

Diffusion and obsolescence of dialect vocabulary in 250 years

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In this paper, we analyze the diffusion process of standard and dialectal forms in terms of geography and age distribution based on computational lexicology. Our purpose is to elucidate the main patterns of lexical changes since before the modernization. This topic can be placed in the fields of linguistic geography and historical sociolinguistics. The basic data are drawn from two large-scale questionnaire surveys. These surveys inquired about the words recorded in a dialect glossary *Hamaogi* which was compiled 250 years ago in Tsuruoka city in northern Japan. Lexicological information was added to the data, and MCA (Multiple Correspondence Analysis) and Cluster Analysis were applied to the whole set of data.

This paper considers, based on this data, generational differences in usage of the words and changes in the usage rate of standard Japanese forms which have replaced words recorded in the dialect glossary. Of the 420 words recorded in *Hamaogi*, many have been replaced by standard Japanese forms, and some by other dialectal forms (new dialect forms). The standard forms were originally taken up to examine the reverse process of dialect decline, but analysis of the data required us to deal with the phenomenon of obsolescence instead. Contrary to expectations, some standard forms were used more often by the older generation and less by the younger generation. These are obsolete words which are related to the old lifestyle. By comparing these tendencies of *Hamaogi* words with the nationwide dialect distribution, we determined that generally those words used only in a small area have declined while words used in a wide area have survived. Also, *Hamaogi* words with a high survival rate showed a seemingly contradictory tendency to be replaced with standard Japanese forms. We discovered this tendency to be the result of a competing process distinct from survival

and replacement: the obsolescence of words. This is a process in 250 years by which words reflecting the pre-modern lifestyle are forgotten, and applies to standard forms as much as dialect forms. The process of obsolescence or dialect attrition seems to govern the linguistic change, and even the linguistic change in progress now may be disturbed by obsolescence.