

「やさしい日本語」による医療関連情報の提供の現状についての探索的調査

Exploratory Study on the Current Situation About Providing Medical Information in “Easy Japanese”

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ABSTRACT

本研究では、「やさしい日本語」による医療関連情報の提供の現状について、全都道府県とそれ以外の団体を対象として探索的に調査した。47都道府県のWebサイトを調査した結果、35都道府県のWebサイトが何らかの医療情報をやさしい日本語で提供していたが、医療に関する詳細な情報を提供していたのは6都道府県のみであった。キーワード検索では、医療における「やさしい日本語」の情報を提供する団体は公的機関と関連する国際交流協会などの公的機関が最も多かった。全国の主要な国際交流協会のWebサイトを調査した結果、29都道府県の国際交流協会のWebサイトが何らかの医療情報をやさしい日本語で提供しており、その数は都道府県の公式Webサイトよりは少なかったが、詳細な医療情報を

提供していたのは21と多かった。本研究の結果から、都道府県のみならず、関連する国際交流協会や市区町村レベルで、医療情報をやさしい日本語で提供していることが示唆された。

We conducted an exploratory survey of all prefectures in Japan as well as relevant organizations concerning the current status of providing medical-related information in “Easy Japanese.” Easy Japanese is a simple, easily understandable form of the language developed for foreigners living in that country. Among the official websites of the 47 prefectures, 35 provided health-care information in Easy Japanese; most dealt with COVID-19 information. Six provided detailed information, such as concerning medical guidance, medical insurance, and childbirth.

We conducted a key word search for “Easy Japanese” plus “medical care” and “Easy Japanese” plus “hospital”; we found that medical care information in Easy Japanese was mostly offered by organizations in the public sector—especially in Tokyo. Medical-related information in Easy Japanese was also provided by universities, nonprofit organizations, and private organizations. International exchange associations related to the public sector offered various kinds of information in Easy Japanese. We examined the websites of major international exchange associations in Japan: We found that such sites in 29 prefectures provided some medical information in Easy Japanese; detailed medical information was offered by 21 sites, which exceeded the number for official prefectural websites. Some sites of the international exchange associations provided a language setting for Easy Japanese. Our results suggest that organizations related to public institutions (such as international exchange associations—especially with large populations of foreign residents) should provide various information services, including medical care, in Easy Japanese.

1. Background

1.1 Foreign Residents in Japan

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has swept the world since early 2020, and it has had a significant impact on the number of foreign visitors to Japan. The number of foreigners living in Japan was expected to decline owing to COVID-19. However, the number of foreigners resident in the country has continued to increase. According to a report by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan (2019), as of the end of 2018, the number of mid- to long-term residents was 2,409,677; the number of special permanent residents was 321,416; thus, the total number of foreign residents was 2,731,093. The proportion of foreigners living in Japan continued to increase until 2019.

The Act on the Entry of Foreigners dates back to the 1950s, and the Immigration Control and Refugee

Recognition Act has been revised repeatedly since it was enacted in 1951. According to Kwon (2016), foreign workers are expected to play a role in compensating for labor shortages in Japan due to its declining birthrate and aging population. The revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was enacted in December 2018 and came into force in April 2019. It aimed to increase the number of foreign workers in Japan and address labor shortages owing to the country’s declining birthrate. Under that revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, the status of permanent residence, which had been limited to highly skilled foreign workers, was expanded to include unskilled workers. Following the introduction of that revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition act, restrictions for permanent residence have been relaxed, allowing more foreigners to reside in Japan. To promote the

acceptance of foreign human resources, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced the “Status of Residence: Specified Skilled Worker” leaflet in English, and the Immigration Services Agency of Japan prepared the publication entitled “Initiatives to Accept New Foreign Nationals and for the Realization of Society of Harmonious Coexistence” in Japanese and English. It is expected that the number of foreigners in Japan will continue to increase after the measures implemented in response to COVID-19 are discontinued.

According to the 2015 census conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2019), there were 1,555,505 foreigners living in Japan, an increase of 244,960 and 18.7% compared with 2000. By nationality, South Korea had the largest number of residents (30.0% of the foreign population), followed by China with 346,877 (22.3%), Brazil with 214,049 (13.8%), and the Philippines with 123,747 (8.0%). Compared with 2000, the figure of South Korea had decreased by 11.9%, whereas that for China had increased by 37.1%, that for Brazil increased by 13.6%, and that for Philippines increased by 32.1%.

Many of those foreign residents in Japan may experience linguistic difficulties in their daily lives. If foreigners living there can speak English, they may be able to communicate with some Japanese without being able to speak Japanese. However, communication in a language other than English may be unlikely if the foreigners’ native tongue has few learners in Japan.

1.2 Use of “Easy Japanese”

According to the Tokyo Metropolitan Bureau of Life and Culture, “Easy Japanese” refers to an easy form of the language that has been simplified so that foreigners can more readily understand (Tokyo Metropolitan Bureau of Life and Culture, 2021).

Nii (2020) suggests that Easy Japanese is an appropriate means of communicating between foreign residents and Japanese. Easy Japanese is attracting attention as a means for foreigners from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate in Japan. Foreign residents there come from many countries. Having foreigners reside in their country gives Japanese the opportunity to learn different languages, such as English. However, there may be difficulties with languages that have few learners in Japan. Using Easy Japanese could offer a solution to such problems and overcome language barriers. If a foreign resident whose native tongue has few learners in Japan could speak Easy Japanese, they could communicate better with Japanese and live more easily in their local community.

Easy Japanese was created at the time of the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which occurred in 1995; it is a form of Japanese that takes into account understanding the language by foreigners. Following that earthquake, communication problems arose: Local Japanese had difficulty communicating with people who spoke neither Japanese nor English. Communication was not possible with standard Japanese, and so Easy Japanese developed. According to Sato (2005), many foreign residents affected by the disaster did not fully understand either Japanese or English. Owing to the many native languages spoken by Japan’s foreign residents, it would be impossible to provide information to them readily in their own language in the event of a disaster. Thus, Easy Japanese came to be considered as a solution. Matsuda et al. (2000) investigated how disaster information could be conveyed in Japanese and checked the effectiveness of Easy Japanese. The authors conducted a study in the form of interviews with foreign participants with respect to Japanese proficiency; the participants ranged from the second half of a beginner’s class to the first half of the intermediate level. Matsuda et al. (2000) observed that the

understanding rate of regular news sentences was about 30% when standard Japanese was used; however, that figure rose to 90% when Easy Japanese was applied, clearly showing a marked increase in understanding. The results of that study revealed that Easy Japanese is an effective means of communication in Japan among people whose native tongue has few learners.

In 2020, the Bureau of Citizens and Cultural Affairs (2020) conducted a survey to identify use and needs for Easy Japanese in the case of cities, towns, international exchange associations, and social welfare councils. The survey found that the prime reason for employing Easy Japanese was the reduced need for multilingual support; the secondary reason was that many foreigners could understand Easy Japanese.

According to the “2016 Foreign Residents Survey Report” (Center for Human Rights Education and Training, 2017), over 80% of such residents could speak Japanese beyond basic survival level. Japan’s foreign residents at that time came from 194 countries; thus, it would be difficult to provide official information in each country’s language. Accordingly, in municipalities with many foreign residents, Easy Japanese is used for certain official procedures and information related to daily living. Public service information can be delivered in Easy Japanese for better understanding: It can play a role as a common language in local communities.

1.3 Easy Japanese in Medical Care

According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2020), about 80% of outpatient clinics (central medical institutions selected by prefectural governments) had experience of accepting foreign patients. The survey found that among “general hospitals”, 50% had accepted foreign patients (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2020, p. 11).

It can be difficult sometimes to find interpreters

for effective communication between foreign patients and Japanese medical professionals—especially if the patient’s native tongue has few learners in Japan. Although some foreign patients may speak some Japanese, everyday Japanese and Japanese spoken in a medical setting are substantially different. Communication problems in hospitals are not limited to foreign patients; they also occur with Japanese patients. According to “the Hospital Language” The National Institute of Japanese Language Hospital Language Committee (2009), even Japanese find the language used in hospitals difficult to understand. Thus, foreigners in Japan will have even more difficulty grasping medical terminology. According to Takeda et al. (2021), such terms as *zukizuki* (throbbing pain) used in Japanese medicine may be difficult to understand even with foreigners who do speak Japanese.

As a result of this situation, some hospitals in Japan are working with Easy Japanese to help foreigners understand medical information. Takeda et al. (2020) released videos on YouTube to disseminate educational materials: the aim was to help medical professionals learn expressions using Easy Japanese in COVID-19 testing. In addition to such testing, information in Easy Japanese can be employed in medical care, and there would appear to be a need for it in municipalities across the country. For many foreigners, Easy Japanese is an effective means of communication in medical care. However, to date, no studies have investigated such information. Therefore, we set two research questions: RQ1. Is medical information in Easy Japanese published on official websites in Japan’s 47 prefectures?

To address RQ1, we examined the official websites of prefectural capitals throughout Japan to confirm whether information related to medical care was available in Easy Japanese. Among the 47 prefectures, areas with large populations of foreign

residents (such as Tokyo, Aichi, Osaka, and surrounding areas) may provide various language services; however, information may be offered not by the prefecture's official website but by related organizations. Therefore, we added the following research question: RQ2. Is there any Easy Japanese medical information provided by organizations other than official prefectural websites, and what characteristics does that information have?

We set RQ2 to confirm whether information related to medical care was available in Easy Japanese on websites as those of international exchange associations rather than prefectural capitals. This study examined the current status of access to medical knowledge in Easy Japanese for foreign residents in Japan.

2. Methods

To answer RQ1, we searched for the use of Easy Japanese on the official websites of Japan's 47 prefectures. We conducted that search using the term "Easy Japanese (やさしい日本語)" with respect to health care. In August 2021, we surveyed those sites to investigate the provision of multilingual information (including machine translation), whether they presented information in Easy Japanese, and how Easy Japanese for medical care was presented. We accessed the official websites of all 47 prefectures and visually checked information content for foreign residents.

To answer RQ2, we searched for the use of Easy Japanese on websites other than official prefectural ones. The prefecture's official websites sometimes displayed URLs to other organizations regarding Easy Japanese, and so we surveyed those. In addition, we obtained the list of international exchange associations nationwide from the Multicultural Symbiosis Portal Site of the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). We accessed various organizations for

medical information in Easy Japanese using links from the nationwide international exchange association. We also conducted that search in August 2021. It involved key word searches in Japanese for "Easy Japanese" (やさしい日本語) plus "medical care" (医療) and for "Easy Japanese" (やさしい日本語) plus "hospital" (病院). We carried out the searches using Google and Yahoo. We conducted the initial search on Google in Japanese and identified related sites. We then performed the same search on Yahoo, and we checked and summarized the differences. We found 7 million results for the key word searches; some pages were repeated on the same website, and when we filtered those out, we obtained fewer than 7 million results. Following visual inspection, we were able to extract 45 pertinent websites. Furthermore, we investigated the websites of public and nonprofit organizations that provided medical care information in Easy Japanese.

We selected organizations that offered some information related to medical care using Easy Japanese on their websites. We excluded organizations that simply listed telephone consultation services for medical matters, translation services for Easy Japanese, and announcements of Easy Japanese language workshops for medical care. We included the International Exchange Association as a public institution.

We conducted a search concerning the use of Easy Japanese on the websites of major international exchange associations in all 47 prefectures. We identified 889 such associations from data released by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. Among the 522 organizations with public sites, we investigated the largest in each prefecture.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the results of our search of the official websites of the 47 prefectures regarding

medical information in Easy Japanese. Of those, 35 provided such information—mostly about COVID-19; six provided detailed information, such

as concerning medical guidance, medical insurance, and childbirth.

Table 1

Summarized Results of Website Survey in Japan's 47 Prefectures

Prefecture	Use of Easy Japanese in medical care	Detailed medical care information in Easy Japanese
Hokkaido	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.hokkaido.lg.jp/ss/tsk/promo/coronavirus.html	
Iwate	Ministry of Justice: Foreign Life Support Portal Site (external link) https://www.pref.iwate.jp/kyouikubunka/kokusai/1006971/1029975.html	
Akita	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.akita.lg.jp/pages/archive/57800	
Yamagata	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.yamagata.jp/documents/8233/gominosutekata-yasashiinihongo.pdf	
Ibaragi	Notice about COVID-19 https://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/seikatsukankyo/josei/kenmin/coronavirus_top.html	
Tochigi	Medical care, health insurance, information about childbirth and child care https://www.pref.tochigi.lg.jp/f04/yasashiinihongo.html	Introduction of easy Japanese initiatives and links to related information
Gumma	Living information in multiple languages (related to COVID-19) https://www.pref.gunma.jp/03/ci11_00298.html	
Saitama	Medical care, health insurance, information about childbirth and child care https://www.pref.saitama.lg.jp/nanbu-foreiner-portal/jp/	
Chiba	Health care https://www.pref.chiba.lg.jp/kokusai/documents/all_yasanichi.pdf	"Hello Chiba" information about daily life and health care in Easy Japanese
Tokyo	Easy Japanese in medical care videos https://www.seikatubunka.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/chiki_tabunka/tabunka/tabunkasuishin/0000001630.html	Universities in Tokyo create "easy Japanese" video materials useful for medical care for foreigners
Kanagawa	Immigration Services Agency of Japan: "Foreign Life Information" COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp/docs/k2w/mlt/f421219/index.html	
Yamanashi	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.yamanashi.jp/kokusai/covid19.html	
Shizuoka	COVID-19, health insurance, others https://www.pref.shizuoka.jp/kenmin/km-160/yasasi-nihongo.html	Various pamphlets on Japan's health-care system https://www.pref.shizuoka.jp/kenmin/km-160/documents/nihon-no-iryuu-no-shikumi.pdf
Aichi	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.aichi.jp/site/covid19-aichi/korona0529.html	
Mie	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.mie.lg.jp/Yakumus/HP/covid19info-jp.htm	
Shiga	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.shiga.lg.jp/ippan/kenkouiryouhukushi/yakuzi/311157.html	

Kyoto	COVID-19 medical guide https://www.pref.kyoto.jp/kokusai/yasashiinihongo.html	Information about COVID-19 vaccination in Easy Japanese
Osaka	Easy Japanese used in medicine https://www.pref.osaka.lg.jp/kanko/easyjpn/index.html	Text “Let’s use easy Japanese!”
Hyogo	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://web.pref.hyogo.lg.jp/kf16/corona/documents/documents/japanese.pdf	
Nara	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.nara.jp/55985.htm	
Wakayama	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.wakayama.lg.jp/prefg/022300/d00203244_d/fil/1001-4.pdf	
Tottori	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.tottori.lg.jp/secure/1255803/Vaccine_yasashiinihongo.pdf	
Shimane	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.shimane.lg.jp/bunkakokusai/tabunka/gaikokujinnsienn/information_covid19.data/01easy-j.pdf	
Okayama	“Conversations When You Get Sick” https://www.pref.okayama.jp/uploaded/attachment/195891.pdf	
Hiroshima	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.hiroshima.lg.jp/uploaded/attachment/417541.pdf	
Yamaguchi	COVID-19 information for foreigners (external link) https://www.pref.yamaguchi.lg.jp/cms/a12900/index/	
Kagawa	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.kagawa.lg.jp/kokusai/live_together/forforeigner/kfvn.html	
Ehime	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.ehime.jp/h14500/tagengomessage.html	
Kochi	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.kochi.lg.jp/soshiki/141901/2020120400243.html	
Fukuoka	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.fukuoka.lg.jp/contents/coronagaikokujin310.html	
Saga	Workbook to create Easy Japanese: Questions about COVID-19 https://www.pref.saga.lg.jp/kiji00382254/index.html	
Nagasaki	COVID-19 information for foreigners (external link) https://www.pref.nagasaki.jp/bunrui/kanko-kyoiku-bunka/kokusaikoryu-passport/tabunkakyousei/	
Oita	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.oita.jp/site/covid19-oita/0508coronavirus2019-simplifiedjapanese.html	
Miyazaki	COVID-19 information for foreigners https://www.pref.miyazaki.lg.jp/fukushihoken/covid-19/kenmin/20210218124955.html	
Kagoshima	COVID-19 information for foreigners (external link) https://www.pref.kagoshima.jp/af09/20200407covid-19.html	

Note. All websites cited were retrieved in November, 2021.

Searches using the key words “Easy Japanese” plus “medical care” with both Google and Yahoo yielded 7,030,000 results. Searches using the key words “Easy Japanese” plus “hospital” with both

Google and Yahoo produced 7,140,000 results. Among them, 45 websites of 41 organizations provided Easy Japanese health-care information. The organizations included 22 public institutions,

one university (Juntendo University), 13 nonprofit organizations, and five private organizations (Table 2). Almost all the public institutions were located in metropolitan prefectures and in various provinces. They were not restricted to such big cities as Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka. They were also unrelated to the top 100 municipalities in number of foreign residents identified by the Ministry of Justice (2019). According to the ministry's data, the top three were Shinjuku-ku (Tokyo), Edogawa-ku (Tokyo), and Kawaguchi city

(Saitama), none of which appear in Table 2. We conducted an additional search among the websites of the municipal offices of Shinjuku-ku, Edogawa-ku, and Kawaguchi. Shinjuku-ku did not have information in Easy Japanese, but it added aids for reading kanji characters. The Edogawa-ku website had a link to Tokyo Intercultural Portal Site, which included medical information in Easy Japanese. Kawaguchi had a link to local living information in Easy Japanese, but it lacked information about medicine.

Table 2
Organizations in Japan That Offered Medical Information in Easy Japanese

By group	No.	Name of organization	Medical care information in Easy Japanese
Public sector	1	Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare https://www.e19.mhlw.go.jp/covid-19-jp.html	COVID-19-related information in Easy Japanese
	2	Immigration Services Agency of Japan https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/support/portal/plain_japanese.html	Foreign Life Support Portal Site (Easy Japanese)
	3	Tokyo: Bureau of Citizens and Cultural Affairs https://www.seikatubunka.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/chiiki_tabunka/tabunka/tabunkasuishin/0000001452.html	COVID-19-related information in Easy Japanese
		Hamura City, Tokyo https://www.city.hamura.tokyo.jp/0000013214.html	COVID-19 infection information (external links)
		Minato-ku https://www.city.minato.tokyo.jp/hokenyobou/yasanichi.html	COVID-19 infection information
	4	Aichi Nagoya City https://www.city.nagoya.jp/kankobunkakoryu/page/0000088938.html	Nagoya City: Information on Life (Hospital, Health insurance)
	5	Osaka Osaka City https://www.city.osaka.lg.jp/contents/wdu020/enjoy/y_ja/content_i.html#content_01	"When you get sick" in the A guide for living in Osaka
	6	Kanagawa Chigasaki City https://www.city.chigasaki.kanagawa.jp/_res/projects/default_project/_page_/001/006/196/30yasashii.pdf	Guidebook for foreign residents "How to consult a doctor in Japan"
	7	Saitama Kuki City https://www.city.kuki.lg.jp/covid19/easy-japanese.html	Information about COVID-19 in Easy Japanese
	8	Others Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture https://www.city.kyoto.lg.jp/sogo/page/0000250837.html?furigana=on	"Guidebook for Foreigners" Health check, childbirth, hospital visit.
	9	Hyogo Prefecture https://www.nishi.or.jp/multilingual/e_japanese/index.html	"Multilingual Life Guide, Nishinomiya City Edition (illness)"

	10	Himeji City, Hyogo Prefecture	Life guide for foreigners "Hands on Himeji" (Easy Japanese version) including tips when you are sick or injured https://www.city.himeji.lg.jp/bousai/0000007799.html
	11	Numazu City, Shizuoka Prefecture	"Easy Japanese Version" of newsletter "Kokuho Dayori" including medical information about medicine https://www.city.numazu.shizuoka.jp/kurashi/zei_hoken/kokuho/towa/dayori.htm
	12	Hyuga City, Miyazaki Prefecture	"Notice of New Coronavirus Infection" http://www.hyugacity.jp/display.php?cont=200304191455
	13	Fukuoka City, Fukuoka Prefecture	"Let's Use It!" Easy Japanese terminology http://www.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/data/open/cnt/3/63597/1/sassi.pdf
	14	Kurume City, Fukuoka Prefecture	"Japanese in Other Words" table for infant health checkups for foreigners https://www.city.kurume.fukuoka.jp/1060manabi/2010kosodate/3030nyuuyouji/2-2-3_nyuukenyasasiinihongo.html
	15	Dazaifu City, Fukuoka Prefecture	"Dazaifu City Life Information Guidebook for Foreigners" (Easy Japanese version) https://www.city.dazaifu.lg.jp/book/list/book13.html
	16	Fukutsu City, Fukuoka Prefecture	"About the New Coronavirus" (Easy Japanese) https://www.city.fukutsu.lg.jp/material/files/group/28/0323easyjapanese.pdf
	17	Koriyama City, Fukushima Prefecture	Information about COVID-19 vaccination in Easy Japanese https://www.city.koriyama.lg.jp/multilingual/28442.html
	18	Annaka City, Gunma prefecture	Multilingual information (Health information in Annaka Life Handbook) https://www.city.annaka.lg.jp/gyousei/shimin/shiminsoudan/simplifiedjapanese.html
	19	Suzuka City, Mie Prefecture	Information about COVID-19 vaccination in Easy Japanese https://www.city.suzuka.lg.jp/amigo/japanese/
	20	Saku City, Nagano Prefecture	"Life Guidebook for Foreigners" in Easy Japanese https://www.city.saku.nagano.jp/shisei/profile/shimaiyukokoryu/teijushien/gaikokujin-seikatu.files/r3yasashiinihongo.pdf
	21	Kameyama City, Mie Prefecture	Information about COVID-19 vaccination in Easy Japanese https://www.city.kameyama.mie.jp/docs/2018111900018/
	22	Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture	Chiba City national health insurance pamphlet https://www.city.chiba.jp/hokenfukushi/iryoeisei/hoken/gaikokugo-pamphlet.html
Non-Profits	23	Tokyo Intercultural Portal Site	Multilingual living information "Covid-19" https://tabunka.tokyo-tsunagari.or.jp/index.html
	24	Esnico for foreign medical support and cross-cultural exchange, Hokkaido	"Esnico Health Data" (Esnico is an international association in Sapporo) https://www.ngos25.org/globalinterview

	25	Association for Local Government Internationalization http://www.clair.or.jp/tagengo/index.html	Multilingual living information "Medical" (External link)
	26	Kawasaki International Exchange Center, "Yubisashi (finger-pointing) Japanese" (medical edition) https://www.kian.or.jp/kic/topics/yubisashi-medical.shtml	
	27	Himeji City Foundation for Cultural Exchange, Hyogo https://www.himeji-iec.or.jp/6514	Public Relations Himeji, April Issue, COVID-19: Easy Japanese
	28	Tochigi Prefecture http://tia21.or.jp/parts/files/yasashi-nihongo.pdf	Tochigi International Exchange Association, "Let's Speak in Easy Japanese! (illness)"
	29	Kanagawa International Foundation https://www.kifjp.org/wp-new/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/8_yasashiihongo2in1.pdf	Daily Japanese for foreign residents
	30	Hamamatsu NPO Network Center https://www.n-pocket.jp/foreigner/link	Communication in Easy Japanese: How to convey information to foreigners in an easy-to-understand manner (External link)
	31	Okayama International Exchange Association http://www.opief.or.jp/handbook/	Useful Information for Foreign Residents (Medical Treatment)
	32	Nagoya International Center https://www.nic-nagoya.or.jp/japanese/publication/yasashii-nihongo-vol/	Books written in Easy Japanese
	33	Association for Toyonaka Multicultural Symbiosis https://www.a-atoms.info/info/detail.php?id=1649	Information about COVID-19
	34	Niigata International Association https://www.niigata-ia.or.jp/jp/ct/004_siryou/001_siryou/gakusyu-sien/01/medical-treatment-contact.pdf	Multilingual medical contact sheet
	35	Kanagawa International Foundation https://www.kifjp.org/medical/	"Multilingual medical questionnaire"
University	36	Juntendo University, Tokyo https://www.juntendo.ac.jp/co-core/consultation/yasashii-nihongo2020.html	Yuko Takeda's Easy Japanese "Teaching Materials for Medical Professionals for New Coronavirus Testing"
Private organization	37	Dunk (Private company for design, proofreading) https://www.dank-yananichi.jp/usage/medical-questionnaire/	Easy Japanese version of the interview form at hospitals
	38	<i>Nishinippon Shimbun</i> , Fukuoka Prefecture (Newspaper) https://www.nishinippon.co.jp/item/n/814028/	Easy Japanese news (health care related)
	39	NHK (national broadcast network), Tokyo https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/easy/	News Web Easy (news in Easy Japanese)
	40	National Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Disabilities http://www.rehab.go.jp/ddis/world/brochure/japanese/	"About Your Child's Developmental Disorder"
	41	Fukuoka Red Cross Hospital https://www.fukuoka-med.jrc.or.jp/care/gentle	"Information for foreigners for your first visit"

Note. All websites cited were retrieved in November, 2021.

We examined the characteristics of the medical care information in Easy Japanese provided by public institutions, universities, nonprofit organizations, and private organizations. We found that the purpose of the information offered by public institutions was to provide foreigners living in local government areas with medical information, access details for necessary medical care, and the latest information, such as for COVID-19. However, the COVID-19 information was limited, such as for infection prevention, PCR testing, and what to do when infected was similar. Juntendo University, which supplied medical care information in Easy Japanese, was affiliated with hospitals through its Faculty of Medicine. That information was aimed to facilitate communication regarding COVID-19 tests for foreign nationals

who visited those hospitals. The medical care information in Easy Japanese provided by Juntendo University was mainly targeted at medical personnel. The information supplied by the nonprofit organizations was intended to support medical communication between foreigners and medical professionals. Some organizations provided specific information (e.g., results of medical questionnaires conducted in hospitals) or news content in Easy Japanese.

Table 3 presents the results of website searches of major international exchange associations in Japan. The sites of such associations in 29 prefectures provided some medical information in Easy Japanese; detailed information was offered by 21 sites, which exceeded the number by official prefectural websites.

Table 3

Summarized Results of Website Surveys of major international exchange associations in 29 Prefectures

Prefecture	Use of Easy Japanese in Medical Care	Detailed medical care information in Easy Japanese
1. Akita Akita International Association http://www.aiahome.or.jp/pages/news/1014	COVID-19 information for foreigners	
2. Yamagata Association for International Relations in Yamagata https://www.moj.go.jp/isa/content/001354570.pdf	COVID-19 information for foreigners	
3. Fukushima Fukushima International Association (External link) https://www.worldvillage.org/life/news.html?id=4743	COVID-19 information for foreigners	Explains how to use a medical institution
4. Ibaraki Ibaraki International Association https://www.ia-ibaraki.or.jp/kokusai/soudan/medical/index.html	COVID-19 information for foreigners	Health handbook for foreigners
5. Tochigi* Tochigi International Exchange Association http://tia21.or.jp/parts/files/yasashi-nihongo.pdf	COVID-19 information for foreigners	"Let's Speak in Easy Japanese! (illness)"
6. Saitama Saitama International Association https://sia1.jp/foreign/coronahotline/	COVID-19 information for foreigners	Telephone counseling for COVID-19 patients
7. Kanagawa * Kanagawa International Foundation https://www.kifjp.org/wp-new/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/8_yasashiinhongo2in1.pdf	Medical care in general	Daily Japanese for foreign residents (Health and medical guide for foreign citizens)
8. Niigata* Niigata International Association https://www.niigata-ia.or.jp/jp/ct/004_siryu/001_siryu/gakusyu-sien/01/medical-treatment-contact.pdf	COVID-19 information for foreigners	Multilingual medical contact sheet

9. Toyama	COVID-19 information for foreigners Toyama International Center http://www.tic-toyama.or.jp/life/information_about_the_novel_coronavirus.html	(Link to Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare)
10. Fukui	COVID-19 information for foreigners Fukui International Association https://www.f-i-a.or.jp/ja/covid-19_jp/	Various links about COVID-19
11. Yamanashi	COVID-19 information for foreigners Yamanashi International Association http://yia.or.jp/wordpress/?page_id=1477	Information about vaccination, Certificate of Testing for COVID-19
12. Shizuoka	Medical care in general Shizuoka Association for International Relations http://mt.adaptive-techs.com/httpadaptor/servlet/HttpAdaptor?.h0.=fp&.ui.=sirshp&.ro.=kh&.st.=rb&.np.=ja/fls/	(Website language settings offer Easy Japanese)
13. Aichi	COVID-19 information for foreigners Aichi International Association http://www2.aia.pref.aichi.jp/topj/coronavirus_info.html	Message from the governor
14. Mie	COVID-19 information for foreigners Mie International Exchange Foundation https://www.pref.mie.lg.jp/YAKUMUS/HP/covid19info-jp.htm	Link to Mie Prefecture
15. Hyogo	COVID-19 information for foreigners Hyogo International Association https://www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/about/ia/infobox/gaikokujinkenmin/documents/e-japanese_0122.pdf	How to decrease new cases
16. Wakayama	Medical care in general (such as hospital visit) Wakayama International Exchange Center https://wak-kokusai.jp/zigyuu/consultation/medical/	External links, but diverse and detailed
17. Tottori	COVID-19 information for foreigners Tottori Prefectural International Exchange Foundation http://www.torisakyu.or.jp/ja/	All of the information on the Web page is written in Easy Japanese, including information about COVID-19
18. Shimane	Medical care in general Shimane International Center https://www.sic-info.org/sic/post-1318/	Open access to Easy Japanese guidebook, including typical conversation in hospitals
19. Okayama*	COVID-19 information for foreigners Okayama International Exchange Association http://www.opief.or.jp/handbook/	COVID-19 information for foreigners, "Conversations When You Get Sick"
20. Hiroshima	Medical-related Multilingual Document Site (external link) Hiroshima International Center http://hiroshima-ic.or.jp/medical.html	(Website language settings offer easy Japanese)
21. Yamaguchi	COVID-19 information for foreigners Yamaguchi International Exchange Association https://yiea.or.jp/easy_jp/	(Website language settings offer easy Japanese)
22. Kagawa	Daily life library for foreigners Kagawa Prefecture International Exchange Association http://www.i-pal.or.jp/daily-life-library/	Information about childbirth, medical care, health, and other matters
23. Fukuoka	COVID-19 information for foreigners (external link) Fukuoka International Exchange Foundation https://kokusaihiroba.or.jp/	(Website language settings offer easy Japanese)

24. Saga	COVID-19 information for foreigners Saga Prefecture International Relations Association https://www.spira.or.jp/covid19relatedinfo/	
25. Kumamoto	COVID-19 information for foreigners Kumamoto International Association http://www.kuma-koku.jp/page153.html?type=top	Link to Multicultural Center Today and medical guidebook for foreigners
26. Oita	Medical care in general Oita International Plaza https://www.oitaplaza.jp/japanese/support/handbook	Open access to its own medical guidebook
27. Miyazaki	Medical care in general Miyazaki Support Center for Foreign Residents https://support.mif.or.jp/medical-treatment/	Open access to its own medical guidebook
28. Kagoshima	COVID-19 information for foreigners Kagoshima International Association https://www.kiaweb.or.jp/corona/index_3.html	Various links for COVID-19 information in Easy Japanese
29. Okinawa	COVID-19 information for foreigners Okinawa International Exchange & Human Resources Development Foundation https://kokusai.oihf.or.jp/covid-19/	Releases YouTube lifestyle videos

Note. All websites cited were retrieved in November, 2021.

* Also appears in Table 2.

At the prefectural level, most of the medical information was general information about COVID-19. By comparison, at the level of such organization as local governments, international exchange associations, and NPOs, many provided such information as how to visit hospital when individual were ill, health insurance cards, and the Japanese medical system in addition to COVID-19. For example, with Aichi Prefecture in central Japan, information in Easy Japanese was related to COVID-19 for foreigners. By comparison, the Aichi Prefecture city of Nagoya had set up a special website in Easy Japanese called Nagoya Life Guide. That site provides information about hospitals, and it posted specific local information, such as hospitals accepting foreigners in the city and dispatch organization for medical interpreters.

4. Discussion

We conducted an exploratory survey among Japan's prefectures and related organizations on the

current status of providing medical information using Easy Japanese. We established research questions accordingly. RQ1 aimed to confirm if medical information in Easy Japanese appeared on the official websites of the 47 prefectures. Of those, 35 offered health-care information in Easy Japanese—mostly about COVID-19; six provided detailed information, such as concerning medical guidance, medical insurance, and childbirth. Therefore, except for COVID-19, medical information in Easy Japanese related to daily life, was not widely available at the official level.

RQ2 aimed to confirm if there was any medical information in Easy Japanese provided by organizations, rather than on the 47 official prefectural websites, and to determine the characteristics of such information. Our key word searches for “Easy Japanese” plus “medical care” and “Easy Japanese” plus “hospital” indicated that medical care information in Easy Japanese was provided by public institutions, universities, nonprofit organizations, and private organizations.

Public institutions and public sectors related to municipal offices accounted for the majority of organizations providing the information. The locations were not restricted to such cities as Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka that have large numbers of foreign residents. They were also unrelated to the ranking of municipalities with many foreign residents released by the Ministry of Justice (2019). The number of websites of international exchange associations that provided some kind of medical information in Easy Japanese was lower than that at the prefectural level; however, more sites of those associations offered detailed medical information. On websites such as those of international exchange associations other than prefectural capitals, information related to medical care was in Easy Japanese, however, the type of information differed according to the organization.

This study has yielded three main points for consideration. First, the provision of medical information in Easy Japanese differed across prefectures; 35 of the 47 prefectures offered some information about health care in Easy Japanese, but it was basic information about COVID-19. More websites of international exchange associations provided detailed medical information than did the official prefectural sites. Some sites of those associations even had a language setting for Easy Japanese. If more prefectural websites offered Easy Japanese as a language setting and provided detailed information, people would better understand that Easy Japanese is versatile and can be applied with many foreign languages.

Second, with public institutions other than those at the prefectural level, medical information in Easy Japanese was provided mainly by cities and the International Exchange Association. We found that Easy Japanese was not often seen on prefectural-level websites, and so it has not penetrated widely nationwide. However, we observed that international exchange associations

of municipalities and those with closer access to citizens provide various services, including medical care, in Easy Japanese.

Third, Easy Japanese originally developed as a form of emergency communication following a major earthquake. However, it has spread to the ordinary community level and is currently used for communication in local life. The use of Easy Japanese is not limited to disaster situations; it can cover broad areas of life among foreign residents. It could be said that Easy Japanese is a means of communications for daily life.

From the above discussion, it is to be hoped that more prefectures will provide medical information in Easy Japanese on their websites. It would also be desirable to have a one-stop access system in Easy Japanese of any medical-related information that is currently found on municipality sites. The system could be a website that collected health information in Easy Japanese. Currently, some municipal offices provide their own health information in Easy Japanese; others have links to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare or other national organizations. Some prefectures offer detailed health-care information only related to their own communities. Thus, a one-stop access system could be used to provide all prefectures with information in Easy Japanese. It would be beneficial to provide information that allowed Japanese residents to communicate in Easy Japanese—especially with medical communication.

A system that can convert websites into easy Japanese is currently being adopted by some local governments. We would expect that if more municipalities used that system, it would help ease language barriers. It would appear that the use of Easy Japanese is gradually spreading, and many local governments employ it. However, increased awareness does not necessarily lead to immediate behavioral changes. It is necessary for foreign residents to learn what Easy Japanese is and how to

make use of it, toward better communication and multicultural coexistence. Iori (2013) suggested that learning Easy Japanese is important for Japanese to develop language skills when communicating with foreigners in Japan (Iori, 2013, p. 10); it could create an environment in which Japanese and non-Japanese could teach one another. Even though Easy Japanese is mainly used by foreign residents, native Japanese speakers—especially Japanese medical professionals—could also learn it to support communication. To promote better communication and understanding in a multicultural society, it would be beneficial for foreigners living in Japan and native Japanese speakers to learn Easy Japanese.

This study has some limitations. First, we conducted the Web search using two search engines (Google, Yahoo). Thus, we may not have covered all information-related websites providing medical information in Easy Japanese. Second, there could be information that does not appear in Internet search results, having links only when organizations that appear in the search results are accessed. Thus, we could have overlooked useful information. Third, the results may vary depending on the word searched for. From the viewpoint of foreigners, some individuals might not search for the term “medical care.” The results may change depending on what keywords they use and what sites they search for. This issue should be clarified in future research.

Despite these limitations, this study is meaningful because it is the first attempt to comprehensively search for medical-related information in Easy Japanese.

We conducted an exploratory survey of Japanese prefectures and organizations to determine the current status of medical-related information in Easy Japanese. As noted by Iori (2010-2014, p. 2), ensuring information is provided to long-term foreign residents in Japan is an important language

policy issue that should be beneficial to the future Japanese society. Toward achieving a multicultural society and minimize disparity, Easy Japanese can be used to support understanding in the context of limited knowledge of Japanese. The number of speakers and translators of foreign languages with few learners in Japan is small; thus, it is not possible to provide important information in many languages. Therefore, Easy Japanese can be used to bridge the language gap in Japanese society. It is hoped that Easy Japanese will become widely recognized and accepted by local governments in Japan. It would also be desirable for further research to add to our knowledge about medical-related information in Easy Japanese.

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