

関西弁 Kansai-ben

1 Introduction

The Kansai dialect of Japanese is spoken by approximately 20 million people in the Kansai region of Japan (“Kansai region”). It belongs to the Japonic language family, which includes the Japanese language and its dialects, and the Ryukyuan languages spoken in the Ryukyu Islands. Although the Kansai dialect differs from the Tokyo dialect (which I’ll be comparing it to) in phonetic inventory, some morphology, and some vocabulary, the dialects are mutually intelligible. Below is a map showing where the Kansai region is located.



The consultant for this project currently lives in Tokyo. She was born and raised in the Kansai area but moved to Tokyo for college. Depending on who she’s talking to, she switches between the Tokyo and Kansai dialects. Even in formal settings, if she’s talking with a friend from the Kansai area, she’ll use the Kansai dialect. While she reads and writes in standard Japanese, she also manipulates kana (Japanese characters) to text friends and family in her dialect.

2 Consonants

Table 1 shows the consonant phonemes and allophones (in parenthesis) of Japanese. Consonants in Japanese become palatalized before /i/ or /j/ (“Japanese phonology”). A speaker of Kansai-ben will often use the sounds in blue where a speaker of the Tokyo Dialect would use those in red (“Kansai dialect”). Examples of words using these phonemes are given in table 2.

table 1. Japanese consonant phonemes and allophone (“Japanese phonology”)

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Alveolo-palatal		Palatal		Velar		Uvular	Glottal
Plosive	p	b	t	d					k	g		
Fricative	(ɸ)		s	z	(ɕ)	(ʑ)	(ç)					h
Affricate			(ts)	(dʑ)	(tɕ)	(dʑ)						
Nasal	m		n				(ɲ)		(ŋ)		ɴ	
Rhotic			r	(r)								
Approximant	w						j		w			

table 2. Examples of Kansai-ben consonant phonemes (“普段よく使う関西弁一覧”)

Phoneme	Orthographic	Phonemic	Phonetic	Gloss	Notes
/p/	<パチ物>	/patimoN/	[pʰat̪eimõN]	‘counterfeit’	1, 6
/b/	<ぼり>	/bari/	[ba̠ri]	‘very’	
/t/	<連れ>	/ture/	[tsure]	‘friend’	2
/d/	<どつく>	/dotuku/	[d̪ot̪s̪uku]	‘to punch’	
/k/	<こしょばい>	/kosjobai/	[kʰo̠ɕobai]	‘ticklish’	3
/g/	<ごっつ>	/goQ.tu/	[go̠t̪.t̪s̪u]	‘extremely’	
/s/	<さら>	/sara/	[sara]	‘new’	5
/z/	<自分>	/zibuN/	[zibũN]	‘oneself’	
/h/	<ほかす>	/hokasu/	[hokasu]	‘to throw away’	
/m/	<めばちこ>	/mebatiko/	[mebat̪e̠iko]	‘sty’	
/n/	<直す>	/naosu/	[naosu]	‘to tidy up’	
/r/	<レーコー>	/re:ko:/	[re:ko:]	‘cold coffee’	
/w/	<わい>	/wai/	[wai]	‘I’, ‘me’	
/j/	<やな>	/jana/	[jana]	‘to be’	

1 the phoneme /ti/ becomes phonetic [t̪ei]

2 the phoneme /tu/ becomes phonetic [tsu]

3 the phoneme /sjo/ becomes phonetic [ɕo]

5 the phoneme /zi/ becomes phonetic [zi]

4 the phoneme /Q/ is transcribed phonetically with the no audible release diacritic [̚]

6 the phoneme /N/ has variable pronunciation depending on what follows, phonetically becoming [m, n, ŋ, ɲ, ɴ, ũ]

3 Vowels

Table 3 shows the vowels of Japanese, and examples are given in table 4. Vowels in Japanese are heavily nasalized before the moraic uvular nasal [N]. Vowels also become devoiced between two voiceless consonants (“Japanese phonology”). The Kansai-ben high back vowel [u] is sometimes more rounded than the Tokyo [u] (“Kansai dialect”).

table 3. Japanese vowels (“Japanese phonology”)

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u (ɯ)
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

Table 4. Examples of Kansai-ben vowel phonemes (“普段よく使う関西弁一覧”)

Phoneme	Orthographic	Phonemic	Phonetic	Gloss	Notes
/a/	<明かん>	/akaN/	[akãN]	‘no good’	6
	<あほくさ>	/ahokusa/	[ahokʰɯsa]	‘foolish’	7
/i/	<いける>	/ikeru/	[ikʰeru]	‘no problem’	
	<イラチ>	/irati/	[iratei]	‘irritated’	
/u/	<うち>	/uti/	[utei]	‘I’, ‘me’	
	<うめだ>	/umeda/	[umeda]	‘Umeda district’	
/e/	<ええ>	/e:/	[e:]	‘no thanks’	
	<偉い>	/erai/	[erai]	‘tiring’, ‘excellent’	
/o/	<お母ん>	/okaN/	[okãN]	‘mother’	8
	<大きに>	/o:kini/	[o:kʲiɲi]	‘thank you’	9

6 the phoneme /a/ becomes nasalized [ã] before nasal final /N/

7 the phoneme /u/ becomes voiceless [ɯ] between two voiceless consonants

8 the phoneme /k/ becomes palatalized [kʲ] before /i/

9 the phoneme /n/ becomes palatalized [ɲ] before /i/

4 Pitch

The pitch accent in Kansai-ben is different from the Tokyo dialect. In Kansai-ben, words are distinguished by initial mora which can begin with a high pitch (高起式) or a low pitch (低起式). Words are further distinguished by where the drop in tone occurs. The first and second mora should have different pitch levels in the Tokyo dialect, but in Kansai-ben the first two mora can be the same pitch. Additionally, Kansai-ben has a characteristic H-H pitch pattern found in some words with two mora that are both high pitch, which isn't found in the Tokyo dialect ("京阪式アクセント").

table 5. Examples of Kansai-ben pitch accent ("Kansai dialect")

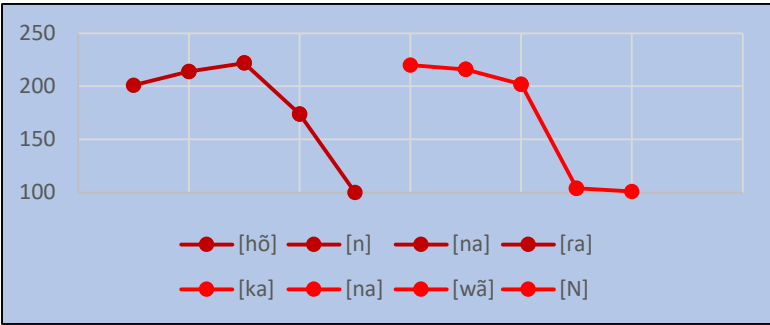
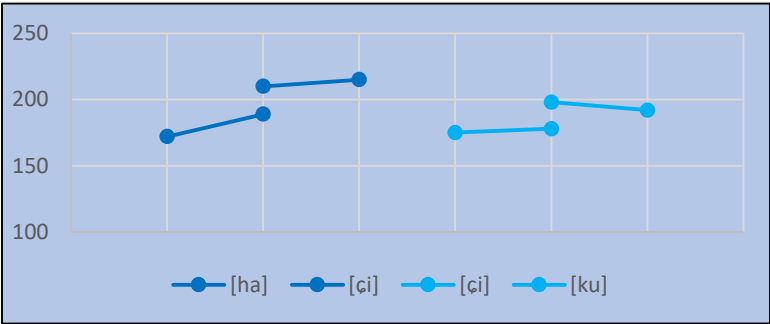
Pitch	Orthographic	Phonemic	Phonetic	Gloss	Notes
HH 平進式 Flat-straight accent	<端>	/hasi ⁺ /	[háci]	'edge'	
	<敷く>	/siku ⁺ /	[éikú]	'to lay out'	
HHLL	<ほんなら>	/hon ⁺ nara/	[hónnàrà]	'in that case'	
	<かなわん>	/kana ⁺ waN/	[kánawàN]	'can't stand it'	
LLH 上昇式 Ascent accent	<起きる>	/okiru/	[òkìrú]	'to wake up'	
	<何ぼ>	/nanbo/	[nàmbó]	'how much'	

To further examine the pitch accent patterns found in Kansai-ben I measured the mora of three pairs of words each belonging to a different accent pattern. For each of these 6 words, I measured the pitch values at the beginning and end of each mora for a total of 18 mora and 27 measurements. Additionally, I did some simple subtraction and took the difference between these values to show how much the pitch changes during each mora. I also measured the average intensity of each mora for an additional 18 measurements. The measurements were taken with a range between 100 and 400 hertz. The values in red show considerable drops in pitch and the values in green show considerable raises in pitch. Table 6 illustrates these measurements.

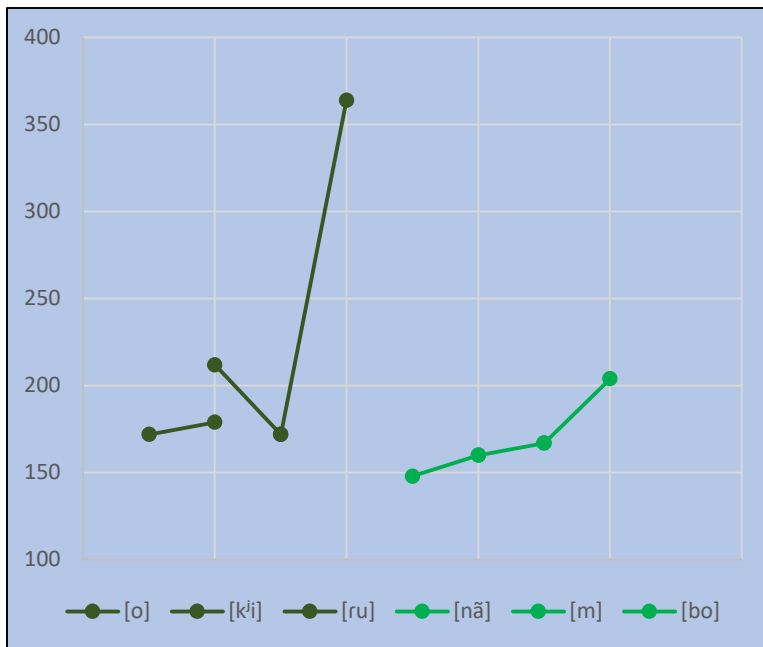
Table 6. pitch measurements of mora in hertz.

pattern	word	mora	beginning	end	difference	intensity
HH	[háǵí]	[ha]	172	189	17	84.4
		[ǵí]	210	215	5	83.2
	[ǵíkú]	[ǵí]	175	178	3	78.4
		[ku]	198	192	-6	79.7
HHLL	[hóǵnàrà]	[hǵ]	201	214	13	79.1
		[n]	214	222	8	79.9
		[na]	222	174	-48	80.8
		[ra]	174	100	-74	78.8
	[kánáwàǵ]	[ka]	220	216	-4	82.7
		[na]	216	202	-14	81.3
		[wǵ]	202	104	-98	78.5
		[N]	104	101	-3	70
LLH	[òkǵírú]	[o]	172	179	7	82.7
		[kǵi]	212	172	-40	82.1
		[ru]	172	364	192	79.9
	[nàǵbó]	[nǵ]	148	160	12	79.7
		[m]	160	167	7	75.6
		[bo]	167	204	37	80.6

**intensity is measured in decibels*



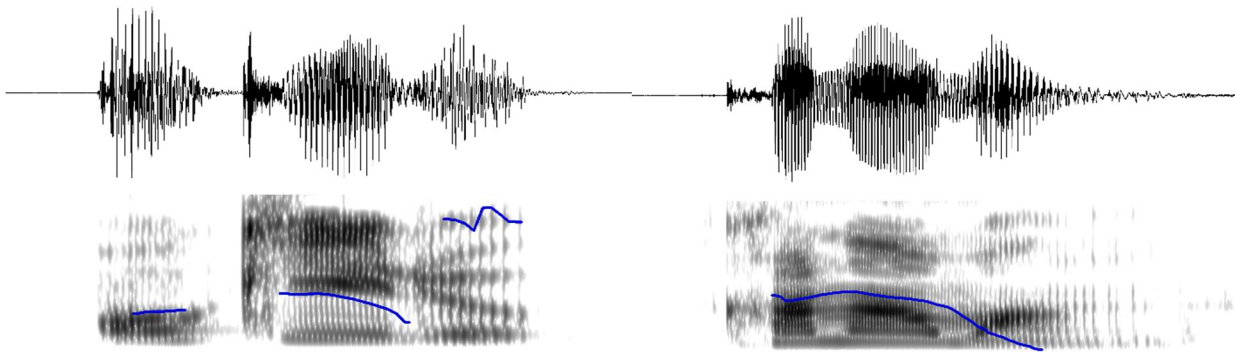
I've organized the data above into three graphs, one for each accent pattern. Each line shows the pitch value where the mora begins and ends. Mora that are connected by these lines represent words where pitch is realized throughout more than one mora. Mora that aren't connected have either a plosive or fricative onset consonant. The first graph shows that the second mora in both [háeí] and [éíku] is a little higher than the first mora, but the change isn't very significant. Since there isn't a significant change, these words are said to have a HH flat-straight accent (“京阪式アクセント”). The second graph shows a significant drop in pitch starting from the beginning of



the third mora in both [hónnàrà] and [kánawàÑ]. The first two mora are still considered to have a HH flat-straight accent but the drop in pitch during the third mora further distinguishes these words (“京阪式アクセント”). The final graph shows a drastic raise in pitch on the third mora in the word [òkʲirú] and a more gradual raise of pitch in the word [nànbó]. This seems to suggest that there are two ways that pitch is elevated in Kansai-ben. Although the degree in which pitch is changed between these words is different, both words are considered to have a LLH ascent accent. I should also mention that I didn’t find pitch to have significant impact on intensity or vice-versa.

<起きる>, /okiru/, ‘to wake up’

<かなわん>, /kana[↑]waN/, ‘can’t stand it’



Finally, the above waveform and spectrogram pairs from Praat give a visual representation of two different pitch patterns. The blue line in each spectrogram shows the pitch value throughout each word. Here I compare the rising pitch in /okiru/ to the falling pitch in /kanawaN/.

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