

## Variation in the Use of Regional and Standard Japanese

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A number of differences between spoken language and written language have been recognized, including degrees of context-dependency, spontaneity, (non-)interactive production, and variation. This paper focuses on one of these differences: linguistic variation. In particular, it examines variation in the use of regional and standard Japanese.

One of the most well recognized examples of linguistic diversity in Japanese is the wide regional variation in speech. However, as noted by many scholars, for a variety of reasons, including the government language policy in modern Japan, the standardization of Japanese has been steadily advancing, reducing regional variation. As a consequence, speakers of regional Japanese are said to have become bidialectal and code-switch between two (or three) varieties of Japanese. However, few studies have examined actual conversations closely and hence it is unclear exactly how and why speakers use regional and standard Japanese. In this study I analyze conversations carried out by speakers of regional Japanese with regard to the use of phonological, morphological, and lexical variants. The results show that speakers mix regional and standard variants in differing degrees depending on the situation. The nature of these mixings is highly complex and structured, suggesting that the use of variants is not mere free variation but rather functionally motivated in that it serves to index particular socio-pragmatic meanings. At the same time, such meanings may be ambiguous and indeterminate, for they are being shaped dialectically through patterns of use as these variants participate in linguistic change in progress.

Based on the findings of this study I consider their implications for the nature Japanese grammar, in particular the question of how the grammar of a particular language can deal with the kind of dynamic variation observed in this study-variation that has ramifications on the relationship between form and function. Linguistic variation is said to be intrinsic to spoken language. I then consider its relevance to written Japanese.