

Takashi Kobayashi / Professor / Graduate School of Arts and Letters

Profile

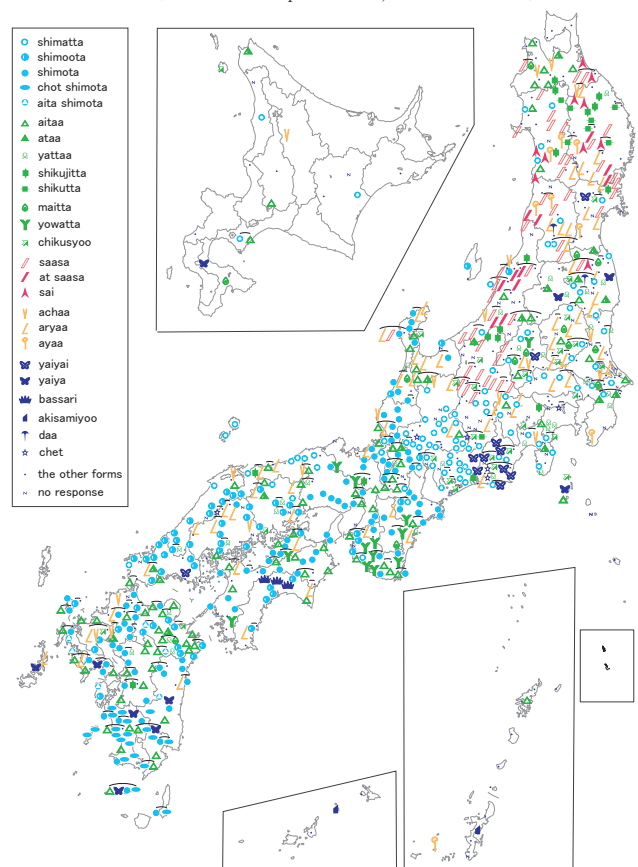


Born 1957 in Niigata Prefecture. Studied Japanese Linguistics as an undergraduate, and later a graduate student, at Tohoku University. From 1983, worked as a researcher at the National Institute for Japanese Language and helped complete the *Grammar Atlas of Japanese Dialects*, a compilation of dialectal grammar from 800 locations across Japan. Became an Associate Professor of Japanese Linguistics at Tohoku University in 1994, and is currently a Professor at the same university. Specialty lies in dialectology; especially the reconstruction of historical Japanese through the so-called method of "Dialectological Study of the History of Japanese." Prizes include the 11th Kyosuke Kindaichi Prize (1986) and the 23rd Izuru Niimura Prize (2004). Publications include the 4 book series: *Shirizu Hougen'gaku [Dialectology Series]* (2006-2007), *Gaidobukku Hougen'ken'kyuu [Dialect Research Guidebook]* (2003), and *Gaidobukku Hougen'chousa [Dialect Survey Guidebook]* (2007). Appears regularly on television programs such as *Shuukan Kotoba Magajin [Weekly Word Magazine]* and *Shittaka Sendaiben [Did you know? Sendai Dialect]* in an effort to increase the understanding of dialects.

Research Activities

In comparison to traditional philological methods, my research focuses on geography and topography in order to clarify the history of Japanese. When studying classical Japanese, we usually look to works such as the *Tale of Genji* and *The Pillow Book*, which contain the literary language of the nobility and clerisy of the central region. However, such language is only a fraction of classical Japanese. Through the study of dialects, it becomes possible to unearth the language of the common people in classical times. It can also be said that the language of antiquity did not simply die out, but was diffused into rural areas and survives in the form of dialects to this day. My research aims to uncover the mechanism in which archaisms are transformed and reborn into dialects. The achievements of my research can be seen in my books, *Hougengakuteki Nihongoshi no Houhou [Method of Dialectological Study of the History of Japanese]* (2004) and *Hougen ga Akasu Nihongo no Rekishi [The History of Japanese as Seen through Dialects]* (2006). It must be mentioned, though, that such research requires organized dialect surveys. The map that I have inserted here is part of a dialect survey of 2,000 locations across Japan that I am currently involved in. It displays the various forms of words used to express failure, such as *shimatta!* (*Oh no!*). Even in such exclamations, there are geographical differences, which reflect vital information about the history of Japanese.

“ Oh no! ” (words used to express failure, such as *shimatta!*)



Message

Most people wouldn't think that there was a different history of Japanese from the one seen through literary works, or that there's a geographical variation for an exclamation such as *shimatta!* It might be said that through doubting common sense, one makes the first step towards discovery. It is also here that the true pleasure of research is born. While it is obvious that dialects are an important cultural heritage, for most people dialects are so close to them, that they don't realize their importance. Furthermore, traditional Japanese dialects are gradually being washed away by the waves of the common language and are currently at the verge of extinction. There remains little time to record for posterity what dialects we still have left. Researchers who have felt this air of crisis are embarking on the mission to record the dialects of Japan. In addition to the 2,000-location survey that I mentioned above, I am involved in local surveys of the Tohoku region with students each year (Center for the Study of Dialectology, Tohoku University website: <http://www.sal.tohoku.ac.jp/hougen/>). My wish is for everybody to hold an interest in dialects and to help record them. No matter how small your effort is, there's no doubt that it will be a valuable record, and will make possible many new discoveries.