

Picture brides and their Japanese dialects: Evidence from their life story interviews in Hawai'i

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A good amount of the Japanese migrants in the Americas are so-called picture bridges. They were born and grew up in the western part of Japan or Okinawa. They were asked by their parents to go abroad to get married with a Japanese boy at the plantation fields in Hawai'i. The only information about the boy was a picture. To understand their life stories, local historians in Hawai'i have conducted their oral stories interviews since 1960s. Although their stories are very much valuable, their actual sounds were not easily accessed as the recording media such as reel-to-reel tapes, cassette tapes are stored (or in other words, buried) in carbonate boxes.

This paper pays a close look at one of the collections in my project work in Hawai'i. In a collaboration with a local historian, Mrs. Barbara Kawakami, I have managed to digitize 208 interview tapes on picture brides in Hawaii. Mrs. Kawakami conducted her interviews since the end of 1970s. After the digital conversion process, I started transcribing the data.

This paper starts with a brief description of picture bride history in Hawai'i. Data description (10 interview tapes, about 25hours in length) will be made to provide analytic framework of this study. I shall illustrate some of the typical features of their Japanese such as aspectual expressions, complementizer deletion, pronouns, and others to examine to what extent some major Japanese dialects in Hawai'i at that time such as Hiroshima, Kochi, Fukuoka, Kumamoto gave an impact on the local Hawai'i Japanese. Based on this, I shall discuss any peculiarities of their Japanese by comparing with other relevant studies on Japanese in Hawai'i (Higa 1974; Hiramoto 2010, etc.), and will point out that the Japanese features found in picture bridge clearly depict the local Hawaii Japanese.