Prestige and stigmatization of a Japanese dialect
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There have been two periods of standardization in Japanese: the first took place in the Meiji Restoration in 1867, while the second was part of the post World War II education reform. Each of these periods had a significant effect upon the status of minority dialect in Japanese. When the Edo Period ended in 1867, the central government determined that the language spoken by the Samurai caste in Tokyo would be the basis for Standard Japanese. The Meiji government tried to centralize political and cultural power in Tokyo and eventually to spread this form of Japanese throughout Asia.

However, it was the post World War II Period when standardization had the strongest effect throughout Japan. The Department of Education meticulously planned the teaching of correct Japanese, which was to be clean of regional accents, dialectal expressions, and slang to elementary pupils (Shimono 1993).

A few tragic episodes are reported in the 60s when some people committed suicide because of their inferiority complex or not being able to speak the Standard (Kanazawa 1993). Stigmatization of local dialects is a product of the Standardization of Japanese which occurred through Japan's modernization process.

This paper will discuss and analyze a Japanese dialect which is considered one of the most stigmatized dialects, a subdialect of Tohoku dialect which is spoken in Yonezawa City. First I will report how the dialect is different from the Standard, and why it has been stigmatized. Secondly I will discuss how the people of Yonezawa, the most southern city of Yamagata Prefecture in Tohoku District has been facing this stigma. In this context, I will argue that the concept of local prestige or covert prestige often reconsidered because these Western sociolinguists' concepts do not seem to fit the study of the study of the contemporary situation of Japanese local dialects.

The Status of Tohoku Dialect
Japanese sociolinguists such as Kindaichi consider the Tohoku Dialect as the farthest from Standard Japanese other than Okinawan (Kindaichi 1977). A certain number of perception tests have shown how Tohoku Dialects has been stigmatized (Inoue 1989; Kanazawa 1993). For example, Fumio Inoue 1989 conducted a study of stereotypes of dialects based on two principal factors, intellectual (evaluative) and emotional (dynamic). He found that overall Tohoku dialect has the most negative intellectual image of any Japanese dialects. The images of the respondents attributed to the Tohoku Dialect are: it sounds bad, it sounds out of date, is sounds unsophisticated, it sounds very far from the standard, etc. Therefore, Tohoku dialect has been a symbol of backwardness in the context of modern Japan.

Linguistic features of Tohoku Dialect

Why does the Tohoku Dialect have these negative images? Before discussing this more in detail, I will briefly explain the linguistic features of Tohoku Dialect.

1. Absence of pitch accent

Japanese is characterized by pitch accent such as kâki (oyster)-kâki (persimmon). However, generally Tohoku Dialect does not have pitch accent. In the following pair which lacks dialectal lexicon, only the lack of pitch accent and low and flat intonation marks the dialect.

1. Ashita wa âme deshoo. (Standard)
2. Ashita wa ame deshoo. (Tohoku Dialect)

It will rain tomorrow.

2. Voicing of intervocalic voiceless stops and affricates

Stops and affricates are voiced following vowels, as in 3 and 4. Depending on the rate of speech, this voicing can take place across a morpheme, or even word boundary.

3. ûtsu to kâette kuru (Standard)
Uzu do kaedde guru (Tohoku Dialect)

hit PAR return come
'When (you) hit (it), it comes back.'

3. Merger of i and u to become i
   The merger of i and u, combined with voicing of intervocalic voiceless stops and affricates, bring about the perception that Tohoku Dialect frequently sounds 'zuuzuu'. For example, *shujutsu* 'surgical operation' *shichiji* 'seven o'clock' and *shijitsu* 'historical fact' are all pronounced as *suzuzu*.

4. Palatalization, which is considered child-like speech.
   /se/ is often pronounced as /she/ in Tohoku Dialect, similar to a toddler's *speech*. For example, sensee teacher' would be pronounced /shenshee/, which Japanese toddlers tend to say.

5. Tag particle *be/ppe*
   The function of the end of the sentence particle *be/ppe* in Tohoku Dialect is to express intention supposition (Inoue 1985 ). This tag-particle has been treated as the symbol of 'country-ness' by the mass media. This is the reason why a hillbilly-like Japanese person is often pejoratively referred to as inakappe 'country-ppe'.

5. Nda be. (Tohoku Dialect)
   Soo deshoo (Standard)
   So isn't it.
   'It is so, isn't it?

6. Hayagu teema kangae-ppe (Tohoku Dialect)
   Hâyaku teema kangae-yoo. (Standard)
   quick theme let's think
   'Let's think of theme quick.'

6. Relatively little difference between men and women's speech
   The first person pronoun *ore*, the second person pronoun *omae*, the lack of the women's particle *wa*, and women's more frequent usage of *yo* distinguish Tohoku speech from that of Tokyo.

7. Ore mae gara oji-kkara yo,
Voicing, slow, heavy talk, low pitch, toddler-like pronunciation, and distinctive intonation, all contribute to the image of backwardness in the Tohoku Dialect. Similarity in the speech of men and women creates the impression that Tohoku women, at least, are not refined, but wild and rough.

These descriptions would be enough to explain why the Tohoku Dialect is stigmatized. The Tohoku-born Inoue Hisashi writes about his experience of stuttering when he started living in Tokyo because he felt uncomfortable about his dialect. Tohoku people outside of Tohoku are often unable to hide their accents, and so they rather tend to be shy, simply by not talking in front of other people.

These linguistic features interact with the fact that Tohoku District was the most backward area, underindustrialized, being heavily based on rice cultivation, having cold and dark climate, and one of the lowest average incomes. The NHK IV soap opera 'O-shin', which aired in the early 1980s, described the hard life of a girl born to an extremely poor Tohoku peasants' family, and was sold to be a house maid at the age of six: This show became popular not only because of the tragic life of the heroine but also because of the dialect spoken on the program. Tohoku--Oshin, dark, poor, tragic--this mental association became a regularized formula for the mass media. Another image Tohoku has is primitive exoticism, 'the Tibet of Japan.'

In fact, the mass media has marked Tohoku Dialect in various ways. Comedians who speak Tohoku Dialect become popular because of their hillbilly-like outfit and the zuuzuu accent, which makes urban audiences laugh. Daniel Kahl, a blond Californian who learned the Yamagata dialect, became quite popular on TV as a yamagata-ben o hanasu maruchi tarento 'a multi-talent who speaks Yamagata Dialect.' The discrepancy between a
fashionable Western, especially Californian, image and the Tohoku image struck many Japanese as funny.

Haga 1992 points out the fact that in Tochigi/Ibaragi Prefectures which belong to Kanto District, but the residents' phonological pattern is obviously that of Tohoku Dialect, the people do not mind speaking their dialects in front of other people, as opposed to Tohoku people. He attributes this difference to the consciousness that their prefectures belong to Kanto which includes metropolitan area such as Tokyo and Yokohama. Thus Haga thinks that social factors are the cause for the stigmatization of dialects. A few Tokyo people I interviewed answered in the same way, that is, if Tohoku districts were more urbanized or modernized, the dialects would not be the object of stigmatization any longer. This question will be left as a chicken and egg question, and we will have to observe the dynamic aspect of this dialect in the near future.

A case study of the Yonezawa Dialect

Yonezawa is a city of about 95,000 people, in the deep south of Yamagata Prefecture. The geographic setting of Yonezawa is conducive to a distinctive local dialect. It is located at the cold, northern tip of Japan, surrounded by high mountains, the Oou Mountain Range. The weather conditions are unusually severe, and until the end of the 19th Century, when a tunnel was constructed through the mountains to the neighboring prefecture, traveling between Yonezawa and the rest of the country was difficult (Kamimura 1977).

This is an ex-castle town which was founded at the beginning of the 17th Century when the Uesugi Clan was defeated by the Tokugawa Shogunate. Uesugi was a poor Shogunate, but has survived their geographic and climate difficulties. The 16th Uesugi Shogun, named Yozan Uesugi is a historical hero as he revived the economical recessions by encouraging silk weaving, carp culturing, and the sake industry. Yonezawa residents are proud of the story that John F. Kennedy cited this Uesugi Shogun in a speech.

Yonezawa dialect has been defined as the language spoken in the castle of the Uesugi Clan and the immediately surrounding town. The dialects spoken in the countryside around Yonezawa have been excluded from this definition, and these neighbor dialects were labeled as inaka-go or
zaigoo-go, 'country languages'. This attitude still remains among people of
Yonezawa, even though the new administrative area of Yonezawa covers a
much larger area.

Contrary to the dialectologists' claim that the Tohoku area lack
honorifics (Kindaichi 1977), the Yonezawa dialect is characterized by the
frequent usage of honorifics and politeness forms which were developed by
the caste system. The consciousness that Yonezawa dialect is the heritage
of the great Uesugi Shogun has contributed to the people's pride in their own
dialect.

Especially the families who originated from the weavers' families
and sake manufacturers are recognized as heirs of the dialect. They go out
of the city to attend universities or work, then come back to the city to inherit
their family business or even start a different business. Although their
traditional occupation face a crisis, they still dominate local cultural and
political organizations. This attitude is reflected among young people, too.
In a highschool where I conducted research, more than half of the students
answered that Yonezawa dialect is a source of pride, and it is important so it
should be maintained well, even though their intellectual evaluation of it is
low and they would not use the dialect when talking to non-Tohoku people.

Questionnaire survey sheet
5. strongly agree
4. agree
3. neutral
2. disagree
1. strongly disagree

(70 respondents, a highschool in Yonezawa)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yonezawa dialect is a source of pride</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important so it should be maintained well</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It sounds intellectual</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will use it when talking to non-Tohoku people</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This attitude sometimes induces negative feelings among outsiders, that is,
feeling that Yonezawa people are closed and haughty, and even among the
weavers' families, a few who are liberal complain about Yonezawa people's obstinate conservatism and traditionalism.

Contrary to reports from Western societies, women are obviously not the promoter of Standard Japanese. Women who are economic as well as political leaders in the local areas are rigid protectors of the dialect, which shows their affection for their home country and human 'warmness'. Speaking the standard could suggest negligence of their families, neighbors, and their homeland. For local women, the standard language, in which men and women speak distinctively, sounds too flirtatious and shirigaru 'light ass'.

The diachronic dynamism of the dialect cannot be ignored. Observing the present situation of the speech, as was reported by NLRI (National Language Research Institute) 1974, younger speakers have fewer dialectal features. Compare the following two sets of three speeches in which the meaning is the same.

8. a. Hoda kozaide kida do.
   b. Ooyuigi no naga aruide kida do.
   c. Ooyuki no naka aruite kita to.
   ST Ooyuki no naka aruite kita-tte.
   in heavy snow walk came I hear
   'I hear that s/he came walking in the heavy snow.'

9.a. Sadoo datta genjomo naniga neebe gasshi?
   b. Satoo deshita gedo naniga nai desuga.
   c. Satoo desu kedo nanika nai desuka.
   ST Satoo desu kedo nanika arimasenka?
   Satoh is but something isn’t there
   'This is Satoh. Is there anything available/necessary?'
   (a call from a food shop)

8a and 9b are spoken by members of the older generation. 8a in particular is almost unintelligible to members of the younger generation. 8b and 9b are spoken by older teenagers and adults, while 8c and 9c are spoken by children in elementary school and kindergartens. This pattern was clear in several conversations I recorded.
Younger children have the fewer dialectal features because of the spread of the mass-media and probably also because of the more nuclear construction of present-day families so that they seldom hear dialectal expressions from their grandparents. The specific dialectal expressions are decreasing in frequency and there is less intervocalic voicing. The lack of pitch accent is the only dialectal feature in children's speech, although I assume that gradually the young children will acquire more dialectal features in the future.

However, this does not mean the dialect is dying. The residents are constantly producing synthetic form of dialects and standard, as seen in 8 and 9. Accordingly, their speech itself moves between more dialectal forms and less dialectal forms, depending on the setting. In formal settings their speech is closer to the standard, while in informal settings the dialect is preferred.

Thus, the dialect is in a transitional stage, but is not in jeopardy. The regional standard is rather coming to be used in the formal contexts where the local polite forms had previously being used.

On the national level, as was pointed out by Shimono 1993, Tohoku dialect has low intellectual prestige, but the other side of the coin is that it has a high emotional value even at this level. It is perceived as being warm, nostalgic, and representing 'good old times'. Some call the current tendency to amrerkt dialect by printing dialectal expressions on souvenir products such as cups, towels, and cake boxes, or catch phrases for the purpose of pulling tourists into the areas~) 'dialect egotism' (Haga 1992). The mass media, especially soap operas, continuously reproduce modified dialects to exaggerate the touch of localness. This fact may also contribute to the local prestige of Yonezawa which has been nurtured by its historical background.

Conclusion

In Western sociolinguistics research, as exemplified by work such as that of Labov 1963 and Trudgill 1972, local dialects can only have covert prestige, meaning that they are particularly associated with the speech of people of lower status in the area, whereas high-status local residents will distance themselves from this local usage by speaking something more closely resembling the national standard even in their informal speech—for example, in a small city in the southern US, the lower-status people will
speak a strong local dialect while the higher-status people, the community 
leaders, will replace many of the features of this local dialect with features 
of Standard English in all of their speech, thereby associating themselves 
more with the central institutions of power in the country. Thus the local 
dialect can only have covert prestige, the prestige of lower-class people in 
opposition to people from other aras but also in opposition to local higher-
class people.

In Japanese cities such as Yonezawa, this is not the case and so the 
concept of covert prestige is irrelevant. Here, local higher-class people are if 
anything the most enthusiastic supporters of the local dialect, so that at the 
local level the prestige of the local dialect is overt, not covert. Usage of the 
dialect therefore marks one as a member of the local community, not as a 
member of a particular social class in the local community.

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