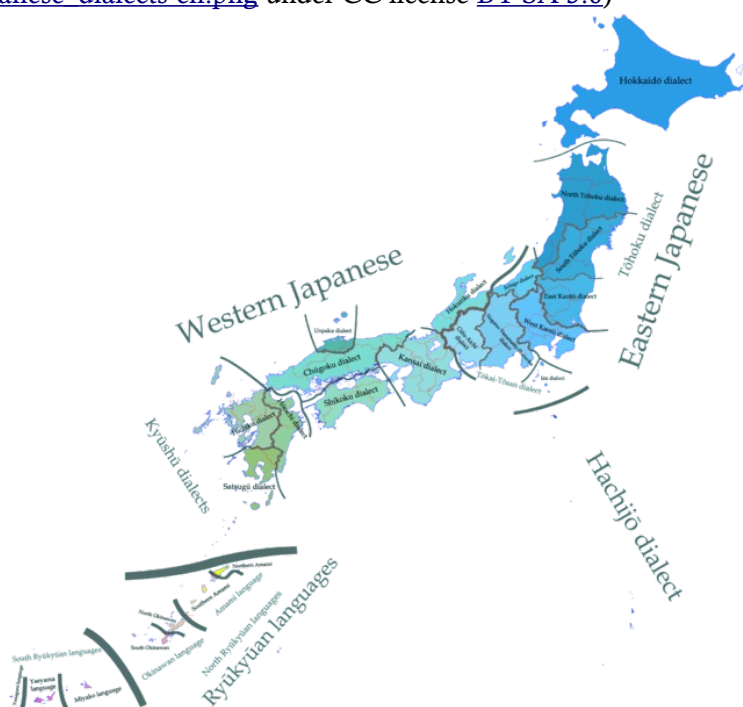
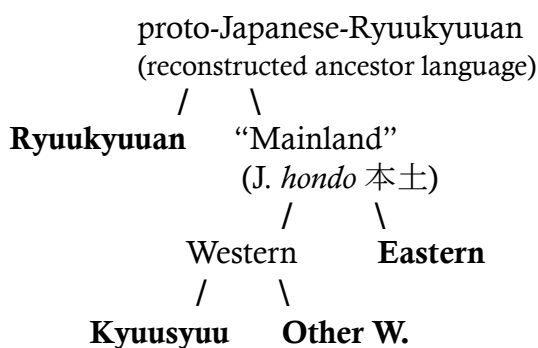


Dialects of modern Japanese

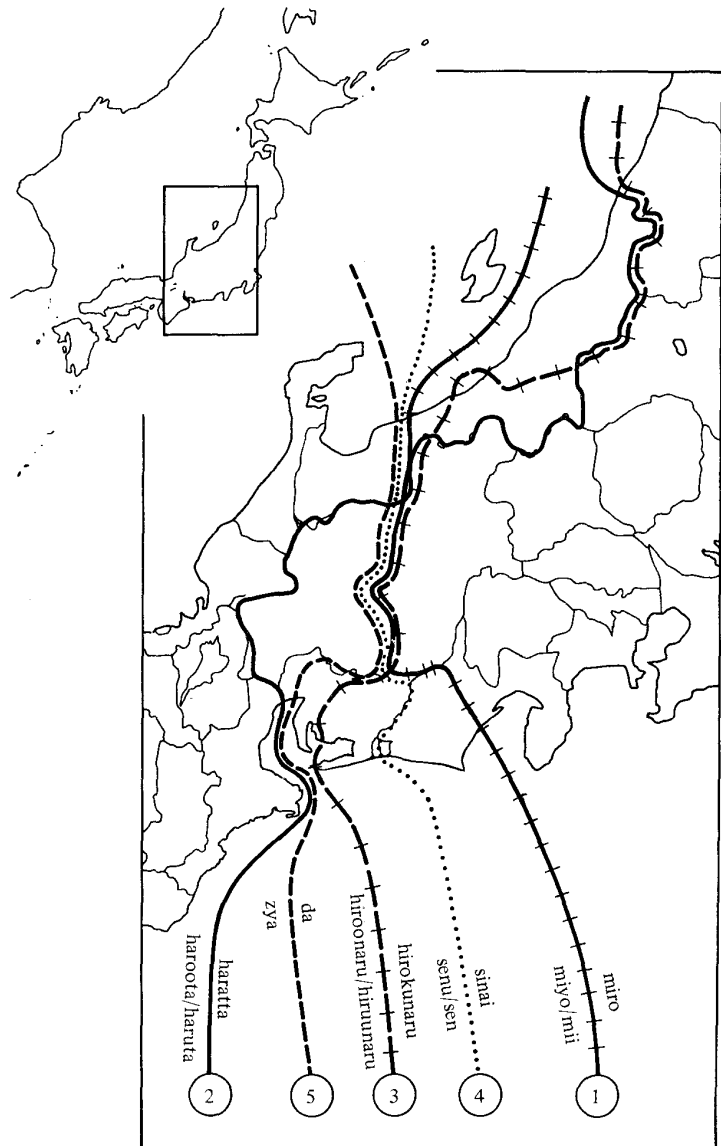
I. What is a dialect?

- (1) Everybody speaks a dialect (actually, one or more)
 - (a) In linguistics, two language varieties are considered dialects of the same language if they are **mutually intelligible**
 - This does not always match the non-specialist use of ‘dialect’—comments?
 - Sometimes we find *one-way intelligibility* or a *dialect continuum* (where A&B are mutually intelligible, and B&C, and C&D, but not A&D), but mutual intelligibility is a useful first-pass criterion
 - (b) Which variety (dialect) of a language becomes (the basis for) the “standard language” is a matter of sociology/political history/etc., not linguistics
 - Any language variety has a mental grammar, systematic patterns, etc.
 - This is true even of varieties that are socially/politically stigmatized
- (2) Historical/geographical relationships among modern Japanese dialects (family tree from Shibatani 1990: Ch 6; map from Enirac Sum, trans. Zakuragi, via Wikimedia Commons at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Japanese_dialects-en.png under CC license BY-SA 3.0)



- (a) Are all of these dialects/dialect groups mutually intelligible?
 - In particular, recent scholars of Ryuukyuan have advocated for this group to be considered a separate language, rather than a dialect group within Japanese
- (b) “Standard Japanese”—e.g., what NHK Broadcasting would like you to sound like—is based mostly on the Tokyo-area dialect (Eastern), but a few features show influence from Kansai-area dialects (Western)
 - Historically, where has the Japanese political power base been located?

- (3) The East/West dialect division:
- (a) A geographic boundary between speech communities based on individual characteristics of language by which they differ is called an “isogloss”
 - (b) Where we find a “bundle of isoglosses,” especially when those isoglosses represent separate and unrelated linguistic features, we have a major dialect boundary
 - (c) The division between Eastern and Western dialects is considered the major dialect division within mainland Japanese



Map 6 Bundle of isoglosses separating the Western dialects and the Eastern dialects

(Map from Shibatani (1990: 197)

II. What kinds of features distinguish dialects?

- See course web page [Media resources for Japanese regional dialects](#) for examples and links

- (4) Lexical differences
- (5) Phonological differences
- (6) Morphological differences
- (7) Syntactic differences

...basically, any aspect of the mental grammar (or social dimensions of use) can in principle distinguish two language varieties