

Received 1 March 2010.
Accepted 1 June 2010.

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN THE JAPANESE DIALECTS: THE CASE OF SHIGA PREFECTURE

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Abstract

Gender difference in dialect and standard language used in Shiga prefecture, near Kyoto, is clarified. Glottograms are used. Research analysis outcome indicates that senior and middle aged women use relatively courteous language, that men have a high regional dialect utilization rate, that the younger generation is the less obvious gender difference becomes, and that there is a trend towards simplification. A new sense of dialect is evident among the younger generations.

Keywords

Gender difference, dialect, honorific, negation, glottogram

Resumen

Este trabajo permite clarificar las diferencias de género en los dialectos y en la lengua estándar en la prefectura de Shiga, cerca de Kyoto. Se utilizan los glotogramas. El resultado del análisis indica que las mujeres de edad y de mediana edad utilizan relativamente con más frecuencia los términos de cortesía, que los hombres tienen un nivel elevado de uso de los dialectos regionales, que en la generación más joven es donde menos se evidencia la diferencia de género, y que existe una tendencia general hacia la simplificación. Un nuevo significado de dialecto se aprecia entre las generaciones más jóvenes.

Palabras clave

Diferencias de género, dialectos, términos de cortesía, negación, glotograma

1. Introduction

It is said that standard Japanese is generally assumed to be the language spoken by middle class male citizens. Standard Japanese was regulated as the assimilation of language spoken by students in higher education with that spoken by ‘cultured Tokyoites’. Following the Japanese language through history, the Kyoto dialect

(western Japan) is the oldest and thus might be considered the suitable choice as standard Japanese, but because of the emphasis on women's language in the Kyoto dialect, educated Tokyoites became the basis for the Japanese language. Although standard Japanese is based on language spoken by male middle-class citizens, it was also for females. As such, to enable women in speaking Japanese, it became necessary to select forms for personal words, sentence-closing particles, honorifics, negations and the like differing from those used by men in order to identify the speaker as female. In Japanese, there is a clear distinction between male and female language.

The Japanese language comprises standard male Japanese which men tend to use, standard female Japanese which women tend to use, and a neutral form of Japanese that both men and women use. In Japanese society, the expectation that females are to display feminine verbal behavior has been relatively strong and the required norm.

Recently a new movement among young people treats dialects as stylish. Likewise rejuvenated dialects can also be viewed as an accessory.

2. Method

The site for this research was the area along the Kosei railway line that passes through western Shiga prefecture bordering on Kyoto and the Koto Tokaido line, as well as the Hokuriku railway line, that pass through the northern Koto section. The technique used employs glottograms to clarify language dynamics by age and location. Particularly in the Koto study, effort was made to ensure balanced numbers and ages of male and female respondents, making male- and female-classified cross tabulation possible. Koto and Kosei data was combined into an aggregate to examine Shiga prefecture as a whole. Koto male and female reference data is expressed as an example in glottogram form. The study, an interview survey, was carried out from November 2006 through September 2009. Approximately one hour was allocated for surveying each respondent. Furthermore, this study was subsidized as Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (basic research (C), topic number (20520421) research delegate, Fumio Inoue).

This study was conducted by several collaborative researchers and cooperative workers in addition to the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research delegate. The author

was involved as a collaborative researcher from the preparation stage of the study through the culmination of its implementation.

3. Previous Studies

Within the Japanese language is a category called *onna kotoba* ‘women’s language’. “Females must speak politely” is among the norms associated with this category (Nakamura, 2002: 30). Even now, this norm rather severely restricts female verbal behavior.

On the one hand, women are intentionally more conscious of dignified language forms that are oriented towards a high social position. On the other hand, men are more attuned to local dialect norms that express values tied to collective consciousness and traditional masculinity (Jenifer Coates, 1990: 167-168).

One recent Japanese language tendency centered on those in the younger generations group is the reduction of gender difference in the use of sentence-closing particles (Ozaki, 2004: 48-55). Young women have stopped using marked forms assertively labeled as female. Alternatively, young women have begun using non-marked forms used by middle and older aged males. As far as language awareness is concerned, curtailing the amount of gender difference is desirable, regardless of the native language used.

Japan can be divided into two primary dialects. They are the Kanto dialect centered on Tokyo and the Kansai dialect centered on Kyoto and Osaka, and Kyoto has historically, economically and culturally had an influence on Shiga prefecture.

The capital of Japan was located in Shiga prefecture during the 7th century, and following the Middle Ages, it prospered under the influence of economic development in Kyoto and Osaka (Masui, 2000: 6). In comparison with other regions such as Tohoku, the use of honorifics has set it apart as a region in which respect is expressed (Kobayashi, 2010: 127-162). Kyoto is also a location where female dialect developed.

4. Results

Among survey items, results for the honorific verb *iku* ‘to go’, the negated adjective *takakunai* ‘not high’, and the verb *wakaranai* ‘do not understand’, are analyzed in this manuscript. The survey contained 8 honorific items and 15 negation items. Honorific items surveyed cases in which language was spoken to principals or respected educators and the like as well as cases in which language was spoken to extremely intimate friends. As for negations, the question was simply “How do you express *takakunai* in *Anoyama wa sonnani takakunai* ‘That mountain is not so high?’.

Respondents are shown in Chart 1. The criterion for respondents was that they be natives from a respective survey location who either had no history of living anywhere else, or had spent only a very short period away. Designated survey locations were each respectively positioned at a railway station. Respondents over the age of 60 made up the senior group, those between 40 and 59 made up the middle-aged group, those between 19 and 39 made up the younger-generations group, and those 18 or younger made up the youth group.

East side of the lake Biwa

	age	male	female	sum
generation	senior [over 60's-]	14	13	27
	middle age [40-59]	11	16	27
	young [19-39]	13	15	28
	teenager [-under 18]	11	16	27
sum		49	60	109

West side of the lake Biwa

	age	male	female	sum
generation	senior [over 60's-]	21	2	23
	middle age [40-59]	20	3	23
	young [19-39]	12	8	20
	teenager [-under 18]	12	10	22
sum		65	23	88

Chart 1.

4.1. Iku-no-ka 'Are you going?' (spoken to a respected superior)

Respondents were asked how they expressed *iku-no-ka* when *iku-no-ka* is to be used with a respected superior as in *Kuruma de iku-no-ka* 'Are you going by car?'. The marks in Figure 1 show responses by survey location. The horizontal axis indicates age groups, progressively moving from the senior group on the left to the youth group on the right. When all age groups gave the same response, four marks are shown. The number of marks on the horizontal axis increases when multiple responses were given in a specific location. Forms of expression used only by a single respondent were all excluded.

There are two common honorific expressions. These are *irassharu*, the most prominent honorific used around Tokyo in eastern Japan, and the *-reru* form of *ikareru* the most prominently used in western Japan. The form of expression having the highest occurrence after *ikareru* is the Kyoto dialect *ikaharu*. The forms of expression used in Shiga prefecture, in order of the degree of politeness, are *irassharu*, *ikareru*, *ikaharu*, *ikundesu*, and *ikun*. The use of *irassharu*, which expresses the highest degree of politeness among common expressions and is prominent in eastern Japan, was extremely scarce. Female speakers tend to rapidly adopt common eastern Japan expressions as well as select the courteous expression with the highest degree of politeness (Figure 2-4).

Ikaharu, next in the degree of politeness, is used most prominently by Kosei males. Remaining insulated from Kyoto influence, both Kosei males and females use a variety of local dialects. When Kosei and Koto were compared, a wider field of activity when going on a trip or going shopping was demonstrated in Koto. In Shiga, *-haru* was predominantly used by older males (47.2%) and by females in the younger generations group (50%). Instances of young females using non-marked forms used by middle-aged males are of great interest.

While males to a large extent use the honorific *-haru* as a form of expression having a high degree of politeness, females recognize the honorific *-reru* as the form of expression with the highest degree of politeness. As age decreases, speakers tend to

choose one of two expressions, *ika-haru-n-desuka* or *iku-n-desuka*, and the selection of alternatives narrows.

As regards the Kyoto dialect, male speakers normally use it in a wider range and as an ordinary form than female speakers do. Additionally, just as female speakers do, male speakers recognize the high merit of *-reru/-rareru* forms of expression (Tsuji, 2009: 219). In Shiga as well, the tendency for male speakers to use it in a wider range and as an ordinary form than female speakers has been observed. Although males do use honorific *-haru*, rather than using *-desu/-masu* sentence-closing particles they have been observed using *ikaharu-nka* or *ikaharu-ka*. Contrastingly, females use *-haru* as *ikaharun-desuka* or *ikahari-masuka*, and invariably use *-desu/-masu* sentence-closing particles to heighten the degree of politeness. In short, in comparison with males, females choose expressions with a higher degree of politeness.

In the Kyoto dialect, comparing male speakers with female speakers, female speakers use a wider variety of attitudinal expression forms than male speakers do (Tsuji, 2009: 276). A similar trend is also seen in Shiga. However, as pointed out in the above comparison, since men use the least polite *-haru* (plain form)+sentence ending particle, such as in *ikaharu-nka*, taking those usages into account, male speakers do use a variety of attitudinal expressions. It can be said that males are lenient in binding the use of a specific level of considerate expression to listeners. It is thought that males simplify the use of attitudinal expressions and are quicker in differentiating listener level unification.

Influenced by the politeness of present-day honorifics, the use of *iku-n-desu-ka?* by both males and females in the youth group is observed. Ultimately, both males and females use the ‘simple (dictionary) *form+n+ desu* (polite verb to be)+*ka* (interrogative)’ for the verb *iku* ‘to go’. When addressing superiors and close friends, verbs can be regulated with the simple manipulation of addition or deletion of *-desu-ka?* as seen in *iku-n?* and *iku-n-desu-ka?*

4.2. Iku-no-ka ‘Are you going?’ (spoken to a close friend)

This section deals with asking *iku-no-ka* to a close friend. Examining Shiga as a whole, there are two competing forms, the *ikun* dialect form and the standard Japanese *iku-no* form (Figure 5-8). The young generation group uses the *ikun* dialect form. The

highest *-n* utilization rates in Shiga as a whole are seen in males in the younger generations group (80%) and in youth group females (96.2%). Rather than the *-n* dialect form declining in hometowns, its influence has grown. It can be thought that the use of *-n* in the northern part of Shiga prefecture has influenced its comeback. Since the *-n* form is made by merely attaching *-n* to the dictionary form verb, that is to the plain form *iku* ‘to go’, it can be used with close friends. Furthermore, merely adding *-desu-ka* makes it the polite *ikun-desu-ka* that can be used with respected superiors. Operation is simple. This is an example of those in younger generations, rather than the middle to older-aged group, having developed a new feeling for dialect.

4.3. Takakunai ‘not high’

The question “How do you express *takakunai* ‘not high’ in *Anoyama wa sonnani takakunai* ‘That mountain is not so high’ was asked. (Figures omitted to save space.) The old Shiga prefecture dialect forms are *takai-koto-nai* and *tako-nai*. The highest use rate for *takonai tako-nai* was seen among the senior group (42%) and middle-aged group (36%). *Takai-koto-nai* was observed in those 70 years old or over.

The utilization rate for the common *takakunai* expression progressively decreases in the order of Koto females, Kosei females, Koto males and Kosei males. Females are more attuned to common language.

In the Kyoto dialect *takanai* is used both by males and females in generations younger than the middle-aged group. The regional *takonai* dialect is most prevalent (54%) among males; 76% of females choose the Kyoto dialect *takanai*. As is the case of the verb *iku* ‘to go’ and *ikanai* (its negation) in its five-level conjugation, those in the younger-generations group say that attaching *-anai* to adjectives, somewhat simplifies bothersome usage; that simplification is perhaps unconscious on their part.

4.4. Wakaranai ‘do not understand’

One question respondents were asked was whether *wakarimasen* was the usual expression they used when they do not understand. (Figures omitted to save space.)

Responses concerning the question about *wakarimasen* were primarily *wakaran* and *wakarahen*. Looking at the entire prefecture, the local *wakaran* dialect response

was high (58%). There is a tendency for both males and females in the younger generations group and youth group to use *wakaran*. As an attitudinal expression with a euphemistic component, ‘-hen’ is primarily used by people in older groups. The lower the age the more rapidly the number of forms of expression decreases, the use of *wakarahen* and *wakaran* reverses in the youth group, and *wakaran* is used 6 times more often in comparison with *wakarahen*. The utilization rate in both the younger generations group is half and half. Comparing males and females in the Koto senior group, women used more polite expressions. In Kosei, males used the regional dialect more.

5. Analysis of Results

Thus far, the verb *iku-no-ka* has been used in addressing honorifics, the adjective *takakunai* and the verb *wakaranai* have been used in addressing negation, and the dynamics of honorifics and negations in Shiga and gender have been examined. Several points can be indicated from the analysis of results.

- 1) Females, the older the group, choose a higher level of polite expression forms when compared with males.
- 2) Females show a strong tendency to choose expressions approaching the Kyoto dialect, or to select common expressions or dignified language forms over regional dialect.
- 3) Females indeed use a variety of expression forms such as common language, regional dialect, sentence ending particles, but other than their strong use of regional dialect and sentence ending particle combinations, males make use of fewer expression forms than females.
- 4) Males are more lenient about divisions in levels of politeness in comparison with females, and regardless of whether the politeness level of an expression is high or low both forms are used in a wide range of instances. It is thought that males are quick in differentiating listener levels.
- 5) The tendency for reduced gender differences among younger generations is striking.
- 6) Younger generation males and females have a new rejuvenated sense of dialect

as seen in the *-n* in negations.

A trend in honorifics use seen when younger generations speak with close friends is a change from the *-desu/-masu +ka* (interrogative) construction to the simplified ‘plain form or dictionary *form +ka* (interrogative)’ construction.

6. Future Considerations

The analysis of only a few of the numerous items in this survey has been given consideration in this manuscript. In the future it is necessary to both continue analysis and grasp overall dialect dynamics from the various survey items. Furthermore, since this was written from the Kyoto and common language influence point of view, evaluating influences from areas to the north and south is meaningful. The three major railway lines in Shiga prefecture were constructed in different years, and contemplating the relationship between the transportation convenience each has brought and language changes is noteworthy.

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Acknowledgements: Yasushi Hanzawa (Fukushima University) created the glottogram software. Keiichi Takamaru (Utsunomiya Kyowa University) collaborated on the GIS data conversion program and language mapping.

APPENDIX

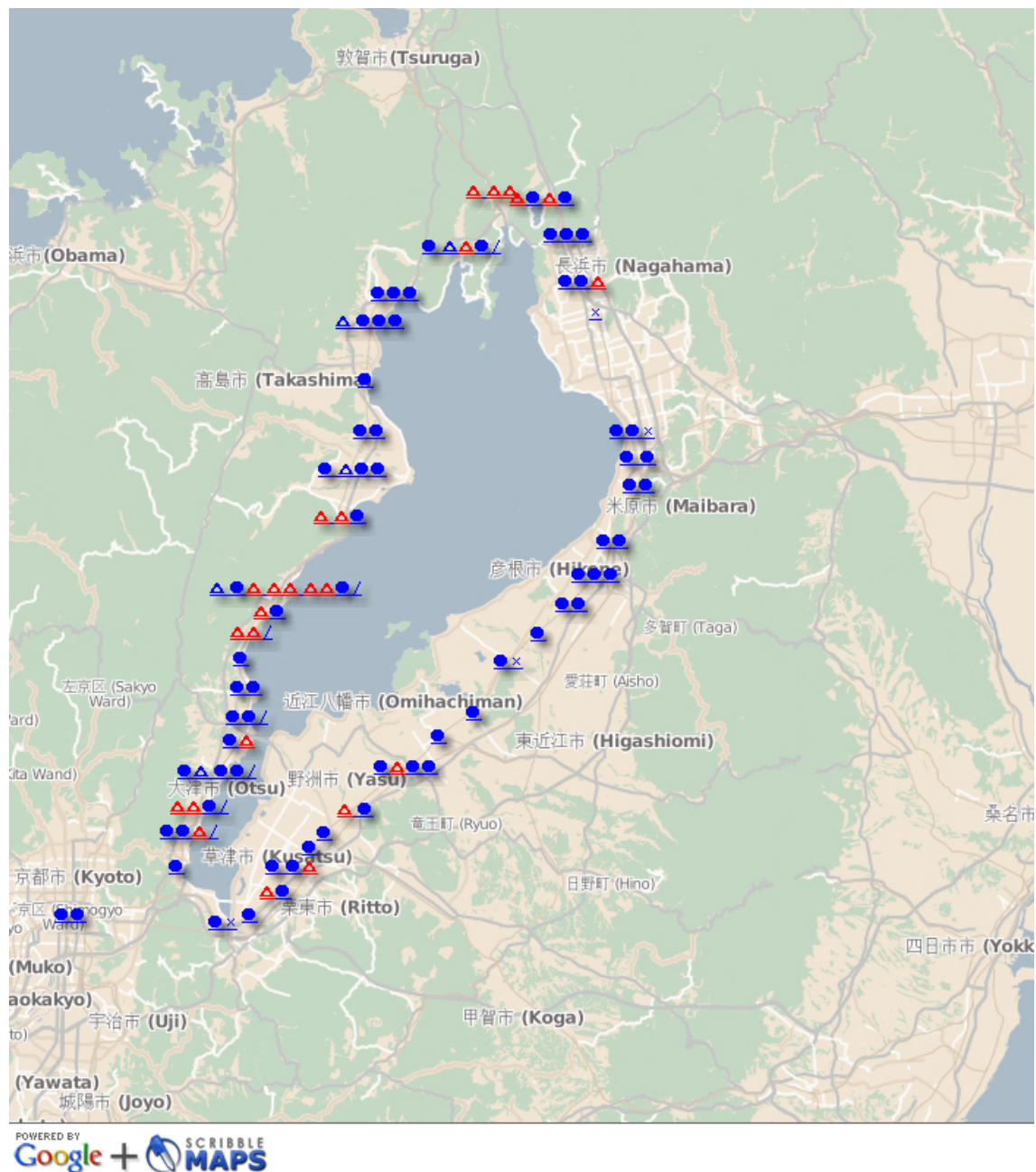


Figure 1. *Ikunoka?* 'Do you go?' (to respectable senior) male

【NOTES】

- *Ikarerunoka, Ikarerunka, Ikaremasuka, Ikarerundesu, Ikarerunodesuka, Ikarerundesuka, Ikaremasudeshoka*
- △ *Ikaharimasuka, Ikaharimasuka-, Ikaharundesuka*
- × *Ikundesuka*

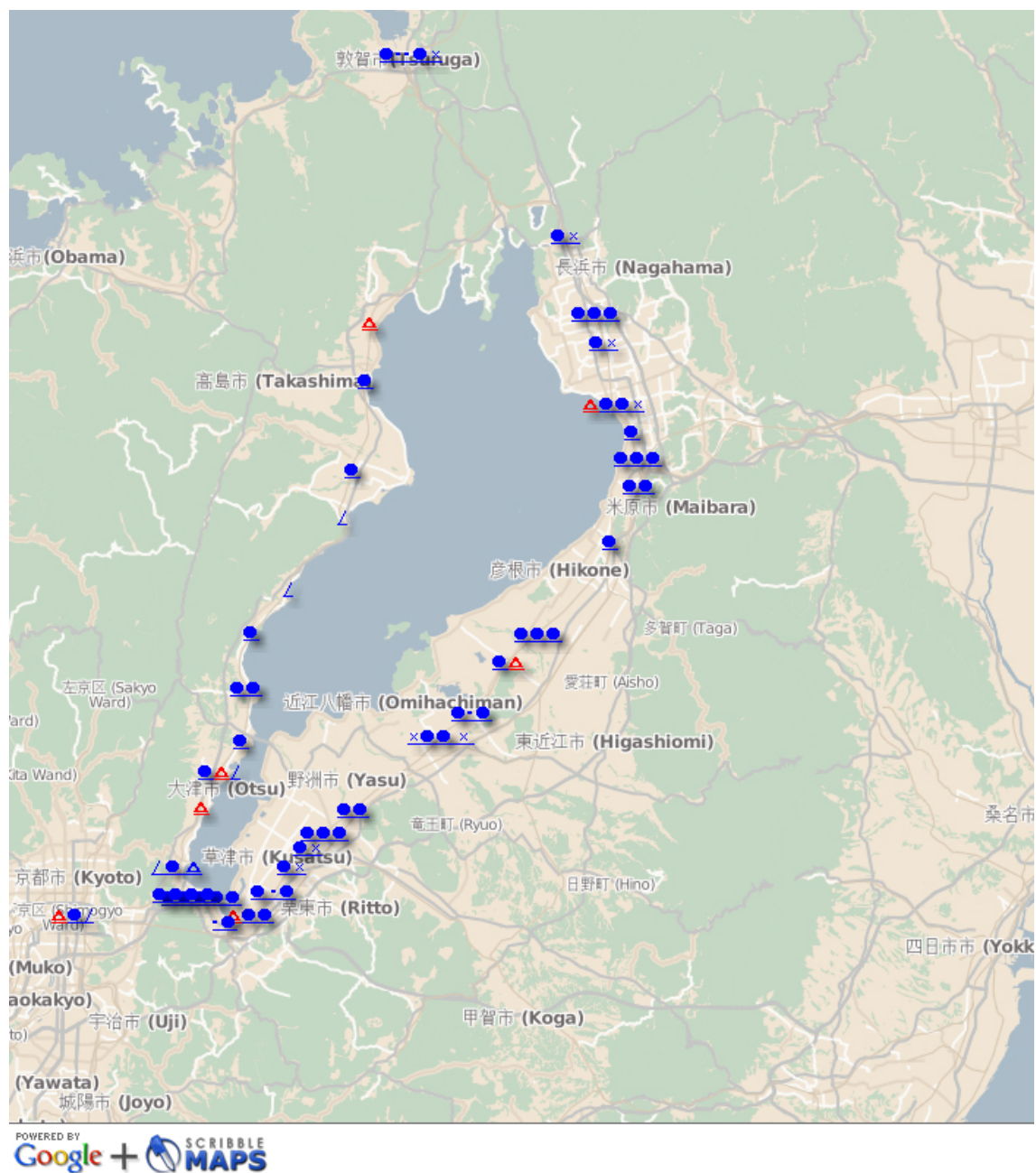


Figure 2. *Ikunoka?* ‘Do you go?’ (to respectable senior) female

【NOTES】

- *Ikaremasuka, Ikaremasuka-, Ikarerunodesuka, Ikarerunodeshoka, Ikarerundesu, Ikarerundesuka*
- △ *Ikaharimasuka, Ikaharunodesuka, Ikaharundesuka, Ikahanno-*
- × *Ikunodesuka, Ikundesuka, Ikundesuka-*
- *Irasshaimasuka, Irassharundesu*

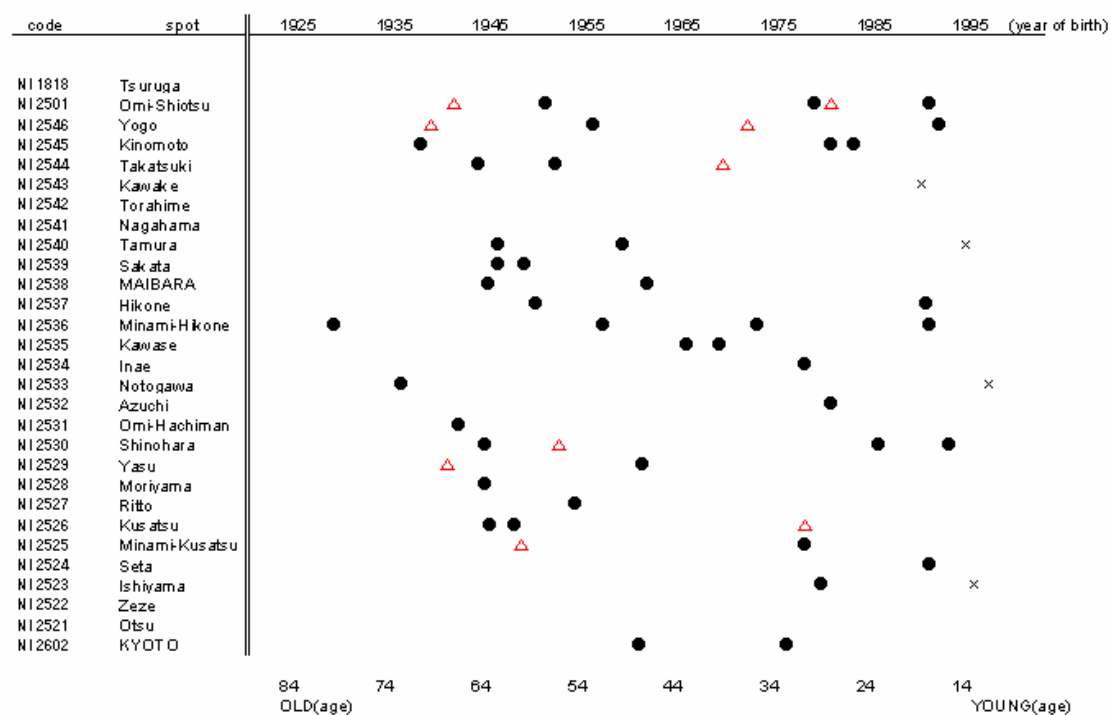


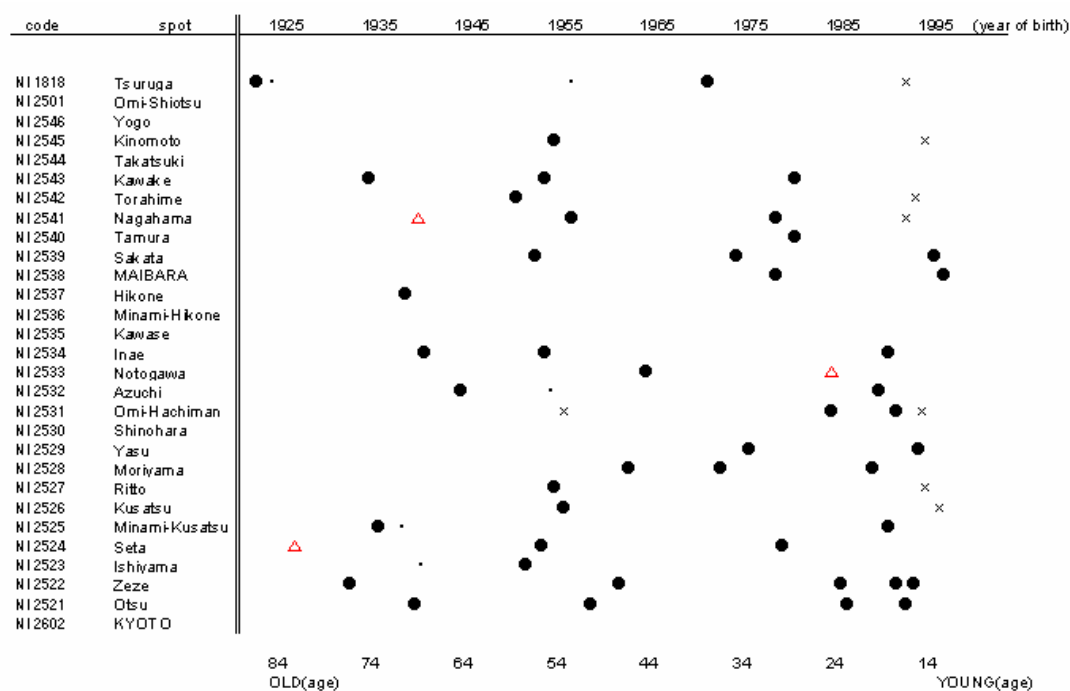
Figure 3. *Ikunoka?* 'Do you go?' (to respectable senior) male/east side

【NOTES】

● *Ikarerunoka, Ikarerunka, Ikaremasuka, Ikarerundesu, Ikarerunodesuka, Ikarerundesuka, Ikaremasudesuka*

△ *Ikaharimasuka, Ikaharimasuka-, Ikaharundesuka*

× *Ikundesuka*

Figure 4. *Ikunoka?* 'Do you go?' (to respectable senior) female/east side

【NOTES】

- *Ikaremasuka, Ikaremasuka-, Ikarerunodesuka, Ikarerunodeshoka, Ikarerundesu, Ikarerundesuka*
- Δ *Ikaharimasuka, Ikaharunodesuka, Ikaharundesuka, Ikahanno-*
- × *Ikunodesuka, Ikundesuka, Ikundesuka-*
- *Irasshaimasuka, Irassharundesu*

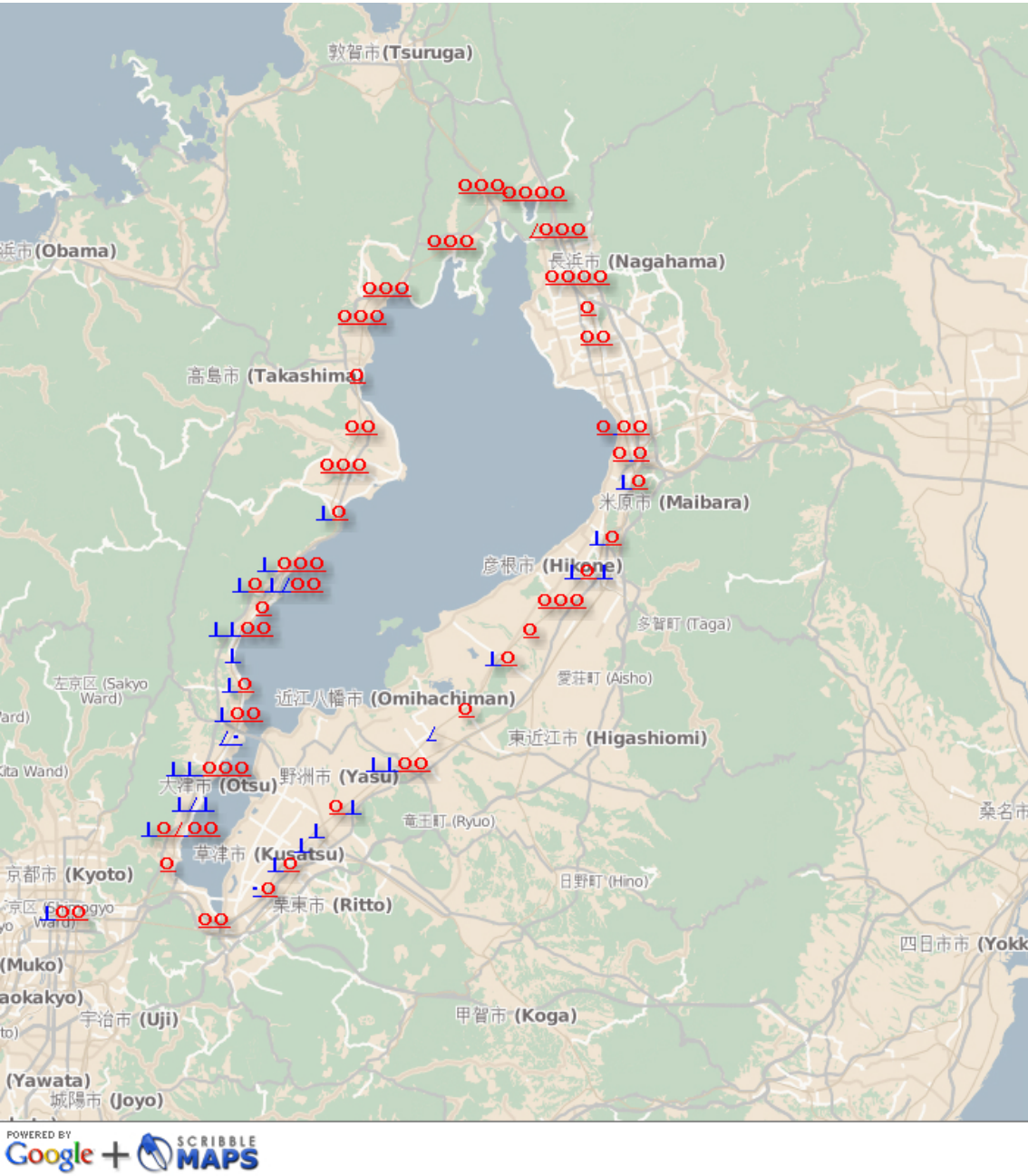


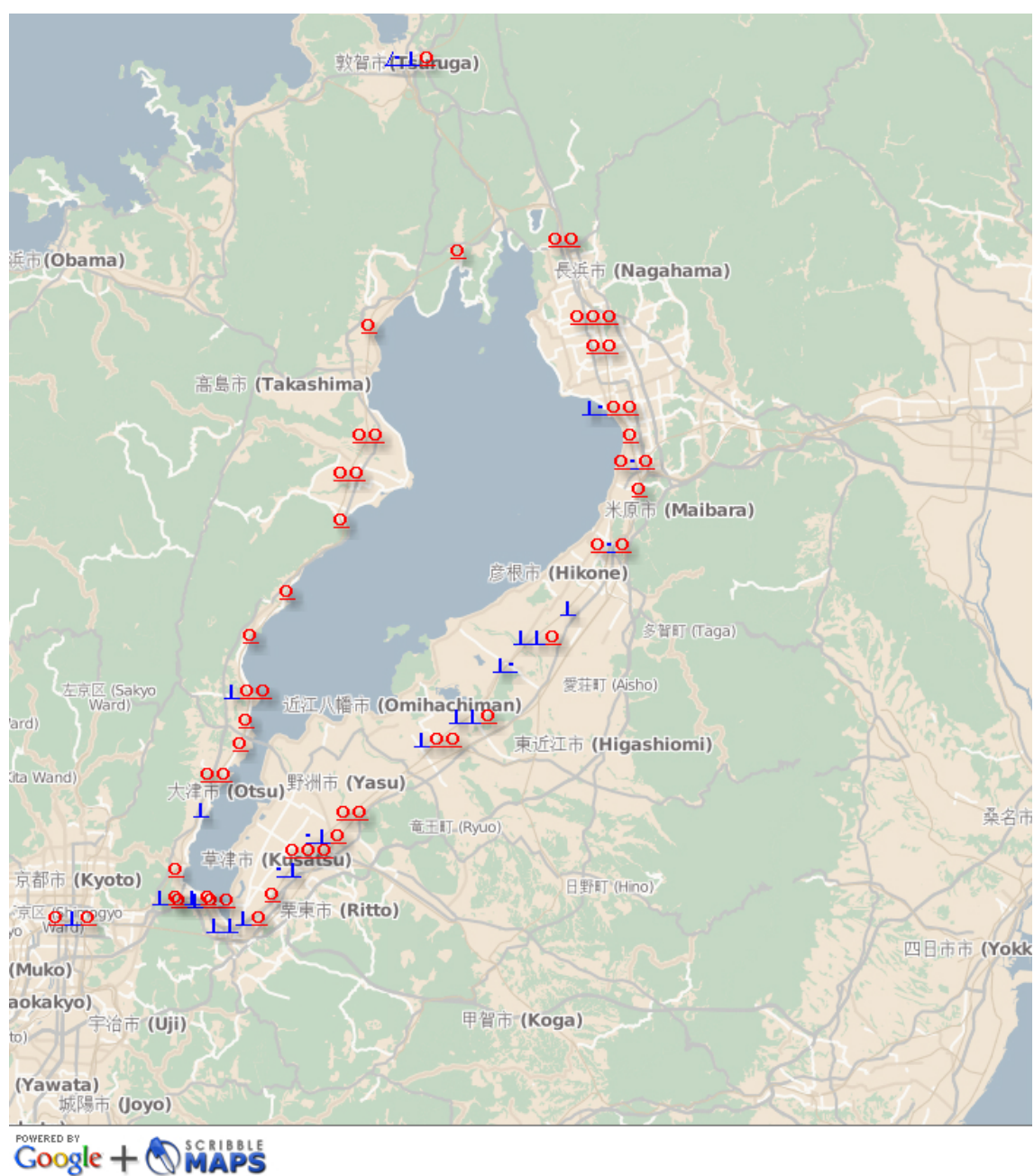
Figure 5. *Ikunoka?* ‘Do you go?’ (to friend) male

【NOTES】

┃ *Ikuka*

• *Ikuke*

○ *Ikun, Ikun-, Ikunka, Ikunka-, Ikunke*

Figure 6. *Ikunoka?* ‘Do you go?’ (to friend) female

【NOTES】

- *Iku, Iku-*
- ┃ *Ikuno, Ikun-*
- *Ikun, Ikun-, Ikunka*

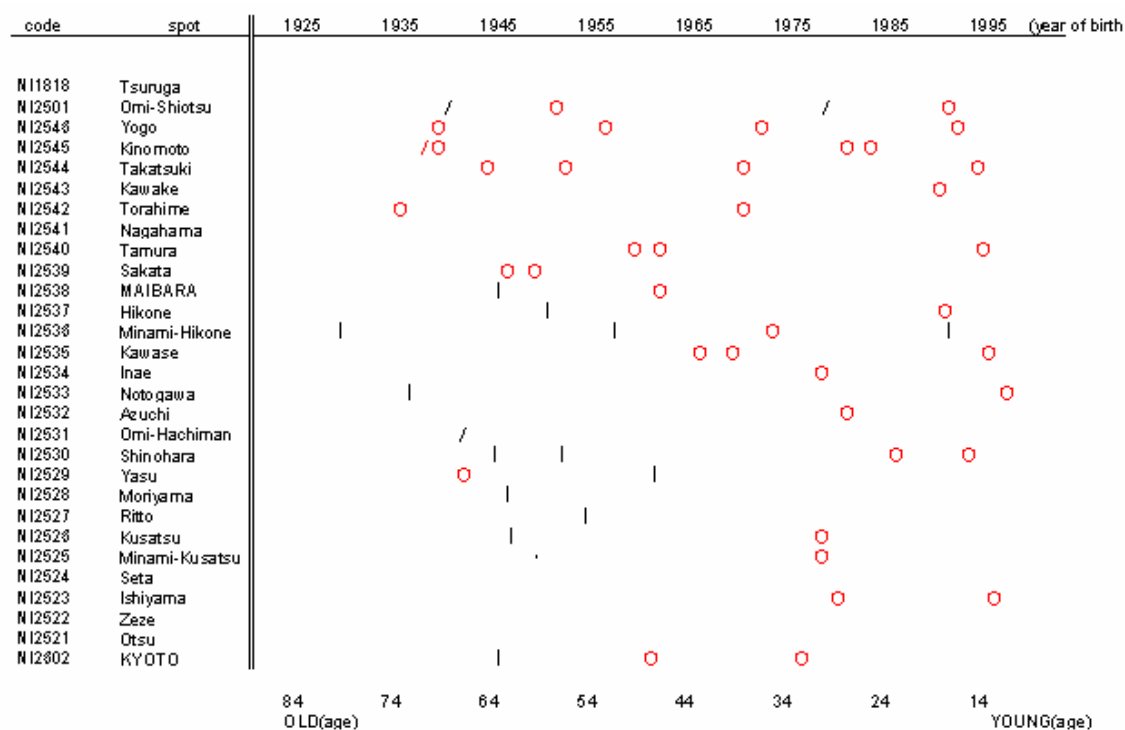


Figure 7. *Ikunoka?* 'Do you go?' (to friend) male/east side

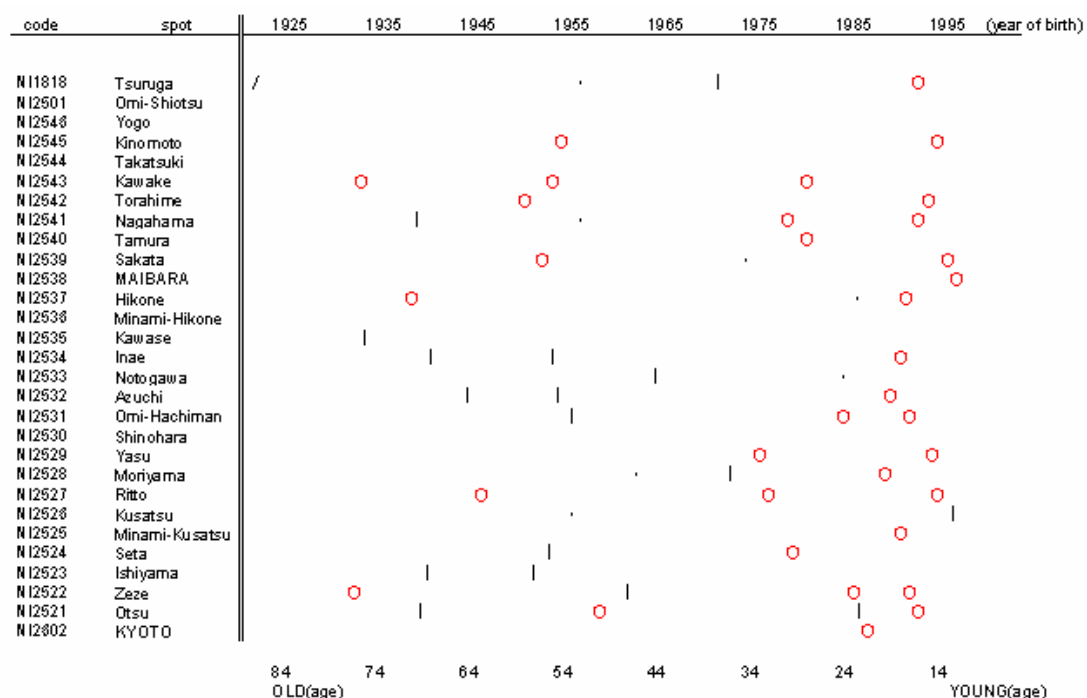
【NOTES】

/ *Ikuka*

• *Ikune*

| *Ikuno, Ikuno-, Ikunoka, Ikunoka-*

○ *Ikun, Ikun-, Ikunka, Ikunka-, Ikunke*

Figure 8. *Ikunoka?* 'Do you go?' (to friend) female/east side

【NOTES】

- *Iku, Iku-*
- / *Ikuka*
- | *Ikuno, Ikuno-*
- *Ikun, Ikun-, Ikunka*