples all indicate that the desire level of *inclusiveness* may be a strong indicator for the desire level by non-native Japanese speakers to learn a local dialect, including Fukui dialect. On the opposite end, a lack of desire to study a local dialect may also indicate a lack of desire to actively participate in a local community or at least a lack of opportunities to engage within the local community. One emerging theme connected to this issue that is not discussed in length within this paper is the association by the participants of Fukui dialect with *older people*. Five of the 10 participants indicate this association. If desire for inclusiveness is truly a necessary prerequisite for desire to study the local dialect, this may be a major factor in many of the participants' lowered *inclusiveness* desire level as the participants are all under 35 years of age and so do not have a strong will to engage with older Fukui residents. This conclusion requires verification through different research including research with younger Japanese native speaking Fukui residents described in the final section of this paper.

5.0 Discussion and Future Research Directions

The results of this pilot interview study suggest that non-native Japanese speakers in Fukui are conscious of Fukui dialect, though depending on the situation they may or may not be able to understand what is being said in Fukui dialect. This result leads into the overall results, which suggest there is some need for creating learning opportunities on Fukui dialect for non-native Japanese speaking residents of Fukui City. However, the results also suggest that any learning opportunities created in response to these results should reflect a focus on developing listening ability for Fukui dialect, and not speaking ability. In what form should these learning opportunities take shape – a class, a symposium, online materials, etc. – is still not clear and further research on this subject is needed.

Also, while it is clear there is some desire by non-Japanese for learning opportunities regarding Fukui dialect and evidence from these 10 participants suggests this conclusion, the scale of number of interviews should be broadened from 10 to a larger number of non-Japanese living in Fukui to ensure the validity of this conclusion. In addition, it would be worthwhile to complement this research on non-native Japanese speakers living in Fukui with qualitative research of native Japanese speakers living in Fukui to understand to what extent Fukui dialect is actually spoken in everyday life in Fukui. Particularly since the participants indicate an association of Fukui dialect with older people and one of the authors own anecdotal experiences with younger Fukui-natives suggest that Fukui dialect is not as prevalent among younger Japanese from the area. Furthermore, if there is a need for the development of learning materials for the Fukui dialect, research on the dialect characteristics in Fukui City is absolutely imperative and, accordingly, research on the speaking habits of native speakers of the dialect is also imperative.

Finally, the authors' research here suggests that a desire for *inclusiveness* in a local community is a necessary prerequisite for a desire to learn the local dialect of that community. However, future research on the topic including looking at a larger sample of participants as indicated above as well as research that may expand into more sociological fields outside of language learning and language altogether may be necessary to determine if this description of *inclusiveness* is indeed something that is both valid and worth pursuing as research when considering the motivation of language learners within any particular community.

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方言を通して見る地域社会との一体感：日本語非母語話者の福井市の方言学習に対する態度に関する予備的調査から

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要旨

本研究では、福井市在住の日本語非母語者10名を対象に、福井市の方言に対する学習意欲と態度について、半構造インタビューによる調査を行った。調査では特に次の4点についてデータを収集した。(1) 福井方言の聞き分けができるか(2) 福井方言についての知識(3) 福井方言を理解できるようになりたいか(4) 福井方言を話せるようになりたいか。調査の結果、被調査者の多くが福井方言を理解できるようになりたいと考えている一方で、福井方言を話せるようになりたいという強い希望は持ち合わせていないことが明らかとなった。さらに、インタビューを詳細に分析したところ、福井方言の理解に対する欲求の強さは、自身が地域社会にとけ込むことをどの程度望んでいるかによって異なることが示唆された。

キーワード：地域日本語教育，方言意識，まちづくり，福井方言