

# Correlation Between Japanese EFL Learners' Attitudes Toward L1 Dialects and Japanese English

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## Abstract

This study explores how Japanese EFL learners' mindset toward their own regional dialect in Japanese (L1) influences their attitudes toward Japanese English, a recognized variety of English from the viewpoint of "English as an International Language" (EIL). We aim to examine whether Japanese learners' attitudes toward the L1 dialects they speak can be a criterion to judge who can accept and practice Japanese English positively. Fourteen Japanese college students were divided into two groups—Western and Northeastern Japan—based on the widely held idea that the Western dialect is popular a variety in Japan while the Northeastern dialect is less popular. Students participated in a survey about their dialects, read two articles about English varieties, and wrote about their ideas on Japanese English. The results show that all the students from Western Japan (7) were favorable about their Japanese dialects, and five showed positive attitudes toward Japanese English. In the Northeastern Japan group, more than half of the students showed negative mindsets toward their own Japanese dialects. The overall tendency was that those who answered favorably about their dialects showed positive attitudes toward Japanese English while those who were negative about their L1 dialect also showed negative attitudes toward Japanese English. The results suggest that Japanese EFL learners' attitudes toward their L1 regional dialect and Japanese English are correlated. The findings can be a benchmark to predict who would agree or disagree with the idea of EIL and help us decide what approaches to take to introduce the concept.

**Keywords:** Dialects, Accents, English varieties, World Englishes, English as an International Language

## 1. Introduction

In line with the progression of globalization, English plays a more and more critical role as an international language to connect people worldwide. The number of English speakers is now reaching approximately 1.5 billion, and around 75 percent of them are non-native English speakers. From a perspective of sociolinguistics, language reflects the speaker's culture and identity (Morimitsu, 2010; Niemeier, 2004); people express their cultures and identities in their languages. Given the unique status of English in global communication, it is more natural to consider it to have a wide range of regional and social varieties that are continuously growing rather than regarding it as one language with a limited number of recognized varieties. In reality, the emergence of English varieties has been acknowledged and discussed by many researchers, especially those whose research topic is 'World Englishes.' Considering the situation, many scholars argue that nativized (non-native) English varieties should be accepted as the legitimate varieties of English as well as native English varieties (Field, 2005) and support the idea of 'English as an International Language' (Smith, 1976) to encourage ESL/EFL learners to freely express their ideas using their own English varieties rather than focusing on correcting "L2 errors" based on the belief that they should aim at mastering "Standard English." However, many Japanese EFL learners prefer native English varieties over nativized ones, including their own variety, i.e., Japanese English. This can be mainly due to the English education policy and the influence of America and England on the history and culture of Japan. Another factor can be speakers' attitudes toward non-standard varieties of language in general. Particularly, if they have an experience of being negatively evaluated because of the dialect they use, such an experience can leave a negative impression on less prestigious varieties of a language in general. In this paper, we argue that Japanese speakers' attitudes toward regional varieties, especially their own, can also affect their attitudes toward Japanese English. In other words, we investigate the correlation between Japanese EFL learners' mindsets about Japanese dialects (L1 regional accent) and their attitudes toward Japanese English (L2 accent). Namely, Japanese EFL learners with negative mindsets about their dialects are expected to form and show negative attitudes toward Japanese English, or vice versa. Based on this hypothesis, the current study explores how Japanese EFL learners' mindsets about their dialects affect their attitudes toward nativized English varieties, including Japanese English, through empirical research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Viewpoints on English Varieties

"World Englishes" (WE) (Bolton, 2004; Brutt Griffler, 2004; Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 1985, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2007; McArthur, 2002) refers to the use of English for international communication by speakers with different linguistic and cultural background (Jenkins & Leung, 2017). In the context of WE, therefore, there are many various 'Englishes' based on the reflection of the speakers' linguistic and cultural characteristics. Related to WE, Smith (1976) advocates "English as an International Language" (EIL). Based on EIL, all English speakers can obtain ownership of English because it does not matter whether they are native or non-native English speakers; 'It is yours (no matter who you are) as much as it is mine (no matter who I am)' (p.39). Also, he claims that ESL/EFL learners should reflect their cultures

and identities to speak English not as a borrowed language but as their own language. By acquiring ownership of the language, the learners are expected to obtain self-confidence or self-efficacy and boost their performance in speaking English.

There are mainly two principles regarding English pronunciation: the native-likeness and intelligibility principles (Levis, 2005). The native-likeness principle leads ESL/EFL learners to follow the rules of “Standard English” accent, in other words, Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American English (GA) accents. On the contrary, the intelligibility principle facilitates them to acquire understandable pronunciation by producing their English accents. Referring to it, Derwing and Munro (2005; 2009) stress that “Accented English” would be understandable even when it is strongly accented. In terms of WE and EIL, therefore, the intelligibility principles should be prioritized over the native-likeness; the native English speaker’s rules do not have to be considered (Jenkins, 2000).

Despite this view, however, many ESL/EFL learners still struggle to acquire RP or GA accents by reducing or excluding their original ones, which are part of their native languages’ characteristics. Indeed, there are various reasons why they prefer RP or GA over their English varieties. Sections 2.2 through 2.5 summarize some of the widely-discussed reasons as well as the aspects we focus on in this study.

### *2.2 Preference, Intelligibility, and Familiarity With English Accents*

The intelligibility and familiarity of English accents may partly explain ESL/EFL learners’ preference for their English varieties. Concerning it, Choomthong and Manowong (2020) implemented empirical research on the pronunciation of English varieties at college in Thai to investigate the correlation between preference and intelligibility of accented English. The participants are all Thai students majoring in English. In the research, the students were asked to evaluate each English variety from the best to the worst accent and from the easiest to the hardest to understand. As a result, it shows that the preference and intelligibility of English varieties are significantly correlated; “the more intelligible the varieties of English were perceived to be, the more likely it was that the participants preferred the speakers’ English” (p.158).

In regard to it, Honna and Kirkpatrick (2004) introduce that intelligibility in pronunciation is essentially associated with English rhythm, whether the English variety is stress-timed or syllable-timed. The native English varieties are stress-timed, while many nativized English varieties are syllable-timed. The rhythm of English is influenced by the speakers’ native languages, that is, whether their languages are stress-timed or syllable-timed. When their native languages are syllable-timed, their English varieties are also syllable-timed, and vice versa. Following this idea, it is easier for ESL/EFL learners to learn and practice English with the same rhythm as their native languages. For instance, Japanese EFL learners are supposed to learn and practice Japanese English more comfortably and effectively rather than American English.

Further, familiarity is also related to intelligibility. Regarding this, Pilus (2013) reported that Malaysian ESL learners rated Malaysian (syllable-timed) English as the most familiar

English variety over American and British English. Based on the result, Pilus asserts that the learners highly recognized Malaysian English in terms of familiarity and identified with their own native accents more comfortably. Given the correlation between these three components: *preference*, *intelligibility*, and *familiarity*, it is likely that Japanese EFL learners prefer the syllable-timed English varieties, especially Japanese English, over stress-timed ones, such as RP and GA. However, the reality seems to be completely the opposite.

### *2.3 Relationship Between L1 Dialects and L2 Accents*

Many empirical research projects on Japanese EFL learners' attitudes toward English varieties (Hanamoto, 2008, 2010; Matsuda, 2003, 2009; McKenzie, 2004, 2008; Takahashi, 2012; Yoshikawa, 2005) were implemented. Looking at some of their reports, many Japanese EFL learners regard Japanese (syllable-timed) English as one of the low-status English varieties (Matsuda, 2003) and hold negative stereotypes about nativized English varieties (Hanamoto, 2010). On the other hand, they highly evaluate "Standard English" (RP or GA), that is, stress-timed English. In our previous studies (Saito et al., 2020; Saito, 2021), we also investigated how Japanese EFL learners consider nativized English varieties, including Japanese English, and many of them did not evaluate positively about the varieties before we introduced the concept of WE and EIL. Accordingly, these investigation results landed on the opposite side of the idea presented in Section 2.2.

Acknowledging the gap between their finding and the reality, Choomthong and Manowong (2020) concludes that "dialectal background is likely a significant factor that affects students' evaluations of accents, whereas gender, region of residence, and listening ability are not (p.12)." In light of this, Matura and Chiba (2014) explain how the dialectal background influences people's ideas about dialects; "participants who had never spoken accented Japanese were more likely to accept unfamiliar L2 accents, compared to bidialectal speakers of Standard Japanese and their own regional dialect. It was likely that participants' positive or negative attitudes toward L1 regional dialects influenced their attitudes toward L2 accents to some extent (p.11)." Given that, many Japanese EFL learners are not expected to be positive about Japanese dialects, considering they show negative attitudes toward Japanese English. In fact, some factors induce people to form negative mindsets about Japanese dialects.

### *2.4 Background of Unfavorable Mindsets About Japanese Dialects*

First, the historical background can explain the Japanese people's negative impression of non-standard dialects. Although Japanese people used to have and use various dialects throughout the country, the government introduced the language policy to unify the people and the country, that is, to modernize the country with the advent of the Meiji era (1868-1912). Sauzier (2008) mentions that people from different social groups had difficulty in communicating because of their dialects, so the government needed to standardize the language at that time. However, language standardization brought the abolishment of dialects and the emergence of "accentism" in Japan. Once the norm of the Japanese language was formed based on the "Tokyo dialect," well-educated people in Tokyo obtained the privilege of being the language dominant class. In contrast, those who speak "non-Tokyo dialects" were targeted for accentism, being associated with "backwardness," "illiberality," and

“exclusivity.” In particular, many people in Tohoku (Northeastern Japan) were labeled with the image of “country people” in public and workplaces. Due to the accentism and social discrimination, the number of dialect speakers significantly went down.

Second, the media further promotes Japanese people’s negative perception of dialects. After WWII, “Standard Japanese” drastically spread in Japan through the radio, newspaper, and TV media. As media increased in sophistication, it became common to stigmatize some dialects. Concerning this, Kumagai (2021) reports that dramas produced by NHK (the Japan Broadcasting Corporation) describe the Tohoku dialect as the one spoken in the countryside, which symbolizes “outland,” “backwardness,” “seniority,” and “ill-educated.” Further, Tanaka (2016) affirms that the media has repeatedly created such a dialectal stereotype, reminding people of the dialect’s solid negative impressions and distorted images.

Some research indicates how people have negatively tagged the Tohoku dialect. For instance, Inoue (1977) implemented a questionnaire to investigate how people evaluate dialects, including their own. The result showed that the Tohoku dialect is considered difficult to understand, very different from Standard Japanese, and a representation of the countryside. Nagase (2015) also conducted a similar investigation and concluded that the impressions and images of dialects formed in the past are hard to change based on the around 40-year-crossing study. Considering that, it seems natural that people from Tohoku shape their negative mindsets about their dialects, which would also negatively affect their attitudes toward Japanese English.

### *2.5 Favorable Mindsets About the Western Dialect*

On the contrary, people from Western Japan proactively express their dialects even outside of their speech communities. According to Kawaguchi (2019), the reason is that the Western dialect has been widely recognized and highly evaluated. Western Japan has been the center of culture and economy for a long time, so the Western dialect has been at the top of the Japanese dialect hierarchy. Furthermore, the media highlights popular and famous people with the dialect, such as celebrities and comedians from Western Japan. Actually, some questionnaire data denotes how popular the Western dialect is.

First, a Japanese marriage support company reported the ranking of favorable Japanese dialects based on the questionnaire (Partner Agent, 2018). The participants were males and females in their 20s and 30s, and the number of participants was 2,180. The result is shown in Figure 1 below.

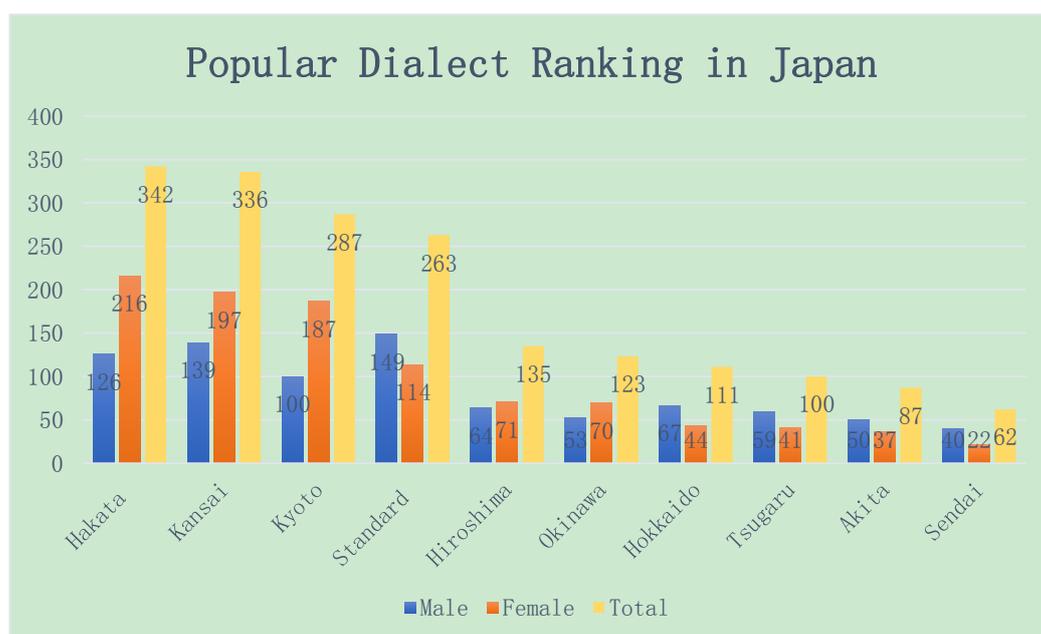


Figure 1. Popular Dialect Ranking in Japan

*Note.* Both the Tohoku and Western dialects are composed of many different regional dialects; the Tohoku dialect includes Tsugaru, Akita, and Sendai dialects, whereas the Western dialect has Hakata, Kansai, and Kyoto dialects.

According to the data, the most popular three dialects (Hakata, Kansai, and Kyoto) are all from Western Japan, while the least popular three dialects (Tsugaru, Akita, and Sendai) are all from Tohoku. Further, a Japanese moving website company reports how much people speak their dialects outside their hometown (speech communities) based on an Internet questionnaire with 500 participants (WebCrew, 2016). The result indicates that nearly 80 percent of people from Western Japan continue to speak their original dialects after moving, whereas only 30 percent of people from Tohoku do so.

### 2.6 Purpose of the Study

Looking at these research and questionnaire investigations introduced in Sections 2.4 and 2.5, it is apparent that the Western dialect is highly evaluated while the Tohoku dialect is not. In light of the idea of Matsuura and Chiba (2014), it is inferred that people from Western Japan would show positive attitudes toward Japanese English (L2 accent) since they are favorable about their dialects (L1 regional dialects). Thus, the current study tackled the following research questions.

- (1) Whether EFL learners with favorable mindsets about their dialects (L1 regional dialects) show positive attitudes toward Japanese English (L2 accent)
- (2) Whether EFL learners with unfavorable mindsets about their dialects (L1 regional dialects) show negative attitudes toward Japanese English (L2 accent)
- (3) Whether more EFL learners from Western Japan are positive about their dialects (L1 regional dialects) and Japanese English (L2 accent) than those in Tohoku

In many studies reporting Japanese EFL learners' preference for certain English varieties (Hanamoto, 2008, 2010; Matsuda, 2003, 2009; McKenzie, 2004, 2008; Takahashi, 2012; Yoshikawa, 2005), few have associated it with their attitudes toward L1 dialects. Although Matura and Chiba (2014) showed that EFL learners' attitudes toward L1 dialects influence those toward English varieties that they are not familiar with, how the L1 dialectal background influences the way people perceive their own "non-native" varieties of English is still understudied. In the current study, therefore, we aim to show how Japanese EFL learners' attitudes toward L1 dialects affect those toward their own Japanese English. Further, by finding out the relatedness between people's attitudes toward L1 dialects and Japanese English, we can predict who can easily accept and practice the idea of EIL to raise their confidence and performance in English communication more effectively. To answer these questions, therefore, we introduced the activity and conducted the questionnaire in English classes at a Japanese college.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Participants*

The participants of this study were 1<sup>st</sup>-year Japanese college students majoring in agriculture, engineering, and regional design in Japan. They were enrolled in an English course designed for students whose English proficiency ranges from novice to low-intermediate (the range of TOEIC scores is from 350 to 450). Seven students from Western Japan and another seven students from Northeastern Japan participated in this study, so the total number of participants was 14.

#### *3.2 Materials and Procedure*

The following materials were used to examine the students' mindsets about Japanese dialects, including their own, and their attitudes toward nativized English varieties, including Japanese English.

##### (1) Questionnaire

The participants were asked to answer the following questions about their dialects.

Q1. *Where is your hometown? (If there are multiple places where you grew up, please write the places and how long you lived there individually.)*

Q2. *Do you speak a dialect? If so, which dialect do you speak?*

Q3. *Do you speak your dialect in other places (out of your hometown), too? Why? Why not?*

Q4. *Which dialects (including your dialect if you have one) do you like (or like to learn if there is a chance), and which dialects are you not really positive about? Why?*

Q5. *Do you think people can speak their dialects outside their hometown?*

First, the participants are asked about their dialectal background; where they are from, and whether they speak dialects (Q1 and Q2). Then they are asked about their preference for

dialects, including their own (Q4). Finally, the participants are asked whether people, including themselves, can use their dialects outside their speech communities. (Q3 and Q5).

## (2) Reading and Writing Materials

After completing the questionnaire (with the interval of six weeks), the participants were asked to read WE/EIL-related articles on their own and write their ideas and opinions about the prepared topic questions in writing assignments (two and a half weeks). The content of the reading materials and the topic questions is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reading Materials and Topic Questions for Writing

	Reading Materials	Topic Questions
<i>Reading/Writing 1</i>	<i>Which Accent Do You Like?</i>	<i>Should we use our own accent or use Standard English accent? Why?</i>
<i>Reading/Writing 2</i>	<i>Pronunciation and Intelligibility</i>	<i>How do you answer the question in the article, “Is it really important for us to learn native English varieties to communicate with people all over the world?”</i>

*Reading 1* introduces how people feel about the L1 regional dialect and L2 accent; the dialect and accent tend to be associated with unintelligence while these bring familiarity, that is, people can communicate with the dialect and accent more easily and comfortably. The topic question asks the participants which English varieties they should use: “Standard English” to make themselves sound intelligent or their English varieties to ensure smooth communication.

*Reading 2* presents the interrelation between pronunciation and intelligibility; it is more accessible for EFL/ESL learners to learn and practice their English varieties rather than “Standard English” because the rhythm of their English varieties is the same as that of their mother languages (Honna & Kirkpatrick, 2004, pp. 98-99). Further, WE is introduced in the reading so the students can learn that there are far more varieties of English spoken in the world. The topic question asks the participants whether they should learn “Standard English” even though the majority of people speak their original English varieties worldwide.

Namely, *Reading 1* and *2* ask the participants which English varieties they should “speak” and “learn” in terms of English accent and pronunciation. In other words, we can tell whether the participants agree with the idea of EIL through their writings. Although the readings are related to WE/EIL, these adopt a neutral position about the ideas of EIL in order not to intentionally lead the participants to form positive attitudes toward nativized English varieties but to let them express their honest voices about it.

Through the activity and questionnaire, we examined the students' attitudes toward Japanese English (L2 accent) and Japanese dialects (L1 regional dialects) and analyzed the correlation of these two elements, dividing the students into two groups according to their hometowns and dialects; Western and Northeastern Japan.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

##### *4.1 Students From Western Japan*

###### *4.1.1 Results of Questionnaire: Western Japanese Group*

The questionnaire result shows that all the students from Western Japan show favorable mindsets about Japanese dialects, including their own. Further, 3 out of 7 students insist that dialect is a part of people's identity (using different terms such as *individuality*, *personality*, and *character*). One of them additionally mentions that he proactively speaks his dialect in communication with people from other areas since expressing and sharing dialects bring deep mutual understanding. Besides, two of them indicate that dialects promote fluent and efficient conversation.

###### *4.1.2 Results of Writings: Western Japanese Group*

The following are some excerpts of the students' comments about English varieties in speaking English (*Writing 1*) and learning English (*Writing 2*).

Student A:

*I think that we should speak English with the standard English accent because people would not like our accent, and it would prevent us from building a good relationship with them (Writing 1).*

*I do not think that people need to learn native English varieties. We can understand each other even though we speak different dialects (Writing 2).*

Student B:

*...we should enjoy the differences between various English accents...For example, I speak the "Kansai Dialect" because I'm from Osaka...Everyone tells me that the dialect describes my character (Writing 1).*

*Learning culture is important for us to communicate with people all over the world...I think learning native English varieties makes us understand their cultures (Writing 2).*

Student C:

*We should use our own accent because it is easy and comfortable to communicate (Writing 1).*

*It is really important for us to have the ability to communicate with our English varieties. There are a lot of English accents in the world, so we should listen to and get close to a variety of English (Writing 2).*

Student D:

*...everyone has a different accent to speak the language easily and comfortably...There are a lot of dialects in Japan...They are all different, but I have never had trouble understanding them...I think that different English accents will not make any trouble either, so we should use our own accents (Writing 1).*

*I think that it is very important for us to learn native English varieties to communicate with people all over the world...I notice that Japanese joke is different from American joke. For example, I could not understand my native English teacher's joke in class and felt that we were not making good communication (Writing 2).*

Student E:

*I speak Japanese English with an accent. This is because I think communicating with people is more important than producing a "correct" accent (Writing 1).*

*I do not have to learn native English varieties...if we learn native English, we cannot communicate with other people fluently (Writing 2).*

Student F:

*I think we should use the Standard English accent...a common accent is essential for people to communicate with various people (Writing 1).*

*I think that it is not important for us to learn native English varieties to communicate with people all over the world (Writing 2).*

Student G:

*I think that we should use our own accents because even people who use English on a daily basis have their own accents (Writing 1).*

*I think Japanese people should also use their own accents...The important thing is to be able to communicate with people, so we should use our own English varieties (Writing 2).*

#### 4.1.3 Analysis and Discussion: Western Japanese Group

Looking at the students' mindsets toward their L1 dialects in the survey, all students from Western Japan are fully favorable about the dialects as expected based on the previous research and questionnaire. Some argue that it is important to use their dialects, associating these with their identities. At this point, their ideas about dialects share the essential thought with EIL; language reflects the speaker's culture and identity.

When it comes to their ideas about English, the result of the writings denotes that 5 out of 7 students are positive about the idea of EIL (*Writing 1*). Most of them state that people should speak English with their own accents instead of RP or GA accents to achieve smooth communication. They seem to think that people can speak more fluently with their own English accents, as they believe it is the case with their dialects (L1 regional accents) in speaking Japanese. Further, one of them remarks that people are not supposed to have

difficulty in English communication with their accents based on his experience of not having any communication troubles with people speaking different Japanese dialects. Another student points out the importance of accents and dialects as an instrument to express the speaker's characters. When it comes to learning English, however, two of them (B and D) show a preference for "Standard English." Even so, their ideas also show another perspective on EIL; Japanese EFL learners can understand cultures of "Standard English" by learning them, which indicates the importance of exposure to different English varieties. Therefore, it appears that the students still stay on the positive side of EIL in learning English as well as speaking the language.

In contrast, the other two students (A and F), who disagree with the idea of EIL in speaking English (*Writing 1*), show positive attitudes toward it in learning English (*Writing 2*). Although it is not clearly stated in their comments, the introduction of WE seemed to change their minds. In fact, many Japanese students in the same class, whose data were not included in the current study because they were not from Western or Northeastern Japan, changed their attitudes from negative to positive between *Writing 1* and 2. Furthermore, some of them commonly mention the following in their writings; "I believed that all English speakers in the world would speak American or British English only, therefore, I was negative about the idea of speaking Japanese English (*Writing 1*), but I changed my mind after knowing the concept of WE, that is, the fact that 75 percent of English speakers are non-native and speak their own English varieties (*Writing 2*)." Such an example can suggest that WE can be a good stepping stone to promote Japanese EFL learners' comprehension of EIL and forge their positive attitudes toward Japanese English.

The result indicates that more than half of the students from Western Japan were originally positive about the idea of EIL, while the rest of them formed positive attitudes toward it after the introduction of WE. Hence, it can be considered that Japanese EFL learners with favorable mindsets toward their dialects show or form positive attitudes toward their English varieties. Based on the result, therefore, a positive correlation between the students' mindsets about their dialects and their attitudes toward Japanese English can be found in the group from Western Japan.

## 4.2 Students From Northeastern Japan

### 4.2.1 Results of Questionnaire: Northeastern Japanese Group

According to the result of the questionnaire, 3 out of 7 students (I, J, and M) from Tohoku show favorable mindsets about their own dialects and agree with the general idea for people to express their dialects even outside of their speech communities. Two of them affirm the importance of dialect by associating it with the speaker's culture and identity. On the other hand, 4 out of 7 students (H, K, L, and N) show negative mindsets about their own dialects, implying that dialects would cause miscommunication and misunderstanding between people from different speech communities. However, three of them (K, L, and N) agree with the general idea that people speak dialects outside, so they are negative about their own dialects but not dialects in general. In contrast, only one student shows negative mindsets about both her own dialect and Japanese dialects in general.

#### 4.2.2 Results of Writings: Northeastern Japanese Group

The following provides some excerpts of the students' comments about English varieties in speaking English (*Writing 1*) and learning English (*Writing 2*).

Student H:

*I think we should use a Standard English accent...because I heard many overseas people cannot understand our Japanese accent well...So, we should use a Standard English accent to make a good relationship with the people (Writing 1).*

*I think correct pronunciation is not important for English communication...because most English speakers are not native speakers (Writing 2).*

Student I:

*I think we should use our own accent...If you use your accent, people can tell where you are from...It sounds friendly...accent is a part of traditional culture that should be passed down to the next generation (Writing 1).*

*I think it is very important for us to learn native English varieties to communicate with people all over the world. I'm sure the local accent is important, but not everyone can understand your way of speaking English (Writing 2).*

Student J:

*I think that we should use our own accent because it is very difficult for us to use an accent that we do not usually use...I think using the Standard English accent that we are not used to using would prevent smooth communication (Writing 1).*

*It is not really important for us to learn native English varieties, which does not mean we do not have to learn them. We might be able to communicate with people all over the world without using native English varieties (Writing 2).*

Student K:

*I think we should use our own familiar accent because it is good enough for people to understand, and the accuracy of an English accent is not needed in daily conversation (Writing 1).*

*I do not think we need to learn native English varieties because language is a communication tool...it is fine to use our own English as long as we can communicate with people (Writing 2).*

Student L:

*I think we should use the Standard English accent because it is common all over the world...Standard English accent is easy to understand compared to our own accent (Writing 1).*

*I think we do not need to learn native English varieties...I did not know that about 75 percent*

*of English speakers are non-native...we can learn Japanese English more easily than native English varieties, according to the reading (Writing 2).*

Student M:

*I think we should use our own accent...accent is a part of the history of the area, so the local people should preserve the accent by speaking it (Writing 1).*

*I do not think learning native English varieties is important...we can understand each other in English with different accents. Even though we cannot understand because of the accents, we can try to use different communication tools, such as gestures (Writing 2).*

Student N:

*I think we need to use a Standard English accent because the purpose of speaking English is to communicate with people abroad (Writing 1).*

*I insist that it is important for us to learn native English varieties because it is easy for people to understand us (Writing 2).*

#### 4.2.3 Analysis and Discussion: Northeastern Japanese Group

Looking back at the results of the questionnaire in Partner Agent (2018) and WebCrew (2016) and those of Inoue (1977) and Nagase (2015), it was expected that more students from Tohoku would show unfavorable mindsets about Japanese dialects, including their own. In fact, however, nearly half of them are favorable about their dialects, and most of them show favorable mindsets about Japanese dialects in general; people can speak their dialects outside of their speech communities. This unexpected result can be attributable to the fact that the Northeastern participants have not experienced accentism seriously. The students are still freshmen, so it seems that they have not faced the events of accentism yet, which keeps them favorable about their dialects even outside of their speech communities. Further, the university is located in the prefecture close to Tohoku, and many of the local people in the suburban area speak a similar dialect. That is, people in the prefecture where the university is located are familiar with the Tohoku dialect, so speaking Tohoku dialects is not negatively highlighted there.

4 out of 7 students (I, J, K, and M) show positive attitudes toward Japanese English in speaking English (*Writing 1*), and three of them (I, J, and M) with favorable mindsets about their dialects commonly state that they prefer producing their Japanese English accent over the “Standard English” accent because their own accent lets them speak English more fluently and embodies their culture and history. Like it was the case with the Western Japan group, the result in the Tohoku group also shows that positive attitudes toward their dialects are linked with positive attitudes toward Japanese English. From a perspective of learning English, however, one of them (I) maintains the importance of learning “Standard English” as a common communication instrument in the global context.

In this group, 3 out of 7 students (H, L, and N) show negative attitudes toward Japanese English in speaking English (*Writing 1*), and all of them are negative about their dialects.

When it comes to learning English, however, two of them (H and L) positively changed their minds, and one of their comments (L) embodies our expectation that WE can be a conceptual instrument to induce Japanese EFL learners' positive attitudes toward English varieties.

#### 4.3 Summary of the Results

The summary of the questionnaire and the writing results are shown in Table 2 and 3, respectively below.

Table 2. Summary of the Questionnaire Results

<b>Western</b>	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Student A	Ehime	Iyo	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student B	Osaka	Kansai	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student C	Ehime	Iyo	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student D	Hiroshima	Hiroshima	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student E	Okayama	Kansai	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student F	Kobe	Kansai	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student G	Mie	Kansai	Positive	Yes	Positive
<b>Tohoku</b>					
	-	-	-	-	-
Student H	Fukushima	Fukushima	Negative	No	Negative
Student I	Miyagi	Tohoku	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student J	Aomori	Tsugaru	Positive	Yes	Positive
Student K	Iwate	Tohoku	Negative	No	Positive
Student L	Fukushima	Fukushima	Negative	No	Positive
Student M	Fukushima	Aizu	Positive	No	Positive
Student N	Aomori	Tohoku	Negative	No	Positive

Note. The question contents are shown in section 3.2 *Activity Materials and Procedures*.

Table 3. Summary of the Writing Results

Western	<i>Writing 1</i>	<i>Writing 2</i>
Student A	Standard English	No (Japanese English)
Student B	Japanese English	Yes (Standard English)
Student C	Japanese English	No (Japanese English)
Student D	Japanese English	Yes (Standard English)
Student E	Japanese English	No (Japanese English)
Student F	Standard English	No (Japanese English)
Student G	Japanese English	No (Japanese English)
<hr/>		
Tohoku	-	-
Student H	Standard English	No (Japanese English)
Student I	Japanese English	Yes (Standard English)
Student J	Japanese English	No (Japanese English)
Student K	Japanese English	No (Japanese English)
Student L	Standard English	No (Japanese English)
Student M	Japanese English	No (Japanese English)
Student N	Standard English	Yes (Standard English)

Note. The writing topics are shown in section 3.2 *Activity Materials and Procedures*.

## 5. Conclusion

In the present study, we analyzed the correlation between Japanese EFL learners' attitudes toward their own Japanese dialects (L1 regional dialects) and Japanese English (L2 accent). Comparing the two groups: college students from Western Japan and those from Tohoku (Northeastern Japan), we implemented an activity (reading/writing tasks and a questionnaire)

to investigate their attitudes. The result shows that all the students from Western Japan are favorable about their dialects and showed or formed positive attitudes toward Japanese English. On the other hand, more than half of the students from Tohoku showed unfavorable mindsets about their dialects, mostly due to low intelligibility. The overall result suggests that Japanese EFL learners' attitudes toward their L1 regional dialects can be an indicator showing what attitude they might show toward Japanese English in both groups; those with favorable mindsets about their own dialects also tend to show positive attitudes toward Japanese English.

Based on the findings in this paper, we learned that Japanese EFL learners' mindsets about their dialects be used to judge whether they will be positive about Japanese English and help us decide what approaches to take to introduce EIL to encourage the learners to practice the idea, that is, to speak Japanese English. To conclude, however, we need more investigations with more Japanese EFL learners since the present study was implemented with a small number of participants. Hence, we will continue to work on this study, targeting different participants with different dialectal backgrounds to figure out to what extent the idea can function as the criterion for introducing WE and EIL into English classes.

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