



**Multilingualization on the Current
Japanese Prefectural Government Web Pages
*The Support Status of Easy Japanese for Foreigners***

Yoshitaka Suzuki¹, Masato Ooe¹, Caihuan Li², Dewi Kusri³, Husnul Yakin⁴

¹Special Needs Education, Gifu University, Japan

²Psychology Department, Meisei University, Japan

³Japanese Language Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

⁴English Education Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

suzuki.yoshitaka.w6@f.gifu-u.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

The multilingualization of Web sites with high quality is essential due to the number of foreigners residing in Japan increasing, web pages need to be translated to obtain information. In this study, we conducted a survey to clarify the current status of language descriptions, including easy Japanese, on prefectural government Web pages. The survey method was to record the language tabs of each prefectural government's Web page and to investigate the number of prefectures that had a tab for easy Japanese in their language tabs. There were 47 Prefectural Government Web Pages in Japan observed based on the availability of language options. As a result, we found that 6 Prefectural Government Web Pages had easy Japanese pages. The six web pages were Tochigi Prefecture, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Yamanashi Prefecture, Hyogo Prefecture, Fukuoka Prefecture, Kagoshima Prefecture. It found that the notation of easy Japanese was different in each prefecture. The results suggest that the easy Japanese web pages are useful not only for children and non-native speakers of Japanese but also for people with disabilities. In the future, it is important to examine whether easy Japanese really functions as easy Japanese and makes it easier to obtain information.

KEYWORDS

Easy Japanese; Government web pages; Language notation; Multilingualism.

ARTICLE INFO

First received: 16 April 2024

Revised: 10 June 2024

Final proof accepted: 20 June 2024

Available online: 25 June 2024

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of foreigners residing in Japan, referred to in Japanese as *seikatsusha*, has been increasing. Whether it is as foreign students or as interns (*ginou jisshuu*) and workers (*tokutei ginou*) (Japan Immigration Supervision Agency, 2022). This has necessitated the need to translate web pages so that information can be obtained (Gottlieb, 2018)

Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) has specified that in 2020, to enhance communication and accessibility for residents, especially those who may not be fluent in Japanese, local governments will be required to "provide information in multiple languages (including easy Japanese) on administrative services provided to residents, details of obligations that must be fulfilled, rules and customs necessary for living in the next society, and events organized

by the local community (Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2020).

Easy Japanese is treated as an attempt to convey information in an easy-to-understand manner using Japanese to many people, including non-native speakers of Japanese, the elderly, and people with disabilities, by rephrasing difficult words, simplified grammar and vocabulary, using clear and concise sentences, etc. (Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2020).

During the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, many foreigners were unable to understand emergency bulletins and evacuation instructions at the time of the earthquake. This prompted the start of the Easy Japanese initiative as a way to quickly convey correct information to foreigners (TIPS for Tokyo Life, Tokyo Intercultural Portal Site). In recent years, furthermore, the government has focusing on promoting easy Japanese so that the increasing number of foreign residents can receive necessary administrative services (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 2023a, 2023b). Thus, in Japan efforts to provide information in multiple languages, including easy Japanese, are widespread.

The concept of multilingualism refers to the use of two or more languages in daily life (Grosjean, 2013). Currently, most people around the world are proficient in more than one language (Peter & Wei, 2007), making multilingualism a prevalent aspect of modern society (Li, 2018). This phenomenon occurs when an individual alternates between multiple languages.

Prefectural government web pages exemplify the practical application of multilingualism. These pages often feature content in multiple languages to cater to a diverse audience, reflecting the widespread use and necessity of multilingual communication in administrative contexts. By providing information in various languages, these web pages ensure accessibility for non-native speakers, facilitating better engagement and understanding among residents and visitors who speak different languages.

However, according to Miyata's (2020) survey on the status of multilingualization of local government Web pages (municipal websites of 47 prefectures and 1,741 basic municipalities in Japan), the number of languages translated manually on the Web pages of each prefectural government, which serves as a window to information, is related to the size of the prefectural budget. However, even among prefectures with large budgets, about 30% of prefectures do not provide information in multilingual languages.

And in many cases, 3 to 5 languages are provided. 66.5% of basic municipalities rely only on manual translation and Southeast Asian languages such as Indonesian are particularly not supported from the viewpoint of the expected resident population of the speakers. In addition, this survey only provides information on easy Japanese as "only 3 prefectures use easy Japanese for translation," and does not analyze information on easy Japanese in web pages, such as the use of separate words. Furthermore, the proportion of foreign residents who can speak Japanese is greater than the proportion of those who can speak English (Ueda, Sugino, Arai, Abe, & Hisamatsu, 2019), but there are also cases where people who can converse in everyday conversation do not necessarily understand the Japanese used in times of disaster (Hiramatsu & Ito, 2018).

According to the Center for the Promotion of Human Rights Education and Enlightenment (2016), 29.1% of foreigners living in Japan reported being able to converse as well as Japanese people, 23.4% said they could converse well enough to do their work or study, and 29.7% said they could converse well enough to get by in daily life. 23.4% of the foreign residents said they can converse in Japanese to the extent that it does not interfere with their work or studies, and 29.7% said they can converse in Japanese to the extent that it does not interfere with their daily lives. On the other hand, 10.4% of foreigners reported that they could hardly converse in Japanese.

According to a survey by the Tokyo Tsunagari Creation Foundation (2022), 63.2% of Japanese respondents answered that they had never heard of easy Japanese, 20.2% of Japanese had seen or heard of it, 12.5% knew it to some extent, and 4.0% were familiar with it. On the other hand, 66.8% of foreign residents answered that they knew easy Japanese, and 33.2% answered that they did not. Regarding the question, "If you receive a leaflet about something you want to know, in which language do you read it?" 18.5% said ordinary Japanese, 38.5% said easy Japanese, 26.8% said English, 12.2% said they read it if it is in their native language, and 3.9% said they do not receive such leaflets. Regarding the question of whether they would like to receive information in easy Japanese, 84.4% said yes. Considering that more than 80% of foreigners living in Japan can converse in Japanese, more than 60% of foreigners living in Japan are familiar with easy Japanese, and more than 80% of foreigners would like to receive information in easy Japanese, it seems that when

considering the multilingualization of information, it is important to take easy Japanese as one language.

Therefore, there is a need to provide information in multiple languages, including easy Japanese, especially on the web pages of prefectural government offices, which serve as contact points for information. However, although the multilingualization of web pages is in progress (Miyata, 2020), the current status of language representation on prefectural government web pages is not clear at present, as the number of foreign residents has been increasing since the coronavirus disaster. Furthermore, Miyata's (2020) survey expects an increase in the provision of easy Japanese on Web pages, but the survey does not examine the current status of language notation of easy Japanese.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to clarify the current status of language notation, including easy Japanese, on the web pages of each official prefecture throughout Japan.

METHOD

The survey covered the official Web pages of the 47 prefectural governments, from November 2nd, 2023 to November 8th 2023. The official Web pages of the 47 prefectural governments were accessed. After that, we recorded the language of the language selection tabs (e.g., Foreign Languages) and the languages listed in the language selection tabs to translate the web pages.

Notations on the tabs for language notations, such as Foreign Languages and Other Languages, were recorded. Then, a tally was made for each notation.

Regarding the languages listed in the language tab, we recorded the number of languages listed for each prefecture, and which language was listed first and which language was listed last. The totals were then compiled. In cases where only "Chinese" was listed on the tab and there was no indication of whether it was in traditional or simplified Chinese, a native speaker of Chinese (third author) confirmed all of the information. For the languages, we also tabulated the results by ranking the number of the topmost positions in each language on the prefecture's Web page.

Based on the data above, for each language translated on the Web page, we tabulated the number of prefectures as well as the number of prefectures, ranked from the top in the tab of

language notation, and described the ranking of the display. For those prefectures that have easy Japanese pages, we described the characteristics of the language used to describe the prefecture.

RESULT

The results of the survey clarified (1) the notation of the language tabs and (2) the number of languages in which translations are available. Each item is described below.

The Notation of The Language Tabs

How to access languages other than Japanese is displayed on the official websites of each prefecture, shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Notation of The Language Tabs.

No	Language Selection Button Display	Number of prefectures
1	"Foreign Language"	30
2	"Language"	10
3	"Other Languages"	3
4	"Translate"	1
5	Language notation	2
6	"言語を選択" / "gengo wo sentaku" mean: "Select a Language"	1

As for the tabs for the language notation for translating Web pages, "Foreign Language" was selected in 30 prefectures, "Language" in 10 prefectures, "Other Languages" in 3 prefectures, "Translate" in 1 prefecture, "Language" in 2 prefectures, and "言語表記" or "Language Notation" in 1 prefecture, and Japanese "言語を選択 (gengo wo sentaku)" which mean "Select a language" was selected in 1 prefecture.

The Number of Languages in Which Translations are Available

1) Number of languages translated into each prefecture's web page

Kanagawa Prefecture was excluded from the analysis in this study because it used the tabs in Google Translate as an alternative, rather than the tabs in the language descriptions created by the

prefecture. The following is a summary of the number of languages translated in the 46 prefectures. The highest number of languages translated was 16, which was in Toyama and Fukui prefectures. On the other hand, the least number of languages translated was 2, in Fukuoka Prefecture. The mode with the highest number of languages translated was 4 languages (Figure 1).

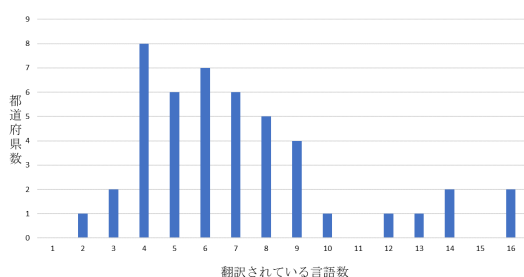


Figure 1: Number of languages translated in each prefecture.

2) List of languages translated in each prefecture's web page

The language translated in the largest number of prefectures was English, which was translated into 46 prefectures, excluding Kanagawa Prefecture. After English, Chinese (simplified), and Korean were translated into 44 prefectures, and Chinese (traditional) was translated into 39 prefectures. Excluding English, Chinese, and Korean, which were the most frequently translated languages, Vietnamese was translated in 25 prefectures. In addition to Vietnamese, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai, Tagalog, Indonesian, French, Japanese, easy Japanese, and German, a total of 10 languages were listed on the language tabs in more than 5 prefectures.

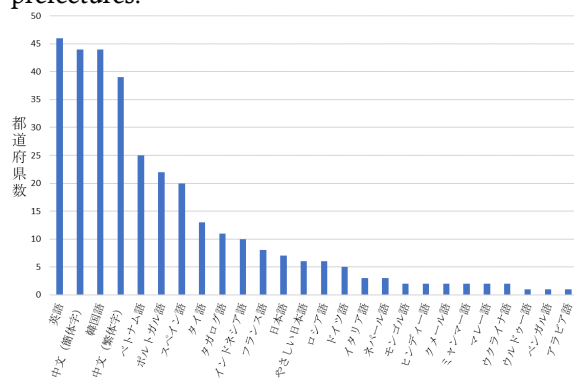


Figure 2: Number of prefectures translating each language.

The number of prefectures with easy Japanese pages was 6. The breakdown was Tochigi, Tokyo, Yamanashi, Hyogo, Fukuoka, and Kagoshima prefectures. Figure 2 below shows the list of languages translated into each prefecture's web page.

3) Display the order of each language in the language notation tab

In the language notation tab, English was the first language most frequently displayed 33 times, Chinese (Simplified) 33 times, Korean 28 times, Chinese (Traditional) 28 times, Portuguese 10 times, and Vietnamese 6 times. Vietnamese was the sixth most frequently displayed language with six times.

Two prefectures, Fukuoka and Kagoshima, displayed easy Japanese as the first language on the tab.

4) Characteristics of the notation on the “Easy Japanese” page

6 prefectures provide easy Japanese menus on their official websites. Tochigi Prefecture, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Yamanashi prefecture, Hyogo prefecture, Fukuoka prefecture and Kagoshima prefecture.

In Tochigi, Yamanashi, Hyogo, and Kagoshima prefectures where “*Wakachi-Gaki* (separating words in Japanese with spaces)” is used, the characteristics of the descriptions on the Web page showed that Tochigi, Yamanashi, and Hyogo prefectures had furigana in Japanese, while Kagoshima prefecture did not. In terms of the *furigana* writing style, Tochigi and Yamanashi Prefecture had *furigana* above Kanji characters, while Hyogo Prefecture had furigana in parentheses after kanji characters.

Yamanashi Prefecture placed *furigana* above the Kanji characters, and no such notations as () or [] were observed.

Tokyo Metropolitan Government dan Hyogo Prefecture wrote *furigana* in parentheses after kanji characters, as in Hyogo Prefecture (Hyogo-ken).

Kagoshima Prefecture used space for each phrase to indicate the meaning of the word, such as “flood (洪水 ‘*Kouzui*’)” (川水 増増とあふれること “*Gawamizu masumasu to afureru koto*”) (Kagoshima Prefectural Government, n.d.). When there are several such annotations in one sentence, as in the example, it is difficult to read the sentence smoothly. In addition, since there is no furigana, the [] words do not make sense if the kanji

characters are not readable. Table 2 contains the features and examples of easy Japanese descriptions.

Table 2: Features and examples of easy Japanese descriptions.

Prefecture	Features in the description	Specific examples
Tochigi Prefecture Yamanashi Prefecture Fukuoka Prefecture	Ruby characters are written above the kanji characters. ○ <i>Furigana</i>	<p>ぼうさい さいがい 防災・災害</p> <p>にほん は とても じしん が おお く に 国です。 いつでも じしん が おき 危険が あります。</p> <p>Bousai & Saigai <i>Nihon wa totemo jishin ga ooi kuni desu. Itsudemo jishin ga okiru kiken ga arimasu.</i> Disaster & Prevention: Japan is a country with many earthquakes. There is always a risk of earthquakes (Tochigi Prefectural Government, n.d.)</p> <p>あめ が たくさん ふって みち いえ なか 水が 来たり 山の 土が くずれたりします。</p> <p><i>Ame ga takusan futte michi ya ie no naka ni mizu ga kitari yama no tsuchi ga kuzuretari shimasu.</i> It rains a lot, and water comes in the road and the house, and the soil of the mountain crumbles (Yamanashi Prefectural Government, 2023)</p> <p>ざいたく いうりょう かいごばんぼ つかうひと ぼうりやく 在宅の 医療・介護現場の 使う人などからの 暴力・ハラスメント (いやがらせ)対策します。</p> <p><i>Zaitaku no iryou & kaigo gamba no tsukau hito nado kara no bouryoku & harasumento taisaku shimasu.</i> We counteract violence & harassment from people who use home medical & nursing care facilities, etc. (Fukuoka Prefectural Government, 2024)</p>
Tokyo Metropolitan Government Hyogo Prefecture	Write <i>furigana</i> (○○) after the kanji ○ <i>Furigana</i>	<p>外国人 (がいこくじん) 向け 災害時 (さいがいじ) に役立つ (やくだつ) 情報 (じょうほう)</p> <p><i>Gaikokujin muke saigaiji ni yakudatsu jouhou.</i> Useful information for foreigners in times of disaster. (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2021)</p> <p>兵庫県 (ひょうごけん) は 日本 (にほん) の 中央 (ちゅうおう) くらいに あります。</p> <p><i>Hyogo ken wa Nihon no chuou kurai ni arimasu.</i> Hyogo Prefecture is located in the center of Japan. (Hyogo Prefectural Government, 2021)</p>
Kagoshima prefecture	Write the meaning of the word (○○) after the phrase. × <i>Furigana</i>	<p>集中豪雨が 起こると 洪水 (川の 水が 増えて あふれること) や 土砂崩れ (山や 崖が 崩れること) などの災害が起こったり 電車やバスが とまったりすることが あります。</p> <p><i>Shuuchuu gouu ga okoru to kouzui (kawa no mizu ga fuete afureru koto) ya doshakuzure (yama ya gake ga kuzureru koto) nado no saigai ga okottari densha ya basu ga tomattari suru koto ga arimasu.</i> Torrential rains can cause disasters such as floods (when river water rises and overflows), landslides (when mountains and cliffs collapse), and train and bus service stoppages. (Kagoshima Prefectural Government, n.d.)</p>

DISCUSSION

Current Status of Multilingualization of Prefectural Web Pages

First, there was an increase in the number of languages translated in each prefecture. In Miyata's (2020) survey, multilingual information was not provided in about 30% of the prefectures, and when it was provided, it was in 3 to 5 languages. However, all prefectural government web pages had tabs for language descriptions, which varied from prefecture to prefecture, but all prefectures had one thing in common: the use of 言語 “*genko*” (Languages) in Japanese, “Languages” in English, and “Translations” in Japanese. “Languages” in Japanese, “Translate” in English, and “Translate” in Japanese. The languages were indicated by the words “Languages” and “Translate” in English. Furthermore, by prefecture, 30 prefectures had at least 6 languages translated (see Figure 1). These results indicate that many more prefectures are now translating into multiple languages than in Miyata's (2020) survey.

Second, support for various languages other than English, Chinese, and Korean was observed. According to Miyata's (2020) survey, “Spanish and Portuguese were at the top of the list, with other languages translated by 3-10%. In addition, the coverage of those from Southeast Asia, such as Nepal, Vietnam, and Indonesia, relative to the population is low.” The results were reported as follows. However, in this survey, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Spanish, Thai, Tagalog, Indonesian, French, Japanese, Easy Japanese, and German were at least 5 prefectures (see Figure. 2). Among these languages, Vietnamese in particular showed more translation tabs than Portuguese and Spanish, and together with Indonesian, more languages from Southeast Asian countries are being translated. These results suggest that multilingualization is underway in a wide variety of languages. As Gottlieb (2018) interpreted the results of his research, translating information for foreigners from Japanese to foreign languages has received increasing attention in Japanese national policy in the past decade. Local governments have played an important role in this endeavor, especially in order to encourage tourism and business activities in Tokyo (Japan National Tourism Organization, 2023). Foreigners are no longer viewed as temporary migrants, but as long-

term members of society, seeking active participation in civic affairs. Therefore, the role of the national government has shifted from focusing on borders and residency to being more proactive in providing translated information and directing local governments to provide more inclusive services. Recognition of the need for translated information has made Japan a more inclusive society and represents an important shift in the attitude of the Japanese government of late (Gottlieb, 2018).

However, the highest frequency in the number of languages translated in each prefecture was 4 (see Figure 1). This is in comparison with the previous survey by Miyata (2020), which revealed that there are still 17 prefectures where the number of languages provided has not yet broken out of 3 to 5 languages. It is considered important to make a wide range of multilingualization in more prefectures in the future.

About Translating Web Pages into Easy Japanese

The number of prefectures with Easy Japanese translations is 6, Tochigi Prefecture, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Yamanashi Prefecture, Hyogo Prefecture, Fukuoka Prefecture, and Kagoshima Prefecture, which is an increase from the number of prefectures in Miyata's (2020) survey, and it can be said that the prefectures are improving their access to information in easy Japanese (Table 2). The number of prefectures with easy Japanese pages was also different among the prefectures. These results suggest that, although easy Japanese pages have been established, many areas could be improved, such as the method of notation.

Carroll (2010) states that in the 2010s, the government in Japan is trying to adopt e-government at both national and local levels. Carroll (2010) looked at how local governments communicate with the public through their websites. His research focused on 47 prefectures in Japan and examined various aspects such as available languages, content, target audience, translation, and efforts to make information more accessible to foreign speakers. Local governments should consider the linguistic needs of the growing number of foreign residents in their communities. Not only that, but local governments are also using languages other than Japanese on their websites for other reasons, such as internationalization, multiculturalism, and managing globalization at

the local level. This research provides insight into these issues and how they are applied in the management of governance at the local level.

Local governments in Japan have employed multilingual and Easy Japanese approaches to enhance accessibility and promote citizenship among non-native residents. For instance, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Yokohama City offer comprehensive information in multiple languages, including English, Chinese, Korean, and Portuguese, on their websites. This multilingual approach includes detailed guides on disaster preparedness, healthcare, education, and legal services, as well as real-time updates and alerts in these languages. By providing critical information directly in the residents' native languages, these governments facilitate immediate comprehension and engagement with civic services, ensuring non-native speakers can access essential resources without language barriers (Carroll, 2011).

Cities like Hamamatsu and Kawasaki utilize Easy Japanese to bridge the language gap for those with basic Japanese proficiency. These websites present city services, healthcare information, and public notices in simplified Japanese, often supported by visual aids and phonetic readings. This approach caters to residents who may not fully understand complex Japanese but can navigate simplified content. For example, Hamamatsu provides easy-to-understand instructions for daily tasks like garbage disposal and using public transportation, enhancing the practical integration of foreign residents. By using simplified language and clear illustrations, these local governments help non-native speakers comprehend essential civic information, thereby promoting their active participation and integration into the community.

A study conducted by Ono, Hamai, and Okabe (2022) showed that most official websites of 47 prefectures in Japan provide healthcare information in Easy Japanese, but only a few provide more detailed information such as medical guidance, health insurance, and childbirth. Keyword searches for “Easy Japanese” plus “medical care” and “Easy Japanese” plus “hospital” show that medical care information in Easy Japanese is mostly offered by public sector organizations, especially in Tokyo. However, some universities, non-profit organizations, and private organizations also provide medical-related information in Easy Japanese. Websites of international exchange associations related to the

public sector also provide various types of information in Easy Japanese. In this study, it was found that the websites of international exchange associations in 29 prefectures provide medical information in Easy Japanese, even more than the official prefectural websites. Therefore, organizations related to public institutions, especially those with a large foreign resident population, need to provide information services, including medical care, in Easy Japanese.

Kusunoki and Hashimoto (2022) conducted a study on the use of *Yasashii Nihongo* (easy Japanese) by municipalities in areas with a high concentration of foreign residents. The study aimed to determine if there have been any changes in the use of *Yasashii Nihongo* in recent years and to examine the level of coordination among municipal offices. Using interviews with employees and information from websites and government documents, the study found that there is a lack of systematic coordination within municipalities and a lack of initiative from the central government to implement *Yasashii Nihongo*. The research suggests that the ambiguous position of *Yasashii Nihongo* in Japanese language policy further separates Japanese and non-Japanese speakers and indicates the government's limited commitment to improving the lives of foreign workers in Japan. Overall, the study highlights the need for better language support and integration efforts for foreign residents in Japan.

Comprehensive Discussion

Regarding the multilingualization of Web pages, it was found that the information on Web pages is translated into a wider range of languages and that the number of prefectures translating Web pages into easy Japanese and the information in easy Japanese have increased, respectively.

Although it is thought that such multilingual information provision is mainly targeted at foreign residents in the Web pages surveyed in this study, it is considered to be related to the field of education for children. For example, NHK's NEWS WEB EASY is written in easy Japanese. This is the first time in Japan that news is provided by “*yasashii nihongo*” (Tanaka, Mino, Ochi, & Shibata, 2013).

According to the site's description, “NEWS WEB EASY conveys news in easy-to-understand language for foreign residents and elementary and junior high school students”. Moreover, in recent years, special needs classes have become a place for

elementary and junior high school students with foreign roots who do not have sufficient Japanese language skills and are unable to take Japanese language classes due to reasons such as “the lack of instructors” (Nikkei Shimbun, 2021). It has been reported that in special needs classes, foreign children account for “one in 15,” twice as many as Japanese children (NHK, 2022). In response to this situation, Japanese language instructors are dispatched to public compulsory education schools to provide instruction in Japanese and native language support staff to assist in the native language, and a school acceptance system for foreign children is being established (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2021).

In particular, easy Japanese is effective for children with intellectual disabilities (Nakajima, 2021) and for children with hearing disabilities due to simplified expressions (Kawauchi, 2021), as school teachers and school personnel are included in the target group for easy Japanese training (Ministry of Justice, 2022). Therefore, with the number of “elementary and junior high school students who may have developmental disabilities and need special support” enrolled in regular classes increasing to 8.8% and the enhancement of support becoming an issue (NHK, 2022), easy Japanese can be effectively used in the education of children with disabilities. Gottlieb (2001) argues that language is not just a tool for communication; it's a gateway to inclusion, empowerment, and cognitive development. In addition, simplified Japanese can be found in various aspects of daily life, such as in newspapers for children. For example, it is thought that people with limited vocabulary may select easy Japanese from the language tabs on the Web pages surveyed here, and use the easy Japanese pages to understand information and an overview of the information. Thus, it is thought that a wide variety of languages, especially easy Japanese, can be used as effective information support in special support education.

However, based on the results of this study, there is still room for improvement in the multilingualization of Web pages that serve as a window to information. For example, NHK World Japan's web page has 18 languages that can be selected for translation from the “Language Selection” tab (NHK World Japan, n.d.), which is more than the maximum number of translated languages of 16 in this study. In addition, NHK World Japan's Easy Japanese web page, for example, states, “This is a beginner-level Japanese

lesson for those who are studying Japanese for the first time. As stated in the “Kanji (English)” section of the website, information is provided in both Japanese and English in the form of sentences. Incorporating diverse languages into school curricula, we not only foster inclusivity but also empower those with disabilities to navigate the world more effectively, as noted by Maher and Nakayama (2003). In light of this, we mentioned that there is a prospect of increasing the number of languages to be translated into multiple languages and that the information obtained through translation in easy Japanese is not sufficient, but we believe that we can provide information that leads to the understanding of non-native Japanese speakers and people with disabilities by writing multiple languages together in a sentence format when easy Japanese is written in a shared style. However, it is thought that information that leads to the understanding of non-native Japanese speakers and people with disabilities can be provided by combining multiple languages in a sentence format when concisely describing easy Japanese.

Future Challenges and Developments

This study did not investigate the relationship between the order of display in the language tabs and the number of foreign residents in each prefecture, or the extent to which non-native speakers of Japanese or people with disabilities use web pages. The Agency for Cultural Affairs (2020) guidelines introduce a “YASA-NICHI CHECKER (Easy Japanese Checker)” that evaluates whether expressions are easy to understand as easy Japanese, but with the assistance of a language specialist, it is possible to check whether the text on a Web page is easy to understand. With the support of a language expert, it would be possible to use the “YASA-NICHI CHECKER (Easy Japanese Checker)” to evaluate the sentences on a Web page. However, it is expected that the countries of origin of foreigners living in Japan will continue to diversify in the future, and there are limits to the multilingual support that can be provided. In addition, a survey shows that approximately 80% of foreigners living in Japan can speak Japanese.

In the future, it will be crucial to enhance the accessibility of Prefectural Government web pages for non-native Japanese speakers and people with disabilities. To ensure these individuals can obtain sufficient information, web pages should be

available in a wider range of languages, with increased and improved information provided in easy-to-understand Japanese. It is necessary to expand language options to include widely spoken languages like English, Chinese, and Korean, as well as minority and regional languages, and to simplify Japanese to ensure clarity for non-native speakers and individuals with cognitive disabilities.

Additionally, improving accessibility for people with disabilities by adhering to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) through features like text-to-speech, adjustable text sizes, and screen reader compatibility is essential. Leveraging AI-based translation services and natural language processing can provide real-time, accurate translations and help create content that is easier to understand. Regular monitoring of web page usage, user engagement, and feedback will ensure effectiveness and highlight areas for improvement. Involving community feedback from non-native speakers and individuals with disabilities can guide the creation of more inclusive content.

Providing multimodal access through various formats such as videos with captions and audio descriptions can cater to different learning styles, enhancing comprehension and accessibility. Training web content developers in best practices for multilingual and accessible web design is also vital. Moreover, it is essential to confirm that pages considered easy Japanese by native speakers are indeed easy for non-native speakers. These strategies collectively aim to make Prefectural Government web pages more usable and inclusive, ensuring that crucial information is accessible and understandable to all users, regardless of language proficiency or disability status.

CONCLUSIONS

As for the current status of multilingualization of prefectural government Web pages (at the time of the survey from November 2nd, 2023 to November 8th, 2023), the highest number of languages translated was 16, in Toyama and Fukui prefectures. On the other hand, the least number of languages translated was 2, in Fukuoka Prefecture. The mode with the highest number of languages translated was 4.

The number of prefectures where easy Japanese pages were found was 6. The notation of easy Japanese was different in each prefecture. The easy

Japanese pages are useful not only for non-native speakers of Japanese but also for those with disabilities. On the other hand, the limited use of easy Japanese and the inconsistency in its presentation raise concerns about accessibility for all users. Easy Japanese is a simplified version of the language that can benefit not only non-native speakers but also individuals with cognitive disabilities, learning difficulties, or low literacy levels. Its effectiveness depends on clear and consistent application across prefectures.

In the future, it is essential to evaluate the actual functionality of easy Japanese. This includes assessing whether it simplifies information access as intended and if it meets the needs of its target audiences. Standardizing easy Japanese across prefectures could help in making the web content universally understandable and more user-friendly. Implementing these improvements would ensure that prefectural government websites effectively serve a diverse populace, facilitating better access to crucial information and services for everyone, regardless of their language proficiency or cognitive abilities.

REFERENCES

- Carroll, T. (2010). Local Government Websites in Japan: International, Multicultural, Multilingual? *Japanese Studies*, 30(3), 373–392. doi:10.1080/10371397.2010.518942
- Fukuoka Prefectural Government. (n.d.). *Fukuoka Prefectural Government Website*. Retrieved December 22, 2023 from <https://www.pref.fukuoka.lg.jp/>
- Fukuoka Prefectural Government. (2024). *Fukuoka ken zaitaku iryou kaigo shokuin kasuhara soudan sentaa* [Fukuoka Prefecture Home Healthcare and Nursing Care Worker Harassment Consultation Center]. Retrieved from <https://tsutaeru.cloud/easy.php?uri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pref.fukuoka.lg.jp%2F>
- Gottlieb, N. (2001). Language and disability in Japan. *Disability & Society*, 16(7), 981-995. DOI: 10.1080/09687590120097863
- Gottlieb, N. (2018). Multilingual information for foreign residents in Japan: a survey of government initiatives. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2018(251), 131–149. doi:10.1515/ijsl-2018-0007
- Grosjean, F. (2013). *Bilingualism: A short introduction*. In F. Grosjean & P. Li (Eds.), *The psycholinguistics of bilingualism* (pp. 5–25). Chichester, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hiramatsu, Y. & Ito, A. (2018). Saigai-ji ni okeru jouhou shien shisutemu kara kousatsu suru gendai shakai no

- jouhou dentatsu no kadai —choukaku shougai-sha jouhou shien kara yunibaasaru dezain tenkai e— [Challenges of information transmission in modern society considered from the perspective of support systems during disasters - From information support for the hearing impaired to the development of universal design]. *Chuo University Economic Research Institute Annual Report*, 575-605.
- Hyogo Prefectural Government. (2021). *Welcome to the Website of Hyogo Prefectural Government*. Retrieved from <https://web.pref.hyogo.lg.jp/sr13/e-japanese/e-japanese.html>
- Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2020). *Zairyuu shien no tame no yasashii nihongo gaidorain [Guidelines for Easy Japanese for Residence Assistance]*. Retrieved December 15, 2023 from https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/kokugo_nihongo/kyoiku/pdf/92484001_01.pdf
- Japan Immigration Supervision Agency. (2022). *Ryou wa 4-nen 6 gatsumatsu genzai ni okeru zairyuu gaikoku ninzuu ni tsuite [Regarding the number of foreign residents as of the end of June 2020]*. Retrieved December 9, 2023 from https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/publications/press/13_00028.html
- Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (formerly Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications). (2020). *Tabunkakyousei no suishin ni kansuru kenkyuu kaihoukokusho ~ chiiki ni okeru tabunkakyousei no saranaru suishin ni tsuite ~ [Report of the Study Group on the Promotion of Multicultural Conviviality - Further Promotion of Multicultural Conviviality in the Region]*. Retrieved December 18, 2023 from https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11573918/www.soumu.go.jp/main_content/000706215.pdf
- Japan National Tourism Organization. (2023). *October 2023 Estimates (November 15, 2023)*. Retrieved December 18, 2023 from https://www.jnto.go.jp/statistics/data/20231115_monthly.pdf
- Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs. (2020). *Zairyuu shien no tame no yasashii nihongo gaidorain [Easy Japanese guidelines for residence support]*. Retrieved December 15, 2023 from https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/kokugo_nihongo/kyoiku/pdf/92484001_01.pdf
- Kagoshima Prefectural Government. (n.d.). *Kagoshima Prefectural Government Website*. Retrieved December 11, 2023 from <https://www.pref.kagoshima.jp/>
- Kawauchi, N. (2021). Shinsai-ji ni okeru choukaku shougai-sha no jouhou juju no kadai — hito to hito to no kakawari to komyunikeeshon no shiten kara [Issues of information exchange for hearing-impaired people during earthquake disasters - From the perspective of interpersonal relationships and communication]. *Aoyama Prefectural University of Insurance Journal*, 12, 11-19.
- Kusunoki, R., & Hashimoto, K. (2022). Is 'Easy Japanese' a Language Option? Local Responses to the Increasing Foreign Resident Population from Southeast Asia. *Asian Studies Review*, 46(4), 613-630.
- Li, W. (2018). Research perspectives on bilingualism and multilingualism. In W. Li & M. Moyer (Eds.), *The Blackwell handbook of research methods on bilingualism and multilingualism* (pp. 3–17). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Maher, J., & Nakayama, A. (2003) Language education in Japan: The multicultural challenge. In Jill Bourne & Euan Reid (eds.), *World yearbook of education 2003*, 127–139. London: Kogan Page.
- Miyata, R. (2020). Nihon ni okeru jichitai weebusaito no tagengoka no genkyou to kadai [Current status and challenges of multilingualization of local government websites in Japan]. *Interpretation and Translation Research*, 20.
- Nakajima, T. (2021). Kategorii no kyousei kara sougo kouji to shite no kyousei e [From coexistence of categories to coexistence as mutual action]. *Sociolinguistic Science*, 24(1), 109-124.
- NHK World Japan. (n.d.). *NHK World Japan official web page*. Retrieved December 7, 2023 from <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/learnjapanese/>
- Nihon Keizai Shimbun. (2021). *Sotokokuseki no ko no kyōiku, naze “shien gakkyū” tanomi? [Education of Children with Foreign Nationality, Why Rely on “Support Classes”?]*. Retrieved December 22, 2023 from <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQODL084CV0Y1A500C200000/>
- Nihon Keizai Shimbun. (2023a). *Kou yougou wa nihongo dake? Gaikoku hito 1-wari koe no jidai ni [Is Japanese the only “official language”? In an age when foreigners account for more than 10 percent of the workforce]*. Retrieved December 25, 2023 from <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUE223SQ0S3A620C200000/>
- Nihon Keizai Shimbun. (2023b). *Nipponseifu, “yasashii nihongo” sokushin e zairyuu gaikoku hito no kakudai haikai [Japanese government to promote “easy Japanese” against a background of increasing foreign residents in Japan]*. Retrieved December 25, 2023 from <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUA251210V20C23A900000/>
- Ono, N., Hamai, T., & Okabe, J. (2022). “Yasashii nihongo” ni yoru iryou kanren jouhou no teikyou no genjou ni tsuite no tansaku-teki chousa [An exploratory study on the current state of medical information provision in “easy Japanese”]. *Kyōuiku Kenkyū*, (64), 63-78.
- Peter, A., & Wei, L. (2007). “Introduction: Multilingualism as a Problem? Monolingualism as a Problem?” *Handbook*

- of Multilingualism and Multilingual Communication.* Berlin: Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Tanaka, H. Mino, H. Ochi, S. Shibata, M. (2013) *“Yasashii Nihongo” ni Yoru Jouhou Teikyou: NHK no News Web Easy no Baai Yasashii Nihongo wa Nani wo Mezasuka* [Providing Information in “Easy Japanese”: In The Case of News Web Easy, What does The Aim of Easy Japanese be?]. Tokyo: Koko Publisher.
- Tochigi Prefectural Government. (n.d.). *Hozai • Saigai* [Disaster and Disaster prevention]. Retrieved from <https://www.pref.tochigi.lg.jp/english/easyjp/disaster.html>
- Tokyo Metropolitan Government. (2021). *Yasashii Nihongo Kizsu Koonaa* [Easy Japanese Kids' Corner]. Retrieved from <https://www.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/tosei/koho/kids/kids.html>
- Tokyo Metropolitan Government Multiculturalism Portal Site. (n.d.). *Yasashii Nihongo to wa* [What is “Easy Japanese”?]. Retrieved from <https://tabunka.tokyo-tsunagari.or.jp/yasanichi/about.html>
- Tokyo Metropolitan Tsunagari Creation Foundation. (2022). *Yasashii Nihongo wo Katsuyoushita Zaiju Gaikokujin he no Jouhou Dentatsu ni Kakawaru Chousa*. [Survey on Information Transfer to Foreign Residents Using Easy Japanese]. Retrieved from https://tabunka.tokyo-tsunagari.or.jp/info/files/02reports_communication.pdf
- Ueda, A., Sugino, T., Arai, H., Abe, E., & Hisamatsu, M. (2019). English for Specific Purposes (ESP) o yasashii nihongo de no insutorakushon ni kansuru kango gakusei no niizu bunseki no tame no bunken rebyuu [Literature review for needs analysis of nursing students regarding English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and instruction in easy Japanese]. *Bulletin of Chiba Prefectural University of Health and Medical Sciences*, 7(1), 69.
- Yamanashi Prefectural Government. (2023). *Kinkyuu • Saigai*. [Emergency/Disaster]. Retrieved from <https://www.pref.yamanashi.jp/foreign/kinkyu.html>