

New criteria for selecting a local dialect speaker:  
how much important the grandparents' information?

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This study aims at setting new criteria for selecting a local dialect speaker by inquiring about the origin of their parents, which accommodates to the reality in big cities. When selecting a dialect speaker in Japan, it is often said that the person who represents a local dialect must have locally-born parents and grandparents. However, how many people can meet the criteria in big cities? In view of the difficulty to find such dialect speaker, it is high time that this criteria must be simplified.

In the past, Chambers and Heisler (1990) proposed the Regional Index to determine whether or not the person can be a representative of the dialect. The influence of parental origin is considered, but not a priority. However, the parental origin influences children's acquisition of the local dialect (Payne 1976, Stanford 2008).

This study shows the results of two surveys. The first survey is based on the data collected in 1965 in Hokkaido, Japan, by NINJAL. The objective was to see if the immigrant family members acquire the standard Japanese through three generations. Hokkaido, situated in the northern part of Japan, was once a land of Ainu, indigenous people. In around 1870, people from the mainland Japan started to settle in for development. Therefore, there were many immigrants from all over Japan. In this survey, three immigrant families participated and in each family three family members (first, second and third generation) read out loud the word list. They documented their accent. Using this data, the author carried out a quantitative study to see how much the dialect of the first generation is transmitted to second and third generation. The results show that the correspondence rate for the dialect of the first generation is different from family to family, but overall the correspondence rate decreases toward third generation. The correspondence rate between first and third generation was between 13% and 30%. In other words, the dialect of the first generation was partially

transmitted.

Then, how much the parental origin influences the children's acquisition of local dialect? The author carried out a survey in Kagoshima, Japan, to see how much children whose parents are not locally born acquire the local dialect accent. The result indicates that the children whose parents are locally born acquire the local accent much better than the children whose parents are not locally born. The children whose mother was locally born showed better performance in acquisition of local accent than the children whose father was locally born.

In conclusion, these results suggest that we do not have to refer to the origin of the grandparents when choosing a dialect speaker because the grandparent's dialect was not much transmitted to third generation. However, the parental origin influences children's dialect acquisition. Therefore, when selecting a dialect speaker, we should ask the person's parental origins. Ideally, the person's parents come from the same dialect region, but it is also acceptable the case where the person's mother comes from the same dialect region.

(495 words)

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