

On the use of *futsū-ni* ‘ordinarily/usually’ with a new twist*

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Abstract

This study deals with expressions containing the adverb *futsū-ni* ‘ordinarily/usually’ in Japanese. In the last decade this adverb gained more meanings that it did not have before. This expanded meaning of *futsū-ni* has become extremely common among relatively young people. This study tries to find out some of the meanings that this adverb can include by using corpus data and a questionnaire. The results indicate that this new use of *futsū-ni* has been utilized in a statement that is made with a reason, cause, or situation that is believed to be common to most people in the language community.

Key words

Futsū-ni, adverbs, Japanese language

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1. Introduction

The use of the Japanese adverb *futsū-ni* ‘ordinarily/usually’ has been changing noticeably in the last decade. Elder generations especially may misunderstand the meaning of the adverb or simply not know what the adverb is supposed to mean. This adverb can sometimes make a sentence ambiguous. For instance, consider example (1). It has two meanings as in (1a) and (1b).

- (1) *Futsū-ni* densha ni maniaimasen deshita.
As-usual train DAT make it not was
a. ‘I missed the train as usual.’
b. ‘I missed the train for no special reason.’

The most common or traditional reading of example (1) is that the speaker often misses the train, and as usual, s/he missed the train again today, i.e. (1a). However, the newer use and meaning (1b) can be taken if the sentence is uttered in reply to a question like *Dō shite ma-ni awanakatta-no?* ‘Why did you miss it?’. Here *futsū-ni* does not necessarily indicate the speaker’s habitual manner of missing a train or bus, but instead could mean that s/he missed the train without any unusually noteworthy reason to be mentioned, which is shared by the people in the community as well. This use is often used in casual conversation. The choice of two interpretations is possible based on the person or situation where the expression is uttered. If the speaker and the listener are aware that the train/bus line s/he takes is often delayed or s/he often oversleeps, the traditional translation of *futsū-ni* is preferred. On the other hand, the new interpretation can be used in situations where the listener and speaker do not share the information as written above. In such cases, the *futsū-ni* used is indicating that the cause for being late was a common reason for most people such as the person overslept or lost track of time while s/he was doing something, and the speaker believes that what s/he was doing is not necessary to be mentioned. This new use of the adverb is very common among those who are in their 30s or younger. People who are older than that may have heard other people use it, but they may not be able to use it themselves.

According to Nishimura (2016), *futsū-ni* is used in contexts where incidents expressed are unexpected and sudden to the speaker.

- (2) [Your friend told you that there are tea flavored marshmallows]
Kōcha-aji no mashumaro ga aru no?! *Futsū-ni* tabetai.
Tea-flavored GEN marshmallows Nom exist?! *futsū-ni* want to eat.
‘Are there tea flavored marshmallows?! I would like to try it *futsū-ni*’
(<http://twitter.com/Ruisa2525/status/726380399329312768> Underline by Nishimura)
(Nishimura 2016:54)

- (3) a. [You find an eerie doll left on the side of the snowy road when you are walking. You post a picture of it on SNS.]
Iya matte *futsū-ni* kowai.
No wait *futsū-ni* scared
‘Oh no I am scared *futsū-ni*’
(<http://twitter.com/mofu0x0/status/691515170858733568> Underline by Nishimura)

- b. [You casually entered a shop and found a cute humidifier.]

Nani kore, *futsū-ni* hoshii.

What this, *futsū-ni* want

‘What is this, I want it *futsū-ni*’

(This example is one of the answers to the questionnaire conducted by Nishimura)

(Nishimura 2016:55)

Nishimura explains that a person that states an expression like (2) should have not known that there were marshmallows that had a tea flavor by the time of the utterance. Similarly, the listeners that hear the expression in (3a) produced by the speaker can tell that the speaker did not know or expect to find an eerie doll on the street. She says that (3b) also conveys the meaning of some sort of unexpected emotion the speaker has.

One of the things Nishimura found in her study is that *futsū-ni* is used in conditions where the speaker did not know what they were about to find out. In this case, the flavor of marshmallows, the doll on the street, or the cute humidifier sold in the shop. There are no preceding incidences that give the speakers knowledge of the future finding. She concluded that those *futsū-ni* sentences are related to the states of suddenness and abruptness to the speaker. *Futsū-ni* expressions are produced for the purpose of showing the surprise of the speaker to their listeners.

She also argues that this new usage is characterized by social agreement in younger generations. As seen in Examples (1), (2), and (3), the adverb *futsū-ni* does not simply modify the verb or adjectives. This new meaning needs some standard idea of meaning that is shared within the community. Their typical ideas and opinions enable them to use and interpret the adverb. This is why younger generations, and not elder generations, tend to be able to figure out which meaning is better for the situation in Example (1). There is no clear-cut boundary between the two groups, however it seems that there are generations which are familiar and unfamiliar with the new use. The younger generation has formed a speaking community that allows them to figure out the shared meaning more or less correctly.

The purpose of this study is to reconsider whether Nishimura’s conditions on the use of the adverb can capture the type of equivalent expressions that she did not mention in her paper. We first review the traditional meaning of *futsū* and discuss the questionnaire that was used to uncover its meaning in the next section. In Section 3, I explore the responses to the questionnaire. Finally, Section 4 discusses whether it is better to modify Nishimura’s condition of the adverbial usage based on the results of the questionnaire.

2. Methods

This study attempts to find out when this new meaning of *futsū-ni* can be used by testing if the sentences containing an adverb that is not *futsū-ni* allows us to replace it with *futsū-ni* without changing or impairing the original meaning of the sentence. The reason why this study uses this method is because the possible meanings expressed by *futsū-ni* are often ambiguous and vague. It is often the case that people are not always aware of, or do not pay attention to, each word they hear in a sentence. Therefore, it is not helpful to try to interpret the adverb meanings by looking at sentences already containing the adverb *futsū-ni*. For example, the expression *futsū-ni kau* ‘buy *futsū-ni*’ has different interpretations based on the context. It may be understood as ‘buy as always’ or ‘buy without paying too much attention’ or ‘buy unexpectedly’ depending on the listener; it is

not simple and clear to ascertain the meaning of this adverb. To avoid having too many possible meaning responses, we use the sentences containing an adverb other than *futsū-ni* in the original sentence. For instance, (4a) can be rephrased like (4b) for some people. This indicates that *futsū-ni* can convey what *itoshitatōri-ni* ‘as expected’ expresses.

- (4) a. Jibun-de *itoshitatōri-ni* tokeru kara ii-nda-yo-ne.
 self-by *as expected* solve because good-NM-be-SFP
 b. Jibun-de *futsū-ni* tokeru kara ii-nda-yo-ne.
 ordinarily
 ‘It’s good because you can solve it as you yourself wish’

Although this study deals with only fourteen different adverbs, it is highly possible that the adverb has more than just these meanings studied here. These fourteen adverbs are selected based on the definition of *futsū* in Hida and Asada (1999)’s *Gendai Fukushi Yōhō Jiten* [Modern Adverbial Usage Dictionary]. In the process of selecting the adverbs for this research, three native Japanese speakers who are currently living in Japan helped to suggest some of the adverbs. They are in either their 20s or 30s.

According to the dictionary above, *futsū* means ‘something or a state that is average. This indicates neither positive nor negative meaning.’ The example in (5) is taken from it.

- (5) Imadoki daigaku-e iku gurai *futsū*-da.
 Nowadays university-to go about normal
 ‘It is normal to go to a university nowadays.’

Another meaning mentioned in the dictionary was ‘something or a state is usual, which is similar to something that is not special or something that always happens.’ This indicates neither positive nor negative meaning. This meaning is expressed in the example below.

- (6) Hiyodori wa nihon-zenkoku-de *futsū-ni* mirareru.
 Bulbul-TOP Japan-throughout-at usually can be seen
 ‘Brown-eared bulbuls can be seen throughout Japan.’

The fourteen selected adverbs are *fudandōri/fudandōri-ni* ‘as usual,’ *heikinteki-ni* ‘on average,’ *ippanteki-ni* ‘typically/generally,’ *itosezu-ni* ‘unintentionally,’ *itoshitatōri-ni* ‘as intended,’ *itsumo* ‘always,’ *itsumodōri/itsumodōri-ni* ‘as always,’ *omottatōri/omottatōri-ni* ‘as one thought/as one expected,’ *tōzen* ‘of course,’ *tōzen-no-yō-ni* ‘as a matter of course,’ *tsūjōdōri-ni* ‘as usual,’ *tsune-ni* ‘always,’ *yosōdōri-ni* ‘as expected,’ and *yosōgai-ni* ‘unexpectedly.’

The sentences for this study were collected primarily from *the Corpus of Spontaneous Japanese* (CSJ, NINJAL 2018a). For the adverbs which do not have as many examples found in the CSJ, *Balanced Corpus* (NINJAL 2018b) and Followthehashtag (2018) were also employed. Followthehashtag is a website owned by DNOiSE that collects data from Twitter. This website is typically used as a business intelligence tool and for the purpose of carrying out research utilizing search analytics. This allows the user to collect only tweets containing specific terms or phrases

the user wants to find. However, all the examples shown in this paper are from the NINJAL corpuses.

A total of 2,522 sentences were analyzed. The number of expressions examined for each adverb varies since the number of available sentences was not even, but at least 50 were studied for each adverb. For instance, *the Corpus of Spontaneous Japanese* contained only one instance of *fudandōri/fudandōri-ni* ‘as usual,’ and *the Balanced Corpus* had 24 instances. In this case, at least 25 sentences from Twitter were taken using Followthehashtag, which allows the users to download an Excel file containing up to 500 tweets. Those tweets are categorized by the number of retweets and ‘likes.’ To avoid counting the same tweet multiple times, this study uses the data set containing only the top tweets ranked by the number of ‘likes.’

The next step was to replace those fourteen chosen adverbs in the expressions from the data with *futsū-ni* and categorize them based on their general acceptability, which was divided into three levels: acceptable, unacceptable, and unknown. This was done to see if the traditional meaning of *futsū-ni* gets a higher acceptance and to see if there is any tendency to reject the new usage in some contexts. The unknown category included sentences that have grammatical errors or ambiguous meanings. This study did not count those examples either in the total number or use them in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire with these acceptability categories was given to ten native Japanese speakers who were either living in Japan at the time that the questionnaires were distributed or were living in Japan until a few years ago but still maintained regularly communication with native speakers in Japan. They were generally familiar with casual spoken Japanese produced by the younger generations who were in their late teens to early thirties. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions in total with 14 different adverbs listed above. Each adverb had two different stimuli sentences. The questionnaire asked them to read the sentences containing *futsū-ni* instead of the adverb used in the original sentence and indicate whether the sentence sounds acceptable to them or not. The adverbs used in the original sentences were not shown to them on the questionnaire. We also asked them to write down in their own words what *futsū-ni* could mean in the sentence if the respondent chose ‘acceptable’ for the use of the adverb. This part was not mandatory.

3. Result

There are nine sentences out of 28 that more than five people chose as unacceptable. The following five sentences (7) – (12) are examples.

First, nobody chose ‘acceptable’ for Example (7) below. The original adverb used in the sentence is *yosōgai-ni* ‘unexpectedly.’

- (7) Senji-chūni gakugyō o chūdansarete, kōgakushin-ni moeru
 wartime-during school-ACC interrupted desire to learn-at passion
 fukuin heishi wa, seifu no *yosōgai-ni/futsū-ni* ōku
 veteran soldier-TOP government-GEN *unexpectedly/futsū-ni* many
 7,800,000 ni tasshi, uchi 230,000 nin ga sono toshi-ni daigaku-ni
 7,800,000 to reach among 230,000 CL-NOM that year-in university-to
 nyūgaku kyokasareta.
 enter approved

‘780,000 veteran soldiers who had to leave school during wartime asked the government to return to school after the war; a number exceeding government expectations. 230,000 of that number were admitted to university that year.’

There is one example that only one person said was acceptable. This is shown in (8). The original sentence uses the adverb *omottatōri-ni* ‘as intended.’

- (8) Motto jiyū-ni yaritai. Jibun-tachi no omottatōri-ni/futsū-ni yaritai.
 more freely do want self-PL GEN as-intended/futsū-ni want to do
 ‘We want to do it more freely. We want to do it as we think.’

This participant guessed the meaning of *futsū-ni* in the sentence was *hōhō o ishiki suru koto naku, shizentai no mama ni* which means ‘do something without being conscious of the method or ways to do it and just go with it.’

Two people said (9) is acceptable. The adverb used in the original sentence is *yosōdōri-ni* ‘as expected.’

- (9) Gojira no kehai wa dokonimo naku, watashi no yosōdōri-ni/futsū-n
 Godzilla-GEN sign-TOP nowhere I- GEN as-expected/futsū-ni
 narisō datta.
 seem to be-Past
 ‘There was no sign of Godzilla anywhere, and it seemed to be as I expected.’

The original sentence *yosōdōri-ni* (9) means that it seems that there was no sign of Godzilla being around the speaker as s/he expected. Eight of them said this is not a natural sentence. Those two gave possible interpretations of *futsū-ni* in this sentence as *nichijō* ‘daily’ and *fudan no seikatsu no ichibu* ‘something that is a part of your daily life’ or *tokudan ishiki suru taishō dewa nai mono* ‘things that you do not particularly pay attention to.’ Their replies did not match the original meaning of the sentence. This may indicate that *futsū-ni* in this context cannot express the meaning of ‘as expected’ in general.

There are three expressions that three participants said were acceptable. One of them is shown in (10).

- (10) Chinamini raishū-mo 1shūkan yōsō o shimasu
 by the way next week-again 1week forecast-ACC do.
 Konkai, yosōdōri-ni/futsū-ni ikanakatta kata no ribenji-mo
 This time, expected/futsū-ni did not go as person GEN revenge-too
 omachishiteorimasu node, mata no gosanka yoroshikuonegaishimasu.
 waiting since, again GEN participation looking forward to

‘By the way, we will make a one week forecast next week again. We are waiting you for your second challenge from those who did not get the correct results as expected/futsū-ni this time. Please participate again.’

The original sentence of the following expression has *itoshitatōri-ni* ‘as intended.’ Four participants judged this sentence (11) as acceptable.

- (11) Miyō mimane-no kōi ga umaku yarenakattakoto o
 Doing by watching others-GEN acts -NOM well did not do NM-ACC
 shirareru hazukashisa, mata jibun no itoshitatōri-ni/futsū-ni umaku
 known embarrassment and self GEN as intended/ futsū-ni well
 yaretakadōka o utagai-mo suru.
 could do-whether-ACC doubt-yet do
 ‘I was embarrassed at being found out that I did not do well by watching others, and I wonder if I did *as intended/futsū-ni*.’

Half of the participants judged (12) and (13) as acceptable. (12) also contains *itoshitatōri-ni* ‘as intended’ as in (11).

- (12) Sōshita tsutaerubeki koto ga desune okurite no itoshitatōri-ni/
 that kind of things have to be told NOM is sender GEN as intended/
futsū-ni-wa rikaisarenaitoiu jittai o subete seito ya kanja-no
futsū-ni-as not to be understood reality ACC all student or patient-GEN
 rikai ga warui to suru.
 understanding NOM bad to be
 ‘There is the fact that their students or patients do not understand what they were told *as intended/futsū-ni* by them which they must be informed of. They think that it is all their students’ and patients’ fault.’

Some example sentences were judged as acceptable by more than half of the total participants. In (13), the original sentence contained *tōzen-no-yō-ni* ‘as a matter of course.’ Eight participants wrote that this sentence sounds natural.

- (13) “Sonna no murini kimatteru yaroto,” jinan wa
 that kind of thing impossible must be isn’t it second son TOP
tōzen-no-yō-ni/futsū-ni hanron. Soko de, ‘katsu tame no
as a matter of course/futsū-ni objected so to win GEN
 hisaku’o sazukemashita.
 secret plan ACC gave
 ‘The second son said “Such a thing must be impossible” as a matter of course/*futsū-ni*. So I gave him a secret plan to win.’

We have seen an example of *yosōgai-ni* ‘unexpectedly’ in Example (7). No participants said that (7) was acceptable. However, eight people replied acceptable to another sentence with the same adverb, i.e., Example (14). Sentence (14) also features *yosōgai-ni*. It appears that this expression sounds better or is more familiar to our participants compared with (7) even though they both have exactly the same adverb.

- (14) Hanshinrade kaipan icchō de mizu ni tsukari nagara

half-naked swimsuits one in water in bathing as doing
 bābekyū o shitetandesu kedo. *Yosōgai-ni/futsū-ni* minna yaketeshimatte
 BBQ ACC was doing but *unexpectedly/futsū-ni* everyone sunburned
 ano hiyake ga hontō ni taihen deshita.
 that sunburn NOM very painful was
 ‘We were having a BBQ and bathing in the water in half-naked swimsuits. Everyone got sunburned unexpectedly. That sunburn was very painful.’

There are eight sentences which only one out of ten participants said were unacceptable. The original sentence of the following example contained the adverb *heikinteki-ni* ‘on average.’ As we saw in Hida and Asada (1999)’s *Gendai Fukushi Yōhō Jiten* [Modern Adverbial Usage Dictionary], one of the meanings of *futsū* is that something is average. Therefore, an outcome like this might be seen as predictable.

- (15) Sore ni shitemo watashi no jyumyō no hō ga
 even so I GEN lifespan GEN more NOM
heikinteki-ni/futsū-ni ieba nagai no kana, sore dake ga ima no
on average/futsū-ni say long wonder, that only NOM now GEN
 fuan desu
 anxious COP
 ‘Even so my lifespan should be longer *on average/futsū-ni*. That’s my only concern.’

Another sentence that nine people accepted is (16). This ‘as usual’ meaning is also mentioned in the dictionary; thus, it is natural that most participants agreed that this usage is acceptable.

- (16) Jitsu-wa sono sugu ato ni *itsumodōri/futsū-ni* K-kun to kao o awaseru
 Actually that soon after *as always/futsū-ni* Mr.K with meet
 shigotoga atta n desu keredomo
 job NOM there was but
 ‘Actually, I had a job to do with Mr. K *as always/futsū-ni* right after that, but...’

Three sentences were judged as acceptable by all the participants: Examples (17), (18) and (19). This is one of the most traditional and common meanings of *futsū-ni* ‘averagely’ according to the Hida and Asada (1999). The sentence with *omottatōri* ‘as one thought’ also found no difficulty for the participants to say it was acceptable. The final sentence, Example (19), has *fudanōri* ‘as usual’ which has the traditional meaning of *futsū* as well.

- (17) Kosei ga taisetsu to iinagara, nandemo
 individuality NOM important COMP saying while anything
heikinteki-ni/futsū-ni dekiru koto o negau oya ga ōi
averagely/futsū-ni can do ACC hope parents NOM many
 no dewanai deshō ka?
 aren’t there
 ‘Aren’t there many parents hoping (that their kids) can do anything averagely while saying individuality is important?’

- (18) *Omottatōri/futsū-ni*, shōjiki ni kotaete kurete iiyo.
as one's thought/futsū-ni honestly answer do fine
 'You can answer as you honestly thought.'
- (19) Ōto to geri o kurikaeshita hi nimo *fudanōri/futsū-ni*
 vomit and diarrhea ACC repeated day even *as usual/futsū-ni*
 shokujio shimashita ka?
 meal ACC did do
 'Did you eat meals on the day even you repeatedly vomitted and had diarrhea *as usual/futsū-ni*?'

4. Discussion

The sentences with a traditional meaning of *futsū-ni* tend to be viewed as more acceptable than newer usages. For instance, participants are comfortable with replacing *itsumodōri* 'as always' as in (16) and *heikinteki-ni* 'averagely' as in (17) with *futsū-ni*. In addition to this usage that encompasses traditional meanings, younger generations have added different meanings to it such as *tōzen-no-yō-ni* 'as a matter of course' or *itoshitatōri-ni* 'as intended' as in (12), or they at least tend to allow the adverb to show up in places where *tōzen-no-yō-ni* and *itoshitatōri-ni* appear. Interestingly, in some contexts *futsū-ni* could express completely opposite meanings such as *yosōdōri-ni* 'as expected' and *yosōgai-ni* 'unexpectedly.' It is true that the acceptance rate for two *yosōdōri-ni* sentences in our questionnaire were not as high as the *yosōgai-ni* sentence. In terms of this tendency, Nishimura (2016)'s definition is more or less correct. We could say that *futsū-ni* can be used in contexts where incidents expressed are unexpected and sudden to the speaker. However, we cannot forget that there are people who would take the meaning of *yosōdōri-ni* 'as expected' out of *futsū-ni*. Also, as in (18), it is possible to use *futsū-ni* without "contexts where incidents expressed are unexpected and sudden to the speaker" as in (11) and (13). Nishimura (2016)'s definition requires this kind of adjustment.

Another point worth mentioning from the results of this questionnaire is the difference between the two *yosōgai-ni* 'unexpectedly' examples. As briefly discussed above, no participants said the sentence with *yosōgai-ni* in (7) was unacceptable, but eight people from the same participant group judged the sentence containing the same adverb in (14) as acceptable. One of the obvious grammatical differences between expressions (7) and (14) is that the former one has the form of 'someone's *futsū-ni*.' In this case, *seifu-no* 'government's' comes right in front of the adverb. This is the same for Examples (8) and (9) which has *jibun-tachi-no* 'our' and *watashi-no* 'my.' Only two people said this sentence is acceptable, but the proposed interpretation of *futsū-ni* was *nichijō* 'daily,' *fudan no seikatu no ichibu* 'something that is a part of your daily life,' or *tokudan ishiki suru taishō dewa naimono* 'things that you do not particularly pay attention to' according to the two participants. Neither of them interpreted the original meaning of the adverb meaning or came up with closer meanings. This result may suggest that most people are not comfortable with placing *futsū-ni* right after a form like 'my, someone, or some institute's.'

There were nine sentences that five or more people judged unacceptable. Four of them contained this genitive *-no* (–'s) form. It is possible that the adverb *futsū-ni* is giving an indication of something that is common or average in a community which is seen in the traditional meaning of *futsū*. This aspect may prohibit the use of *futsū* to a certain extent in situations where the listeners

tend to invoke private thought or uncommon ideas by sentences with *futsū-ni*. If so, it indicates that the use of *futsū-ni* is less acceptable when the context is not considered as something standard, expected, or believed by most people.

Futsū-ni sentences prefer situations where the speaker assumes that the listener has some shared idea of the reason for the incident. However, if the ideas or reasons are only acceptable to a limited number of people and not a norm for the community as a whole, then the acceptability decreases. Younger generations who are familiar with the new use of *futsū-ni* may unconsciously judge if a sentence is suitable for containing the adverb *futsū-ni*. If the *futsū-ni* is capturing too narrow a domain such as only one person's opinion, then they probably reject the use of *futsū-ni* in that sentence. In other words, even if two adverbs such as *futsū-ni* and *yosōgai-ni* 'unexpectedly' can be interchangeably used in a sentence, this does not mean that they are always interchangeable regardless of the sentence they appear in. The users of *futsū-ni* judge if the sentence is appropriate for each adverb.

5. Conclusion

Nishimura (2016)'s definition is more or less correct based on the results received from the survey in this study. However, this study indicates that some people use the adverb *futsū-ni* without "contexts where incidents expressed are unexpected and sudden to the speaker." Therefore, her definition requires this adjustment. As long as the speaker assumes that the listener has some shared idea of the reason for the incident, this new use appears permissible. However, if the ideas or reasons are only accepted by a limited number of people and not a norm for the community as a whole, then the acceptability decreases. This may be the reason most of our participants did not like the genitive *-no* (-'s) form expressions that appeared right before *futsū-ni*. Or it may be that the listeners tend to assume naturally that the matters expressed by the sentence containing the adverb *futsū-ni* should be applied to the majority of people in the community along with the new possible meanings. Further research is obviously necessary to figure out in what contexts they can have different interpretations. It also requires a larger number of participants in an experiment to find out whether *futsū-ni* can be replaced with more adverbs than those discussed in this study. Finally, we need to conduct a separate experiment to figure out why genitive *-no* can occur with some adverbs, but not with *futsū-ni*.

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