

UO‘K(UDC, УДК): 81-26

JAPANESE DIALECTS ACROSS MEDIA: REPRESENTATION AND CHALLENGES²⁷**Noto Kuniyuki***Lecturer**Uzbekistan State World Languages University**Tashkent, Uzbekistan**E-mail: notokuniyuki@gmail.com**ORCID ID: 0009-0002-5609-8441***ABSTRACT**

This study examines the representation and use of Japanese dialects in contemporary media. Since the establishment of a standardized national language, dialects in Japan have often been associated with linguistic inferiority and social stigma. However, recent movements toward dialect preservation and reevaluation have influenced the ways dialects appear in media and how they are perceived by audiences. Using examples from films, computer games, and anime/manga, this study analyzes how dialects contribute to character construction, narrative development, and cross-linguistic translation. In film, dialects are frequently employed to highlight character traits or comedic tone when translating non-standard speech. Meanwhile, some computer games demonstrate a shift from stereotypical uses, employing dialects to suggest individuality or regional identity. In anime and manga, translators occasionally create artificial dialects in the target language to preserve cultural nuance, illustrating innovative strategies in translation. Despite such developments, reproducing the subtle linguistic and cultural meanings of dialects remains challenging, and current AI translation systems still struggle with dialect-specific nuance. This study concludes that while representations of dialects in media are gradually moving away from negative stereotyping, significant issues persist in translation and language processing. Further research should address the growing influence of social media, where dialect usage and its interpretation continue to evolve.

KEY WORDS

Dialects, Media
Representation, Translation,
Standard Japanese,
Stereotypes, AI Translation.

Received: February 23, 2026**Accepted:** March 18, 2026**Available online:** May 10, 2026

²⁷ **For citation (Iqtibos keltirish uchun, для цитирования):**

Kuniyuki N. Japanese Dialects Across Media: Representation and Challenges. // Komparativistika (Comparative Studies). — 2026. — Vol.3, № 2(10) — B. 209-220.

YAPON SHEVALARINING MEDIADAGI IFODALANISHI: TAVSIFI VA MUAMMOLARI**Noto Kuniyuki***O'qituvchisi**O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti**Toshkent, O'zbekiston**E-mail:* notokuniyuki@gmail.com*ORCID ID:* 0009-0002-5609-8441**ANNOTATSIYA**

Ushbu tadqiqot zamonaviy ommaviy axborot vositalarida yapon shevalarining ifodalanishi va qo'llanishini tahlil qiladi. Yaponiyada standart adabiy til joriy etilgandan so'ng, shevalar ko'pincha "me'yoriy bo'lmagan" nutq sifatida baholanib, shevada so'zlovchilarga nisbatan kamsitish yoki salbiy stereotiplar shakllangan. So'nggi yillarda esa shevalarni qayta baholash va saqlash harakatlari kuchayib, ularning ommaviy axborotdagi roli ham o'zgarib bormoqda.

Maqolada kino, kompyuter o'yinlari hamda anime va manga kabi turli media namunalari ko'rib chiqiladi. Kinoda standart bo'lmagan nutqni yapon shevalari orqali tarjima qilish obrazni kuchaytirish yoki komedik effect yaratishga xizmat qiladi. Ba'zi kompyuter o'yinlarida esa shevalar stereotip yaratish vositasi emas, balki qahramonning shaxsiyati yoki hududiy kelib chiqishini ko'rsatish uchun qo'llaniladi. Anime va manga tarjimalarida esa madaniy ma'noni saqlab qolish maqsadida sun'iy shevalar yaratish holatlari uchraydi.

Shunga qaramay, shevalarning nozik ma'no va madaniy konnotatsiyalarini tarjimada to'liq aks ettirish murakkab bo'lib qolmoqda. AI tarjima vositalari ham hozircha shevalarga xos sezgirlikni to'laqonli yarata olmaydi. Tadqiqot xulosasiga ko'ra, media makonida shevalarning ijobiy va neytral talqini kuchayib borayotgan bo'lsa-da, tarjima va tilni qayta ishlash jarayonlarida yechilishi lozim bo'lgan muammolar hali ham mavjud.

KALIT SO'ZLAR

Lahjalar, media tasviri, tarjima, adabiy yapon tili (standarttil), stereotiplar, sun'iy intellekt tarjimasi.

**ДИАЛЕКТЫ ЯПОНСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В МЕДИА:
РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ****Ното Куниуки***Преподаватель**Узбекский государственный университет мировых языков**Ташкент, Узбекистан**E-mail: notokuniyuki@gmail.com**ORCID ID: 0009-0002-5609-8441***АННОТАЦИЯ**

В настоящем исследовании рассматриваются репрезентация и использование японских диалектов в современных медиа. С момента установления в Японии стандартизированного национального языка диалекты часто ассоциируются с языковой неполноценностью и социальной стигмой. Однако недавние движения за сохранение и переоценку диалектов повлияли на то, как диалекты репрезентируются в средствах массовой информации и как они воспринимаются аудиторией. На примерах из фильмов, компьютерных игр и аниме/манги, в данном исследовании анализируется, как диалекты способствуют построению характеров, развитию повествования и межъязыковому переводу. В кино диалекты часто используются для выделения черт характера или создания комического оттенка при переводе нестандартной речи. В то же время некоторые компьютерные игры демонстрируют сдвиг от стереотипного подхода, используя диалекты для указания на индивидуальность или для передачи региональной идентичности. В аниме и манге переводчики время от времени создают искусственные диалекты на целевом языке для сохранения культурных нюансов, прибегая тем самым к использованию в переводе инновационных стратегий. Несмотря на такие находки, воспроизведение тонких лингвистических и культурных значений диалектов остается сложной задачей, а текущие системы перевода искусственного интеллекта все еще борются с диалектными нюансами. В данном исследовании делается вывод о том, что, хотя представление диалектов в средствах массовой информации постепенно отходит от негативных стереотипов, существуют значительные проблемы в переводе и обработке языка. Следует проводить дальнейшие исследования по поводу растущего влияния социальных сетей, где использование диалектов и их интерпретация продолжают развиваться.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

Диалекты, репрезентация в медиа, перевод, стандартный японский, стереотипы, ИИ-перевод.

INTRODUCTION

Dialect as “Incorrect” Language

Since the implementation of the Standard Japanese policy in modern Japan, dialects have generally been perceived in opposition to Standard Japanese, and thus as “incorrect” forms of speech. With the expansion of media such as radio and television, Standard Japanese has become widely disseminated across the country. In recent years, however, there has been a growing movement to reassess and preserve dialects (Lee, 1998). This movement has emerged against the backdrop of a reality in which many dialects are disappearing.

The author, a speaker of the Osaka dialect, notes significant differences between the Osaka dialect used by the grandparents’ generation and that spoken by the parent generation. This illustrates that, even in regional areas, dialects have increasingly been standardized.

This phenomenon is not unique to Japan. For example, in China, the spread of Putonghua (Mandarin) in educational settings has created a generation unable to communicate with their own grandparents, as younger people can no longer speak the dialects used by their elders. Putonghua, literally meaning “the widely understandable speech,” parallels the concept of Standard Japanese in Japan. The term *common language* (*Kyoutsuugo*) can also be used in Japan to refer to a language that facilitates communication among speakers of different regional dialects. Unlike Standard Japanese as a prescriptive national language, a common language carries no inherent normative connotations.

Despite increasing recognition of dialects, the standardization policy has left enduring dialectal complexes and biases. Feelings of inferiority among speakers from non-standardized regions are a product of the authority associated with Standard Japanese. Promoting the spread of Standard Japanese and maintaining dialects are inherently conflicting goals.

Setting a standard language was essential for the formation of the modern Japanese state. Even during World War II, when Japan attempted to impose Japanese in occupied territories, the question arose of which variety of Japanese should be taught (Yasuda, 1999). Establishing a normative language system was crucial for the functioning of a nation.

Today, Standard Japanese is generally understood as the speech of educated speakers in the Tokyo-Yamanote area (Shibata, 1998; Yasuda, 1999). Once Standard Japanese was established, local dialects came to be viewed as forms requiring correction. According to Yasuda (1999), Standard Japanese appeared in school textbooks, and students who used dialect were penalized with “dialect tags,” marking dialects as linguistically incorrect.

Although such feelings of inferiority among dialect speakers persist, there has been a growing movement to preserve dialects. Just as the dissemination of Standard Japanese was greatly aided by mass media such as radio and television, the reevaluation of dialects is also manifesting through media (Sato, 1998). This study will examine how dialects are treated across different media, and specifically, how the various associations attached to non-standard dialects are managed in translation.

The Perception of Dialects

Nagase (2015) conducted a survey on the public perception of various Japanese dialects, revealing that the Kyoto dialect tends to be viewed favorably, whereas the Tohoku dialect is generally less well regarded. At the same time, research has pointed out that some dialects elicit strong evaluative perceptions, while others do not. That is, dialects frequently appearing in the media tend to have their stereotypes reinforced, whereas those that rarely appear in mass media often lack such associated imagery.

Perceptions of a dialect are not determined solely by linguistic features; rather, they are shaped by the region where the dialect is spoken and by the social characteristics of its speakers. The media has historically played a significant role in constructing such perceptions. In this section, we focus on two dialects with well-defined public evaluations: Osaka dialect and Tohoku dialect.

Osaka Dialect

The Osaka dialect refers to the speech used primarily in the Kansai region, especially Osaka, rather than Standard Japanese. Its distinctiveness lies in the fact that it is the only regional dialect that is frequently broadcast on public media (Peng, 2000). This prominence contributes to its perceived strength, which may be influenced by regional traits, as well as Osaka's economic significance as a major city after the capital. Nevertheless, Osaka dialect remains, relative to Standard Japanese, a regional dialect. Its deliberate use in media is often intended to evoke specific effects associated with the dialect.

Tohoku Dialect

Kumagai (2019) investigated the Tohoku dialect, one of the most stigmatized Japanese dialects, through the lens of NHK dramas. The studies revealed that the Tohoku dialect is employed in drama to convey simplicity or humor while simultaneously positioning its speakers socially lower. The dialects represented in dramas are not authentic, but rather limited, stylized versions. Kumagai (2017) argues that such portrayals reflect a structure in which the majority group uses a minority language to enhance their own social or personal appeal—through cuteness, humor, or familiarity—while subtly subordinating minority speakers. A similar pattern can be observed with Osaka dialect, reflecting the broader dynamic

of dialects as non-standard language. In general, the use of dialects in media is intentional, often reinforcing the dominance of the central language.

Role Language

In literary works, certain speech forms, such as “women’s language,” appear even if they are not used in everyday conversation. Kinsui (2023) classifies these forms as *role language*, which has become a subject of scholarly study. A well-known example is found in *The Golden Demon (Konjiki Yasha)* (Ozaki, 1998), where characters react to a large diamond:

“Daiyamondo! (Diamond!)”

“Umu, daiyamondo da. (Yes, a diamond.)”

“Daiyamondo?? (Diamond??)”

“Naruhododaiyamondo! (Indeed, a diamond!)”

“Maa, daiyamondoyo. (Well, it is a diamond.)”

“Arega daiyamondo? (Is that a diamond?)”

“Mitamae, daiyamondo (Behold, a diamond.)”

“Ara, maa daiyamondo?? (Oh my, a diamond??)”

“Subarashiidaiyamondo. (A splendid diamond.)”

“Osoroshihikaru none, daiyamondo. (What a fearsome shine, a diamond.)”

“San byaken no daiyamondo. (A three-hundred-yen diamond.)”

Through the use of role language, the scene differentiates the astonishment expressed by various characters, vividly portraying their reactions to the enormous diamond ring.

The Use of Dialects in Film

In Hollywood history, *Gone with the Wind* stands out as an unprecedented blockbuster, with its novel reportedly second only to the Bible in readership. Set in the American South during the Civil War, the narrative depicts the imminent collapse of the institution of slavery. Under this system, African Americans displayed distinct linguistic and social patterns compared to their white masters. One manifestation of this is African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which exhibits features clearly distinguishable from standard English.

In the Japanese translation, AAVE is rendered using Tohoku dialect, or accents reminiscent of northern Kanto. Similarly, the film’s Japanese subtitles and dubbed versions employ this constructed dialect. The assignment of a regional dialect to non-standard English did not appear to be problematic, as it reflects the perception of dialects as “incorrect” relative to the standard language. While it may be an overstatement to equate the perception of African Americans by white characters with Tokyo speakers’ perception of Tohoku dialect, the rationale for

choosing Tohoku dialect remains an intriguing question. Importantly, the impression conveyed by a dialect often aligns with the perceived impression of its speakers.

There are also instances where dialects with Osaka features are used in films. In Audrey Hepburn's classic *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, a comically depicted Japanese character speaks English that cannot naturally be rendered in Standard Japanese. In this case, Osaka dialect—or a close approximation—is applied in translation. The choice of which dialect to employ as the translation of non-standard English often reflects stereotypical perceptions of the dialect and its speakers.

Speech patterns serve as a highly effective means of embodying a character's persona. Dialects convey more than mere "incorrectness"; they contribute significantly to the image of the speaker. If Standard Japanese represents a neutral form of speech, dialects inevitably carry positive or negative connotations—most often negative.

In the 2001 American comedy *Rat Race*, starring Rowan Atkinson (known for *Mr. Bean*) and Whoopi Goldberg, Atkinson's character is Italian, speaking English with a heavy Italian accent to emphasize his difficulty with the language. This accent generates comedic effect. In one scene, a female character expresses anger over a business dispute exclusively in Osaka dialect. Dialects are often said to allow richer emotional expression, and the choice of Osaka dialect in this phone-based outburst can be seen as intentionally amplifying her emotional display.

The Use of Dialects in Computer Games

The strategic use of dialect to construct character identity, as seen in film translation, is also evident in computer games. While attitudes toward dialects have gradually evolved, the general approach from the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind* to the 2001 film *Rat Race* shows remarkable continuity. Comedic characters are often given dialects that emphasize their traits, while other dialects may enhance specific stereotypical characteristics.

However, there are now instances in video games where dialectal distinctions are deliberately minimized or ignored. Japanese computer games, along with animation, enjoy global popularity and are widely exported.

One prominent example is SNK's *King of Fighters*, a fighting game series released annually from 1994 to 2001 (with the 2001 edition developed by a Korean affiliate due to SNK's bankruptcy). In these games, characters generally speak without dialect. Like films, dialects are applied selectively for specific effects. Notably, a standard protagonist-type character, who would normally speak Standard Japanese, speaks Osaka dialect, while other characters who also speak Osaka dialect are explicitly comedic. Thus, Osaka dialect is associated with humor in some cases but not universally.

Another major example is CAPCOM's globally popular *Resident Evil* series, which has been adapted into Hollywood films starring actors such as Robert Englund and Milla Jovovich. The game is set in the United States, and all dialogue is in English, without marked dialectal variation. Japanese subtitles are rendered in Standard Japanese (Tokyo dialect). Yet in a bonus track, the protagonist, a police officer, shouts in Osaka dialect — “Nani sun nen!(Don't you dare!)” — when attacked by enemies, adding a regional flavor to his reaction.

Role-playing games (RPGs) provide further examples. SQUARE's *Final Fantasy VIII*, released several years ago, featured large-scale production aimed at the global market, including a theme song performed by Hong Kong singer Faye Wong. In this game, a young female character switches between Standard Japanese in ordinary conversation and Osaka dialect in private speech or when conversing with a compatriot. This code-switching portrays dialect in a positive light, detached from the traditional association with humor. Such use of Osaka dialect, free from conventional stereotypes, represents a highly innovative approach.

Dialects in Anime and Manga

Finally, we examine anime, a medium that has been extensively translated from Japanese. In the globally popular series *Detective Conan*, there are characters who speak Osaka dialect. Nobukuni (2023) investigated how this Osaka dialect is rendered in German translations. In these cases, translators appear to create artificial, non-standard dialects to evoke particular impressions. Importantly, this strategy is not applied to all instances of Osaka dialect, but rather to characterize major figures as speakers of non-standard speech. Nobukuni further suggests that these artificial dialects may, over time, become the conventional German counterpart to Osaka dialect — a prospect that is particularly noteworthy. If a single anime work establishes a persistent artificial dialect corresponding to Osaka dialect, subsequent translations may adopt this convention.

Another notable point is that in *Detective Conan*, the use of Osaka dialect does not appear to rely on traditional stereotypes associated with speakers. Rather, it is simply employed to indicate that the setting is in the Kansai region rather than Tokyo. As observed in the discussion of video games, this represents a departure from conventional approaches to dialect use. Consequently, it becomes important to ascertain the translator's intent in using dialect.

Sanders (2025) emphasizes that personal linguistic features — such as accent, hesitations, or speech mannerisms — often disappear in translation, even though these are precisely the elements that should be reflected. What is particularly interesting is the emergence of cases where dialect is used not to evoke a stereotypical impression, but merely as a neutral regional marker. Distinguishing

between these intentions is extremely difficult, and it remains a challenge to determine the extent to which an author's use of dialect draws upon stereotypes.

Sanders also considers voice actors' vocal characteristics in translations. In Uzbekistan (and other former Soviet states), translation practices often strip away all character-specific information, preserving only semantic content. Gender, for instance, may be disregarded, with male characters rendered in female voices in translation. This approach is analogous to reproducing a vividly painted landscape in black and white; while visually different, it remains recognizable as the original work, though it may be regrettable from the creator's perspective. Such regions require greater awareness of copyright and respect for creators.

In translation, the focus should not be on literal correspondence — formal equivalence — but rather on achieving functional equivalence, whereby the semantic and emotional effects of the original are preserved for the target audience. As Sanders (2025) notes, fan-created subtitles often attempt to translate elements previously ignored or untranslatable, challenging the limits of conventional translation. Incorporating such approaches into translation education can be highly valuable for pedagogical purposes.

Limitations and Challenges in Translation

We have examined the strategy of rendering non-standard English with dialects in Japanese translations. However, expressing the subtle linguistic nuances that native speakers intuitively perceive in another language remains extremely challenging in Japanese. Kogishi (1985, 155) notes that the protagonist of *The Tin Drum*, a young boy, speaks with an unusual intonation suited to the prose of Kashubian, and because he was born in Lausanne, Switzerland, and raised primarily in French, his German carries a somewhat grandiose, nasal quality. This vocal character perfectly suited the role of Oskar in the film adaptation. Nevertheless, these nuances are not conveyed in Japanese subtitles, and rendering such impressions in Japanese would be nearly impossible. Without familiarity with the source language, viewers inevitably miss these subtleties.

Similarly, in *Gone with the Wind*, the English spoken by white characters should reflect Southern accents, yet in Japanese translations, dialects are never applied. In *Bagdad Cafe*, differences between the German protagonist Jasmine and the local African American and Native American characters are also absent in the Japanese subtitles. Given that these groups are portrayed with distinctive linguistic patterns in the original, translation must ideally reflect these differences.

AI Translation

Currently, the Department of Japanese philology at the Uzbekistan State World Languages University is developing teaching materials for Japanese literature

translated into Uzbek. Compared to English or Russian, there are few Uzbek translations, and many are based on Russian versions due to a shortage of qualified translators. While training bilingual specialists remains crucial, AI can serve as a potential solution to this labor shortage, which is one of the driving motivations for AI development.

As Yanase (2023) observes, while some educators actively promote AI use in the classroom, others strongly resist it. In all cases, AI usage assumes the learner as the primary user, but educators themselves can also utilize AI. From this perspective, AI offers virtually limitless potential as a learning tool (Sumida, Yamanaka, & Ushikubo, 2024). Accordingly, the author has experimented with AI in producing Uzbek-language materials. Compared to traditional machine translation, AI translation has shown remarkable improvement. However, as we have seen, novels frequently feature dialects and role language, limiting AI's effectiveness.

Regardless of whether the user is a learner or an educator, evaluating AI output ultimately requires linguistic competence. Sanehira, Imanishi, Fujihira, and Nohata (2025) note that concerns about AI supplanting language teachers are compounded by learners' uncertainty about the reliability of AI outputs, necessitating human judgment. Even as AI evolves to incorporate dialectal data, the question remains: should one trust AI or human insight? This represents an emerging challenge in translation studies.

CONCLUSION

The present study has shown that the intent behind the use of dialects is gradually becoming neutralized in some contexts. This marks a departure from the traditional purpose of dialect use, which often relied on evoking negative stereotypes. For instance, characters who speak Osaka dialect are no longer invariably portrayed as comedians, nor is humor the sole justification for rendering them in this dialect. In some cases, dialect is used simply to indicate the geographic setting, as in *Detective Conan*, or to faithfully reflect the reality that not all characters speak Standard Japanese, as in *Final Fantasy*.

While these examples suggest that dialects are beginning to break free from stereotypical associations, the opposite tendency persists. Unconsciously or otherwise, NHK dramas continue to employ dialects in ways that presuppose established stereotypes.

The widespread adoption of new dialectal usage through media has the potential to alter perceptions of dialects and to accelerate these changes. Media's influence remains strong, yet the rapid rise of social media now surpasses traditional media in reach. On these platforms, non-professional speakers freely employ their

own dialects and role language. How such emerging trends influence the formation of dialectal perceptions, and how they are translated, remains a pressing question.

Social media content is already shared across national borders, where AI-based translation tools are increasingly utilized to overcome language barriers. AI translation performs best with Standard Japanese but remains insufficient for dialects. A major future challenge for translation studies will be determining how AI can effectively handle dialect translation and how human evaluators should assess these outputs.

REFERENCE:

1. Kinsui, S. (2023). *Virtual Japanese: The Enigma of Role Language*. Iwanami shoten.
2. Kogishi, A. (1985). *Desiring images: On the German spirit and deformed figures*. Shinshindo. doi:10.11501/12437782
3. Kumagai, S. (2017). *Dialect Images in Television Drama: Regional Stereotypes Reproduced in NHK Local Dramas*. *Kotoba*, 38, 11-28. doi:10.20741/kotoba.38.0_11
4. Kumagai, S. (2019). *Tōhoku Dialect in NHK Morning Dramas : The Persistent Stigmatization of Tōhoku Dialect in Japanese Media*. *Studies in humanities*, 69(2), 103-129. doi:10.14945/00026270
5. Lee, Y. (1998). *The formation of the representation of “Tokyo language”*. *Gekkan Gengo*, 27(1), 25-31.
6. Nagase, J. (2015). *The Formation of Dialect Images*. *Senshu Kokubun*, 96, 1-18. doi:10.34360/00001321
7. Nobukuni, M. (2023). *<Kansai Dialect> as a Role Language and its German Translation : Examples in Detective Conan*. *Studies in Urban Cultures*, 25, 41-51. doi:10.24729/00017976
8. Ozaki, K. (1998). *Konjiki-yasha [The Golden Demon]*. Shincho-sha.
9. Peng, F. (2000). *The Osaka dialect as seen by foreigners*. *Gekkan Gengo*, 29(1), 73-79.
10. Sanders, L. (2025). *Translating Character Voice: Proposing new subtitling guidelines for conveying character and culture in English subtitles for Japanese anime*. *Journal for Japanese studies*, 15, 51-75. doi:10.15026/0002001139
11. Sanehira, M., Imanishi, T., Fujihira, M., & Nohata, R. (2025). *Roundtable report: The changing landscape of Japanese language education : Language learning and AI in the post-corona era, Based on the national qualification of Japanese language teachers*. *Matanironshu*, 19, 1-16. doi:10.18910/101084
12. Sato, K. (1998). *The Tokyo dialect in the mainstream society*. *Gekkan Gengo*,

27(1), 32-40.

13. Shibata, T. (1998). What is the Tokyo dialect? *Gekkan Gengo*, 27(1), 18-24.
14. Sumida, T., Yamanaka, T., & Ushikubo, R. (2024). Rethinking language and cultural education in the age of generative AI: Exploring new approaches and challenges. *Studies of language and cultural education*, 22, 273-285. doi:10.14960/gbkkkg.22.273
15. Yanase, Y. (2023). Resisting AI's Transformation of 'English Proficiency' Scores into Commodities and Currency in Language Education: Shifting from Technology-Driven to Humanistic Questions. *Waseda studies in Japanese language education*, 57-72. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2065/0002000817>
16. Yasuda, T. (1999). *Between the national language and dialects: The politics of language construction*. JiubunShoin.