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RYUKYUAN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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Introduction

The Ryukyu Archipelago stretches for almost 1,000 km from north to south and encompasses some 200 islands, 40 of which have permanent inhabitants. The Ryukyu Archipelago is made up of four larger groups of islands. These are, from north to south, the Amami Islands, the Okinawa Islands, the Miyako Islands and the Yaeyama Islands. The Amami Islands are a part of Kagoshima Prefecture, the remaining islands make up Okinawa Prefecture. The Ryukyu Islands formed an independent Kingdom from 1492 onwards. It was annexed by the Meiji government in 1872 and, after several years of a conflicted status, the Ryukyus were integrated into the Meiji state as Okinawa Prefecture and as part of Kagoshima Prefecture (Akamine 2016). In the first half of the twentieth century, poverty drove thousands of Ryukyuan people outside their homeland, spreading Ryukyuan languages into the newly developing industrial zones on the Japanese mainland (Maeda 2014; Rabson 2012) and into the foreign diaspora, most notable in Hawai'i and South-America (Ishihara 2007; Miyahira and Petrucci 2015).

Ten years ago, UNESCO identified six endangered languages in the Ryukyu Islands (Moseley 2009). These languages are Amami, Kunigami, Okinawa, Miyako, Yaeyama and Dunan (Yonaguni). A number of other classifications of Ryukyuan languages exist (e.g., Simons and Fennig 2018), but the most commonly referred definition of language boundaries is today that of the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Extinction*.¹ From 1879 onwards, Japanese was spread in the Ryukyu Islands as the national language (*kokugo*), and along the lines of language nationalist ideology the Ryukyuan languages became designated as greater dialects (*dai-hōgen*) of the national language (Heinrich 2012: 83–93). Japanese was first spread in public domains (government, school, media) and from 1950 onwards also in private domains (family and neighborhood). The two only domains where the Ryukyuan languages are maintained today are in indigenous shamanistic religion and in Ryukyuan folksongs, theater and opera (Heinrich 2015a). Japanese language spread was accompanied by various Ryukyuan language suppression campaigns (Kondō 2006; Maeda 2014), which led to negative attitudes towards Ryukyuan languages also among Ryukyuan language speakers themselves. Before 1945, various efforts were made to completely eradicate the Ryukyuan languages.

There are number of studies that include discussions of the historical processes of language suppression and language shift in the Ryukyus in Japanese (e.g., Heinrich and Matsuo 2010;

ODCK 2013) and in English (e.g., Anderson and Heinrich 2014; Heinrich, Miyara and Shimoji 2015). Due to the limited space, we do not touch upon this topic here but discuss more recent developments in Ryukyuan sociolinguistics. More concretely, we limit our attention here to discussions of language attitudes, linguistic landscape, language variation, language revitalization and second language learning.

Changing attitudes towards Ryukyuan languages

Two of the nine factors proposed by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages for language endangerment assessment are related to language attitudes. One is “governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use” and the other “community members’ attitudes toward their own language” (UNESCO 2003: 13–15). In this section, Ryukyuan languages are discussed with respect to these two factors.

Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies

Governmental and institutional language attitude and policies can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, the Ryukyuan languages were assumed to be an impediment to Ryukyuan assimilation into the Japanese nation. In the second phase Okinawa Prefecture has started to show positive attitudes toward the local languages.

After the annexation of the Ryukyus and the establishment of Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, the national and the prefectural governments encouraged Okinawan people to learn Japanese and pressured them in various ways to abandon their local languages. This policy continued until 1945.² However, the Ryukyuan languages remained to be used in everyday life for the vast majority at this time. Okinawa Prefecture was concerned with this situation. In the 1930s, school teachers took the lead in promoting new measures towards linguistic assimilation. They created a “Speak Standard Language Campaign” that was enforced in schools and local communities. The campaign was supported by Okinawa Prefecture (Oguma 1998). During the US Occupation Period (1945–1972), the Okinawa Teachers’ Association maintained the same negative attitudes towards Ryukyuan languages. It took again the lead in a new campaign through which children were discouraged from speaking local languages (Ishihara 2010). They argued that Okinawan children should be able to speak Japanese so that they would not experience language-related discriminations in mainland Japan. Another rationale for the campaign was the argument that children would not achieve good academic results if they were not highly proficient in Japanese. Ryukyuan languages were thus perceived to constitute an obstacle for speaking Japanese well and also for doing well in education (Okinawa Kyōshokuin-kai 1954, 1957). As an effect of such measures and the negative attitudes they spurred, language shift reached the family in the 1950s and 60s and natural intergenerational language transmission was broken. As a result, all Ryukyuan languages are either “definitely endangered” or “critically endangered” today (Moseley 2009). Heinrich (2012, 2015a, 2015b) describes Ryukyuan language shift and the spread of Japanese in the Ryukyus in detail.

Today, Okinawa Prefecture is concerned about the endangerment of the Ryukyuan languages, and it has taken steps to revitalize them (Ishihara 2016; Heinrich and Ishihara 2017). Although none of the languages has been designated as an official language of the prefecture, local government institutions support or take the lead in a number of activities. First, the prefectural assembly passed an ordinance in 2006 that designated 18th September as “community language day”, and a number of events related to language preservation are annually organized around this day. Second, the prefecture now clearly states that local languages are the foundation

of Okinawan culture and that they constitute a cultural heritage of Okinawa (Okinawa-ken 2012). Third, Okinawa Prefecture, Naha City and Tomishiro City have separately published readers of community languages that can be used in elementary and junior high schools. Fourth, the prefecture has established a Center for Spreading Community Languages in 2017. The center organizes activities aimed at language maintenance and revitalization, including language instructor-training and community language speech contests (Shimakutuba Fukyū Sentā 2018).

Community members' attitudes toward their language

Ryukyuan attitudes towards their languages can also be divided into two phases. In the first phase, large parts of the population assumed that the local languages were hindering their efforts of becoming *bona fide* Japanese citizens who spoke Japanese – the “national language” of Japan – and that Ryukyuan children therefore did not need to inherit their ancestral languages. At that time, many felt ashamed of the fact that they spoke Ryukyuan languages. In the second phase, the vast majority supports the view that the languages constitute a cultural heritage that should be preserved. Those proficient in Ryukyuan languages usually no longer feel ashamed of speaking them.

Most Ryukyuan people held negative attitudes towards their languages at least until the 1960s. The Okinawa Teachers' Association largely maintained the pre-war mentality of denying any value in the local languages. According to these attitudes, it took the lead of a campaign that aimed at the “Japanization” of Okinawan children. This campaign involved also attempts to totally eradicate the local languages among schoolchildren (Ishihara 2010). If students were found to speak the local language, they were punished by having to wear a dialect tag (*hōgen fuda*) around their neck.³ Local communities largely supported the campaign, and people tried to speak exclusively Japanese, although many of them were not good at Japanese then. Okinawans who were born in 1950s and 60s usually report that their parents spoke to them in Japanese, and that they were discouraged from speaking Ryukyuan languages. As an effect, the majority of those born from the 1950s and 60s onwards speak Japanese as their everyday language today, although there are some exceptions to this trend. Since they also speak Japanese to their children and grandchildren, there are by now two to three generations who speak mostly, if not exclusively, Japanese.

Prefecture-wide surveys on language attitudes were separately conducted in 2016 by Ryūkyū Shinpō, a local newspaper company, and in 2017 by Okinawa Prefecture. According to Ryūkyū Shinpō (2017), 48.5% of all the respondents (N = 1,047) stated that they “feel attached” to the local languages, and 37.6% of respondents said they “sort of feel attached”. Only about 3% of respondents said they are “ashamed” of them. With regard to the question whether they wanted their children to speak the local languages, 41.1% answered “I definitely think so” and 40.2% responded “I sort of think so”. The survey by Okinawa Prefecture shows similar trends (Okinawa-ken 2017). According to their survey, 40.6% of all the respondents (N = 2,630) claimed that they “feel attached” to the community languages and 37.8% reported to “sort of feel attached”; 15.4% of respondents had negative attitudes; 29.2% of respondents stated that they want children to be able to “speak the language by all accounts”, and 40.2% of respondents said that they want children to “be able to speak them if possible”; 14% of respondents answered that they “don't want children to be able to speak the local languages”. Furthermore, the survey inquired if people needed the languages in everyday life. To this question, 16.8% of respondents stated that they “acutely needed them”, and 60.1% of respondents said that they “need them to some extent”. All in all, the results of these two surveys show that Ryukyuan today have positive attitudes toward their languages.

Linguistic landscape

The study of linguistic landscape (henceforth, LL) in Japan has a relatively short history. The dominant monolingual ideology and the ensuing social climate did not initially spur this rapidly developing approach to the study of societal multilingualism. Japanese linguistics had to wait until Backhaus' (2006) groundbreaking study that analyzed multilingual signage at major train station neighborhoods in Tokyo.

Public signage research in the Ryukyus

In Okinawa, LL study is now in its nascent stage. However, research that looked at street names, advertisements, commercial shop signs and other public signs has existed for some time in neighboring fields of study. For example, Miyagi (1982) recorded street posters, street banners, pamphlets and magazine covers to analyze how American military officers ruled and suppressed the voice of local Okinawan people during the Occupation Period (1945–1972). Likewise, a more recent study on tourism discusses effective “linkages” between the tourism industry and the transportation, information and tourism infrastructure (Miyaguni 2015). One of the factors examined is visual material that typically consists of public signs at bus stops, nameplates at tourist attractions or street name signs. Another study examines the use of Chinese scripts in public signage in Okinawa (Kinjo 2018). It proposes some orthographic rules for printing the Japanese names of tourist attractions in both simplified and original Chinese scripts. At the same time, it identifies some problems of translation in order to propose the creation of more tourist-friendly public spaces.

One of the earliest sociolinguistic studies of LL in the Ryukyu Islands was conducted by Long (2009) on Minami-Daito Island. In Minami-Daito, the equivalent of “welcome” is at times on display either in the Hachijo language (*ojariyare*) and in Okinawan (*mensooree*). The island has a large community that has migrated from Hachijo Island, where another endangered Japonic language is spoken (Moseley 2009). The choice for either Okinawan or Hachijo depends on location. For example, at the airport and in the village community center, only *ojariyare* appears because most of the island's visitors are from Okinawa and they find the Hachijo term “new” and “appealing”. At the end of his qualitative analysis, Long (2009) stresses two findings. One is that the local languages in the LL are used to promote tourism on the island. The other is that the local language is used as the unmarked language choice among the islanders for specific references such as local fish and cuisine. In other words, Standard Japanese does not always serve as the default language choice.

In another contribution, Long (2010) examines Amami LL from several analytical points: the order of languages in multilingual signs, types of orthographies, styles of writing, meaning and linguistic units of text in the signs. He also analyzes the imagined addressees and LL actors. He arrives at the following conclusions. Amami LL helps distinguish islanders from Standard Japanese speakers; it serves as a resource to promote local tourism; it expresses people's pride in the local language and it helps teenagers to mark their cultural identity. He also reports that unlike Okinawa, where written texts tend to be standardized and no longer represent phonetic features accurately, Amami LL shows a remarkable textual variation based on the regional differences within the island. Long's findings in Minami-Daito and Amami suggest that the LL of minority languages in Japan is highly contextual, infused with multiple meanings and appeals, depending on the discourse space, history and the interaction between the signage and its recipients.

Another example of LL studies is a case study conducted at Heiwadori and Makishi Market in Naha, Okinawa (Petrucci and Miyahira 2015). It was grounded in three analytical foci: (a) in

vivo or bottom-up signs rather than in vitro or top-down ones, (b) neighborhood rather than urban signage and (c) choices regarding language and/or script. The study collected Okinawan language signs and presented a qualitative analysis based on script combinations and whether the signage was spontaneously produced on site, usually by hand, or mass produced at printeries in other locations. In vivo signs are privately produced, unofficial signs like labels, stickers, posters, storefront signs, whereas in vitro signs are government sanctioned, official signs such as street nameplates and warnings. Both types of signage figure in the public spaces examined. This study finds two diametrically opposed uses of Okinawan signage. One valorizes the local variety as a language in its own right (rather than as a “dialect” of Japanese) by creatively displaying the text in manifold language and script combinations. By contrast, the other casts Okinawan texts in a negative light by reducing language tokens to exotic topics of a subtropical island. Because the site of this LL study is a popular market, the authors discuss ways in which Okinawan language helps construct uniquely commodified spaces where Okinawan goods and experiences are sold (Miyahira and Petrucci 2017). They also demonstrate ways in which the Okinawan language itself is being commodified in displays on souvenir stickers or on T-shirts. Again, this commodification process may cast Okinawan in both a positive and negative light depending on how LL actors and consumers engage themselves in the process. In consequence, the LL at Heiwadori and Makishi Market reflects a complex public space that is both contested and negotiable.

Outside places such as the traditional Makishi Market, Ryukyuan LL signage becomes scarce. After reviewing the LL of four different locations in Ryukyu Islands (Naha Airport, Yui Monorail, Heiwadori Market and Yonaguni Island), Heinrich (2010, 2016) argues that regimented language choice at Naha Airport and Yui Monorail results mostly in Japanese signs with very few examples of Ryukyuan. In the rare case where Ryukyuan is used, the text tends to be limited to clichéd greetings like *mensooree* written in Japanese hiragana syllabary and accompanied by English translation. In contrast, public signage in Heiwadori and Makishi Market depicts more diversified and dynamic LL where Okinawan language and Okinawan-substrate Japanese are used much more often than in other locations. On Yonaguni Island, Dunan, one of the eight endangered languages of Japan, is hard to find in any public signage. Instead, an overwhelming majority of public signs are written in Standard Japanese and are occasionally accompanied by English. In effect, in none of these four cases are Ryukyuan languages successfully employed to maintain the local language, despite possible functions of promoting local industries such as tourism or displaying positive attitudes towards the local language. Even in the more diversified LL in Heiwadori, Heinrich finds evidence of language attrition. Okinawan texts show elimination of Okinawan phonetic features in the process of adapting Okinawan to Japanese orthography, most typically in the form of vowel raising and the loss of long vowels. This leads him to conclude that the LL in Okinawa Prefecture does not reflect the language repertoires of those who populate the public spaces in Okinawa Prefecture, and thus that it is “nothing but an order of power” (Heinrich 2016: 49).

From this perspective of language and power, the LL in Okinawa Prefecture is a site where struggles for language equity take place. If the LL in Okinawa Prefecture were to reflect the linguistic repertoire of people living in the prefecture, it ought to feature local languages much more frequently. At the same time, LL actors ought to be mindful not to succumb to the overwhelming pressure of complying with Japanese phonetic and orthographic systems. Building on the concept of “scales” as outlined by Blommaert (2010), Heinrich (2016) analyses the LL in Okinawa Prefecture as a manifestation of two co-present scales. Scales are a metaphor for codes, norms and expectations of behavior that come into play when people or messages move in public space. Lower scales in the case of LL in Okinawa Prefecture consist of local, momentary, private

and situated in vivo signs. Higher scales, on the other hand, are translocal, timeless, official and decontextualized in vitro signs. Higher scales are so dominating that Japanese signs are de facto standard and Ryukyuan languages are sorely missing here in the LL. In this struggle for visibility and power, in vivo signs can be seen as an attempt to resist the prevailing power hierarchy by offering some creative alternatives as to how LL could possibly be (re-)designed.

Further topics of Ryukyuan LL study

The LL studies discussed here give us a mixed message. On the one hand, the scarcity of Ryukyuan signage may tempt us to conclude that there is not much value in studying Ryukyuan LL in the first place. Ryukyuan LL does not reflect the linguistic repertoire of those populating the public spaces. Hence, not many insights can be expected with regard to the roles and manifestations of Ryukyuan in everyday life. On the other hand, for those who have a vested interest in maintaining and revitalizing Ryukyuan language, the study of LL holds an important language ecological niche. A previous study of the use of French outside Quebec showed that LL was a significant factor that increased bilingual students' use of the language in everyday situations (Landry and Bourhis 1997). A higher visibility of Ryukyuan languages in LL may therefore also lead to an increased use of the languages in everyday life. It is with this prospect that we sketch below some promising future topics of research.

In order to increase the number of Ryukyuan signs, it is essential for LL actors to have access to official orthographic systems for Ryukyuan languages. There have been continuing efforts to produce such authoritative orthographies. Ogawa (2015) is a good case in point. Nonetheless, it is essential for the orthography to be approved by institutional authorities for wider dissemination through public education. If successful, this would mark a "visual turn" from orality to literacy, and as Marten, Mensel and Gorter (2012: 8) write, "for a language to be revitalized and to secure a sustained future, it needs to be used in written language, and consequently it will also appear in the LL".

Ryukyuan LL can serve as resources for tourism, a local key industry (Long 2009, 2010), and it can help design public spaces as a commodity (Miyahira and Petrucci 2017). However, not all commodification by and of Ryukyuan LL put Ryukyuan languages in a positive light. Therefore, it is important to identify efficient "linkages" (Miyaguni 2015) between tourism and LL in order to foster both the local economy and the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Ryukyuan languages. LL can serve as a resource for Ryukyuan language status building, too. An increased visibility of Ryukyuan signs would foster positive language attitudes toward these languages. LL actors must carefully assess "the interaction order" (Hult 2009) that govern individuals' actions and interactions in the mediated space of the LL. The interaction order of the Ryukyuan LL may include social conventions about language and script choices based on the intended recipients of linguistic objects, types of signs (nameplates, public transportation signs, product ads, warnings, etc.), expectations about in vitro and in vivo signs, or de jure and de facto language policies that govern language use in public spaces. Humans interact with linguistic objects in public space. With such interaction in mind, a question worth pursuing is "how LL actors can participate in shaping a LL that yields favorable outcomes for a given language?"

Ryukyuan LL can also be interpreted as a resistance or a counter-narrative to the still prevailing monolingual ideology in Japan. Future research may examine how such ideology creeps into LL actors' decision-making, including fine-grained decisions such as script choices, size, color and position of the text, as well as the overall design and portrayal of Ryukyuan LL. Such analyses should reveal the various and subtle ways in which language ideology operates in public space. Also, what is called "the historical body" in nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon

2004) can serve as a key analytical concept in future research. According to Hult (2009: 92), “[t]he historical body attends to the ideas that are embedded in the social practices of individuals”. In the analysis of LL, this prompts us to ask questions such as the following: “What takes place behind the LL?” “What makes an LL actor decide to create or interpret a linguistic object in a certain way?” According to such a view, the historical experience of language shift in the Ryukyus marks a critical moment, for some linguistic remnants of this shift can be observed in present-day discourse in Okinawa. For example, utterance-final particles (Miyahira and Petrucci 2014), distinctive phrases and intonation (Petrucci and Miyahira 2015) or pragmatic modality (Miyahira 2016) are all unique outcomes of language contact on the island of Okinawa. Students of Ryukyuan LL, and for that matter anyone studying LL, must be attuned to such nuanced meanings and modalities. The historical body plays a crucial role in uncovering the tacit power hierarchy (Heinrich 2016). One possible extension of this language ideology research is to capture LL actors’ practice of “scale-jumping” or “outscaling” – a move from one scale-level to another (Blommaert 2010: 34–36). When an LL actor appropriates a set of kanji to represent a Ryukyuan word (e.g., by pronouncing <美人> (literally “a beauty”) not in Japanese as *bijin* but in Okinawan as *churakaagiii*), s/he makes a move toward “scale-jumping” or “outscaling” the prevailing language hierarchy in a Ryukyuan context.

Of interest for future studies is a kind of signage wherein multiple languages or language varieties (e.g., Japanese, Okinawan, Okinawan-substrate Japanese, English) constitute an independent message. Such signs are in many ways different from regular multilingual signs where given information is conveyed repeatedly in multiple languages. Figure 2.1 is an example of a sign that employs various languages in order to constitute one unified message. Attached to a school gate in Okinawa Island, it shows a combination of Japanese and Okinawan (in italics)

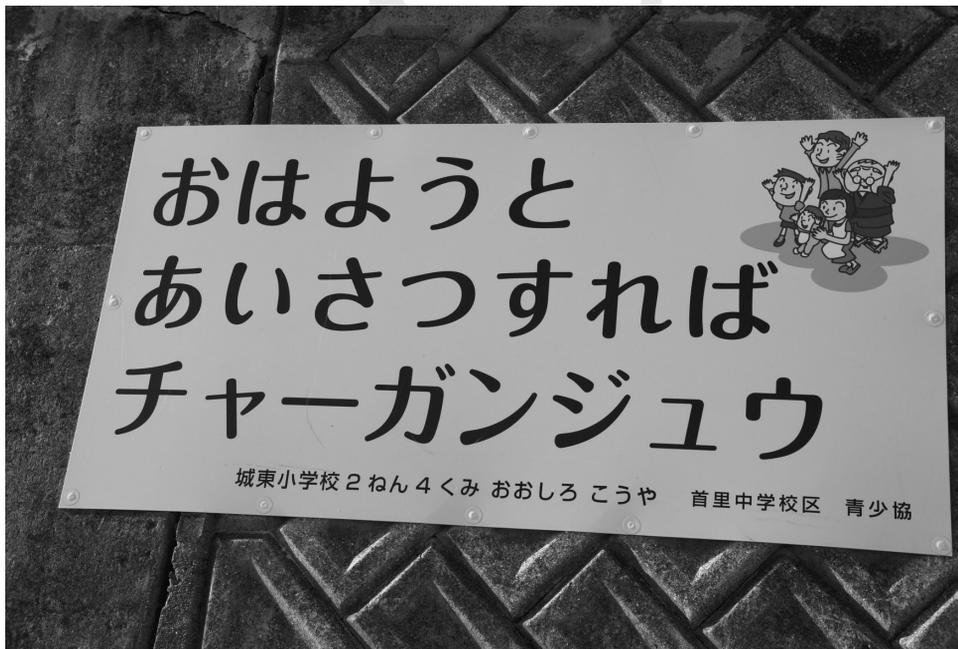


Figure 2.1 Mixed language school sign made by an elementary school student
Source: Photo by Katsuyuki Miyahira.

in a well-formed sentence, meaning “Greet people with ‘good morning’ and you’ll be *healthy and strong*”. Written by a second-grade student, this sign emulates the five-seven-five syllable structure of Japanese haiku verse. The first two phrases are written in Standard Japanese and in hiragana syllabary, and the last phrase in Okinawan and in katakana syllabary. This type of code mixing may provide an accurate depiction of how local Okinawans make sense of the world in their rapidly changing linguistic environment.

Language variation

Ryukyuan languages are spoken on all inhabited islands of the Ryukyuan Island. The only Ryukyuan-speaking settlement outside the Ryukyuan Archipelago is Suwanose Island in the Tokara Islands in Kagoshima Prefecture. Suwanose Island was settled by people from Akakina on Amami Island in 1883. The older generation still speaks Amami there (Matsumoto and Tabata 2012: 152). While no Ryukyuan language is extinct at the time of writing this chapter, there are a number of reports of language drift and dialect leveling, and one can often hear statements such as “no one speaks real X dialect anymore”.

Regional variation

The Ryukyuan languages display a significant amount of lexical, phonological and morpho-syntactic variation. Speakers frequently report mutual intelligibility between all Ryukyuan languages. Even within the individual Ryukyuan languages, instances of low mutual intelligibility are reported. The sentence “I am going to the fields, but where are you going?” rendered in Japanese and different Ryukyuan languages displays the multilingualism and the linguistic variation in the Ryukyuan Islands.

(1a) Japanese

watafi=wa	hatake=e	iku=kedo	anata=wa	doko=e	iku=no=ka?
I=TOP	field=ALL	go=but	you=TOP	where=ALL	go=NMLZ=Q

(1b) Kikai, Kamikatetsu

wano:	hate=kʔatfi	itʔiN=ŋa	da:	dʒai	itʔi-φu=jō
I.TOP	field=ALL	go=but	you	where.ALL	go-NMLZ=Q

(1c) Amami, Ura

waN=ja	hatē=ttfi	ikʲuN=baN	ʔja=ja	da=ttfi	ikʲuN=jō:
I=TOP	field=ALL	go=but	you=TOP	where=ALL	go=Q

(1d) Okinoerabu, Masana

wana:	horo=gatfi	iki-figa	ura=wa	uda=gatfi	ikiN=jō:
I.TOP	field=ALL	go-but	you=TOP	where=ALL	go=Q

(1e) Iotorishima

abo:	hau=nke:	ittsun=tfi	re:-figa	ʔwe:	ma:=nke:	ittsun=na
I.TOP	field=ALL	go=INT	COP-but you	where=ALL		go=Q

(1f) Okinawa, Nakijin Jana

waN=ja	pharu=ttfi	itʃu:-figa	ʔja:=ja	da:=ttfi	itʃu-ga
I=TOP	field=ALL	go-but	you=TOP	where=ALL	go-Q

(1g) Okinawa, Shuri

waNne:	haru=Nkai	itfu-figa	ʔja:=ja	ma:=Nkai	itfu-ga
I.TOP	field=ALL	go-but	you=TOP	where=ALL	go-Q

(1h) Miyako, Irabu,

ba:	pai=Nkai	ifu-kutu jaLLuga	vva:	nza=Nkai=ga	ifu-kutu=ga
I	field=ALL	go-INT COP.but	you	where=ALL=FOC	go-INT=Q

(1i) Ishigaki, Miyara

ba:=ja	pari=ge	haru-songa	wa:=ja	zima=ge=du	har-ja:
I=TOP	field=ALL	go-but	you=TOP	where=ALL=FOC	go-Q

(1j) Yonaguni, Sonai

anu=ja	hataki=Nki	hiru-ga	nda=ja	mma=Nki	hiru-Nga
I=TOP	field=ALL	go-but	you=TOP	where=ALL	go-Q

The variation displayed above is mostly lexical and phonological. Examples of lexical variation are (a) the different words for the first person. One kind starts with *wa-*(*ba-*) and the other kind starts with *a-*, (b) the allative marker *nkai* and related forms and *kai* and related forms and (c) the word for “go”, where we find cognates of Japanese *iku* and varieties the *haruN* and *hiruN* in Yaeyama and Yonaguni. An instance of phonological variation can be seen in reflexes of proto-Japonic /p/. In the word for “field”, /p/ is preserved in some varieties, whereas it has changed into /h/ in other varieties. Morphosyntactic variation can be observed in the presence or absence of a focus marker in the wh-phrase in the second part of the sentence, and the presence or absence of a construction marking “intention”.

The linguistic variation we find today across the Ryukyus is a legacy of the ancient tax system of the Ryukyu Kingdom that made mobility between settlements difficult (Karimata 2018: 6). It is safe to say that until 1945 every settlement had its own distinctive dialect. Neighboring dialects tend to be more similar in areas where contact between settlements was facilitated by geographical and social factors. Most islands form dialect clusters where regional variation takes the form of continua. Communities settled by people from other areas or islands appear as linguistic islands in these continua. In some instances, the language variety of such settlers is mutually unintelligible with the surrounding varieties. For example, the Torishima hamlet on Kumejima was settled by evacuees from Iotorishima, a small volcanic Island 220 km north of Kumejima in 1903. Torishima Ryukyuan is different from the Okinawan dialect that is traditionally spoken on Kumejima, and the evacuees had to learn it (in addition to Japanese) to facilitate communication with their neighbors on Kumejima (Van der Lubbe 2016: 25). In Kubura on Yonaguni Island, Okinawan is spoken rather than Dunan (Yonaguni language). Some inhabitants are trilingual in Okinawan, Dunan and Japanese. In Shiraho on Ishigaki, a dialect vastly different from the neighboring Miyara-Yaeyaman is spoken due to the resettlement of speakers from Hateruma Island after a fatal tsunami wiped out the original population of Shiraho in 1771.

Sociolects

Language variation in the Ryukyus also reflects the ancient feudal classes. Like all feudal societies, the population of the Ryukyu Kingdom was strictly divided into social classes, and we still find a strong class-consciousness in Okinawa Prefecture today. Class-consciousness is much

weaker in the part of the Ryukyus that are now part of Kagoshima Prefecture. Linguistic class-consciousness is especially strong amongst speakers of Okinawan. Commoner-gentry differences in Okinawan exist in lexicon, especially in kinship terms and honorifics (Lawrence 2015: 162–163). Differences in pronunciation used to exist, but they have largely disappeared. Similar class distinctions as in Okinawan exist to some extent also in Ishigaki Yaeyaman (Miyagi 2003: 9–13).

The sociolectal differences are most pronounced in the Shuri-Naha area. Three main sociolects can be distinguished. There is commoner speech (*fimin kutuba*), gentry speech (*samuree kutuba*) and nobility speech (*udun kutuba*). Again, a significant difference between these sociolects is the system of honorifics. In (2), we have the sentence “Where are you going?” rendered into the different honorific styles.

(2a) Commoner

na:=ja	ma:=Nkai	mei-ga?
you=TOP	where=ALL	go.HON-WHQ

(2b) Gentry

uNdzo:	ma:=Nkai	?weNje:-bi:-ga?
you=TOP	where=ALL	go.HON-POL-WHQ

(2c) Nobility

nuNdzo:	ma:=Nkai	utfe:Nje:-bi:-ga?
you=TOP	where=ALL	go.HON-POL-WHQ

One of the lexical differences is the honorific second person pronoun, where we find *na:* for commoners, *uNdzu* for gentry, and *nuNdzu* for the nobility. When interacting with someone of a higher social class, one was supposed to use the pronoun appropriate to that class. When addressing someone older but of lower social rank, the commoner honorific *na:* was used (Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo 2001[1963]: 399). This complex system with a functional distinction between the different sets of honorifics has fallen out of use at an early stage of language shift from Okinawan to Japanese.

Sociolectal differences are not unique to Shuri-Naha. They also exist in several other settlements where commoners and gentry lived alongside each other. For instance, the Sokei hamlet of Ginoza Village is predominantly inhabited by commoners but has also a gentry minority. At present, two language shifts are taking place in Sokei. One is a nearly complete shift from Sokei-Okinawan towards a more common form of Okinawan (discussed below), and the second is a shift from Okinawan to Japanese (Yabiku 1962: 334–335). Commoners as well as gentry would use the Sokei variety until 1945. However, they would use different kinship terms and different honorifics amongst each other. Commoners would use *ana:* for “older sister” while the gentry would use *iNmi:*. Just as was the case for Shuri-Okinawan, there is also class difference in honorifics. The following sentence in Sokei-Okinawan would be the same when used towards someone younger or of the same age:

(3a)

ja:=ja	nu:	kami-ga?
You=TOP	what	eat-WHQ

What will you eat?

A sociolectal difference becomes apparent, when the same utterance is directed towards someone older.

(3b) Commoner

nami=ja nu: tagi-doru-ga?
 You.HON=TOP what eat.HON-HON-WHQ
 What will you eat?

(3c) Gentry

uNdzu=ja nu: usaga-miser-ga?
 You.HON=TOP what eat.HON-HON-WHQ

Commoners would use different second person pronouns, *nami* versus *uNdzu*, and different honorific verbs for “eat”, *tagidoru:N* versus *usagamise:N*. Our consultant (born 1935), himself being of gentry descent and one of the last active speakers of Sokei–Okinawan, indicated that some members of the gentry in Sokei wished not to be addressed by the commoner second person pronoun *nami*. They insisted on having both commoners and younger gentry members use *uNdzu* towards them.⁴

Shuri–Okinawan (Okinawan: Sui-kutuba) maintains a special position amongst the Ryukyuan language varieties. It carries considerable prestige due to Shuri’s former position as the seat of government during the Ryukyuan Kingdom. Lawrence (2015: 161) reports that Sui-kutuba has a rich vocabulary for words related to court culture that does not exist in other Okinawan varieties. These are words relating to cuisine, textiles and dyeing techniques, metalworking and lacquer ware, Ryukyuan dance and drama, but these word fields include many borrowings from the Sino-Japanese vocabulary from Japanese. As for honorifics, the set of nobility-level honorific vocabulary introduced in the previous section is another feature that sets Shuri apart from other Okinawan varieties.

Together with the closely related Naha–Okinawan (Okinawan: Naafa-kutuba), Sui-kutuba is at the basis of a “Common Okinawan” that was traditionally used as an informal lingua franca throughout the Okinawan-speaking area before this role was taken over by Japanese. None of the other Ryukyuan languages have a variety that functions as a lingua franca to facilitate communication between speakers of different dialects, or that can in any other way be considered being “normative”. Nowadays, Ryukyuan speakers use mostly Japanese for interregional communication. This is an area of study that is so far entirely unexplored in Ryukyuan sociolinguistics. Common Okinawan is also the language that is used in commercial theater in Okinawa where it is called *shibaikutuba* (Heinrich and Fija 2007: 12). The designation for Common Okinawan differs across regions. In Oku in Kunigami it is called *simanakamunii* (middle-of-the-island speech), in Sokei in Ginoza it is called *kaikutuba* (borrow-speech) and in Iejima it is called *tadikutuba* (traveler-speech). It is unclear whether Common Okinawan is a conscious effort by speakers of other varieties of Okinawan to adapt their speech to that of Shuri (or Naha), or whether they are simply trying to “suppress” certain features of their regional Okinawan. Anecdotal evidence points towards the latter, but further research into this field is needed.

Shuri-based Common Okinawan’s normative status has an influence on other Okinawan varieties. It can even be argued that Common Okinawan has some characteristics of a(n) (informal) standard variety. Concrete instances of Common Okinawan influence can already be observed in some natural conversation in the Itoman variety recorded in 1953 by NHK (1972: 316, 323, 331, 335). For instance, a speaker from Itoman (born 1891) uttered the following phrase in Common Okinawan in a conversation that was otherwise completely in the Itoman variety:

(4a) Common Okinawan

waNne: tfu:=ja ja:=Nkai ke:-ti itfu-sa
 I.TOP today=TOP house=ALL return-SEQ go-SFP
 For today, I'll go home.

(4b) Itoman-Okinawan

waNno: ku:=ja ja:=Nkai ke:-ti iku-sa
 I.TOP today=TOP house=ALL return-SEQ go-SFP

On a somewhat more alarming note, Osumi (2001: 74–75) reports that the perceived lower status of other varieties of Okinawan vis-à-vis Sui-kutuba has caused a faster language shift towards Japanese in some regions of Okinawa. Research into (a) Common Okinawan influence on other Okinawan varieties and (b) speaker attitudes towards prestige differences between local varieties, Common Okinawan and Sui-kutuba are needed to enhance our understanding of intra-Ryukyuan language drift and dialect leveling. As for other areas of the Ryukyus, Common Okinawan never gained much currency outside Okinawa Island, even before the spread of Japanese. This notwithstanding, there are instances of Okinawan influence on Southern Ryukyuan languages. For instance, the honorific pronoun *uNdzu* has been borrowed piecemeal into Miyako varieties (Shimoji 2001: 71).

Language revitalization and second language learning

With regard to reviving endangered languages, a distinction between “language maintenance” and “language revitalization” is important. Language maintenance is an effort to stop ongoing language shift and to strengthen a language in an early stage of its decline. In language maintenance, people are still able to use the language but choose not to do so for various reasons. Language maintenance needs to restore former language choice patterns. Language revitalization, however, means bringing back a language to new users and to new uses. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence of language maintenance in the Ryukyus, i.e., of speakers purposefully choosing to use the local languages more often than they did in the past, and Okinawa Prefecture has been supporting these efforts of language maintenance (Shimakutuba Fukyū Sentā 2018). However, there is no actual sociolinguistic research on language maintenance yet. Exploring this field of sociolinguistics represents another important research desiderata.

Language revitalization

The study of language shift and revitalization have been the most prominent field of Ryukyuan sociolinguistics, a discipline that only formed as a reaction to (a) the perception that Ryukyuan languages are languages in their own rights and should therefore not be studied within the framework of Japanese dialectology, and (b) a keen awareness that all Ryukyuan languages are highly endangered and will fall out of use by the mid-twenty-first century if they are not revitalized. Ryukyuan sociolinguistics became a visible and active field only from 2000 onwards. Efforts of and research into language revitalization were preceded by attempts and studies of cultural revitalization for almost half a century (see Hara and Heinrich 2015). Research into language revitalization started from perspectives focusing on language ideology and policy (Heinrich 2004) or were comparative (Hara 2005), before it shifted to more detailed, insider accounts. Later publications provide more fine-grained information on grassroots activities and on schools (e.g., Ishihara 2015; ODCK 2013). Currently,

up-to-date information summarizing both Japanese and international studies can be found in Ishihara (2016), Heinrich and Ishihara (2017) and Heinrich (2018). These works depict in detail a situation of language revitalization in a country that does not retreat from its invented monolingual self-image and therefore also sticks to the language policies that are based on this ideology. Consequently, language revitalization has little policy support. It is driven by actors on the micro- and meso-level.

Much progress has been made in what is called “ideological clarification”, that is to say, the rationalization why Ryukyuan languages should be maintained and what role they should play in future Ryukyuan society. There are countless efforts of using the language in (arranged) intergenerational encounters, ranging from children’s playgroups, to speech circles and competitions, to theater plays and radio broadcasts. While the number of these activities has sharply increased in the past decade, it is difficult, and therefore very rare, that new speakers of Ryukyuan languages overcome the threshold level of language learning (B1 in the European Common Framework). Particular attention needs to be laid, therefore, on second language-learning materials and circles where language learning takes place. It is by now also high time to retreat from the entirely unfounded monolingual view of the Japanese nation and to allow for regions with ethnolinguistic minorities like the Ryukyus or Hokkaido to develop policies that are specifically designed to support their multilingual heritage. It is also important to study Ryukyuan second language learning and teaching more broadly and more purposefully.

Second language learning: materials and courses

Second language acquisition of Ryukyuan languages is something that once used to happen without any institutional involvement or specific materials. When moving to another region, one would acquire the new local variety through immersion and out of the sheer necessity to communicate. Now that all Ryukyuan languages are endangered, the success of revitalization efforts depends on the availability of structured second language learning materials and language courses for as many Ryukyuan varieties as possible.

As of 2018, Okinawan is the only Ryukyuan language for which there are several textbooks for adult learners on the market, all focusing on the Shuri-Naha variety. The two best-known examples are *Okinawago no nyūmon – tanoshii uchinaaguchi* by Nishioka and Nakahara (2006) which is accompanied by a CD, and *Uchinaaguchi sabira – okinawago o hanashimashō* by Funatsu (2010). Both textbooks present well-structured approaches for the acquisition of Shuri-Okinawan. Especially the textbook by Nishioka and Nakahara stands out as a sound introduction from absolute beginner to intermediate level (European Common Framework Level A1 to approximately B1). As for other varieties of Okinawan, there is an introduction into the Kunigami-Oku variety by Tōyama (2016) in the form of three audio lessons. Learning materials for other Ryukyuan varieties also exist. However, these are not textbooks in the sense that they provide a step-by-step roadmap for second language learning. Some of these materials focus on memorizing individual phrases or words. They usually target school-aged children. The following materials are of this genre:

- *Setouchi no shimaguchi* (2013): Conversations, phrases and words in different Amami varieties spoken in the municipality of Setouchi (Southern Amami-Ōshima and Kakeroma Island). The material includes a DVD.
- *Wattā takaramun Tumigusuku nu kutuba* (2016): Phrases and words in different varieties of Okinawan spoken in Tomigusuku on Okinawa.

- *Shimakutuba dokuhon – shōgakusei* (2017): Phrases in the Naha–Okinawan, Kushi–Okinawan, Hirara–Miyako, Shika–Yaeyama and Sonai–Yonaguni (Dunan) published by Okinawa Prefecture. The material includes a CD.
- *Ryūkyūgo nyūmon – Shimoji Isamu de manabu myaakufutsu* by Karimata Shigehisa. This is a robust introduction to the Miyako language using lyrics of songs made by Miyako language singer Shimoji Isamu. This material was used as a course book at the University of the Ryukyus for several years.
- *Shugaafutsu shi asuba – Tarama-son Shiokawa hōgen no kyōzai – shokyū, chūkyū-hen* by Genka Yuka. This is a rich and fun introduction to the Tarama variety of the Miyako language. It was submitted as a Bachelor thesis at the University of the Ryukyus in 2018.

Not officially published but distributed amongst Okinawan language learners of the Okinawan diaspora is the textbook *Rikka uchinaa-nkai* (Sakihara et al. 2011), an excellent approach to Okinawan learning for which both English and Portuguese versions exist. In addition, the materials compiled by Yoron language advocate Kiku Hidenori are worth mentioning. They provide for an overview of Yoron grammar, lexicon and phrasal expressions. Then there are some promising textbook materials for the Miyako language that have not been published yet, and it is unclear at this moment whether they ever will be. In the last decade, we can observe a trend to publish children’s books and folk tales in Ryukyuan languages. These materials contribute to documentation in the short run and to revitalization in the long run. Still, for revitalization efforts, the facilitation of second language learning of (young) adults that are willing to dedicate time and effort to language revitalization remains key. To this end, the creation of step-by-step learning materials from introductory to advanced level should take precedence.

Language learning of Ryukyuan languages in the Ryukyus itself takes place in different settings and arrangements. For example, the University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa International University and Okinawa Christian University offer introductory-level Okinawan language classes as part of their curriculum. Language courses are also offered through municipal institutions, adult education organizations, and through various private initiatives in different places across the Ryukyus. However, no structured course or materials go beyond the low intermediate level (B1). Learners that have reached intermediate level are on their own and very often there is little progress beyond this stage. Regional variety is the reality of every language. A complicating factor in case of the Ryukyuan languages is that most speakers speak only their own regional variety (in addition to Japanese). Learners and instructors alike must therefore learn to deal with regional differences if they want to communicate in a meaningful way with native speakers.

Amongst the reasons for promoting the learning and use of Ryukyuan languages are objectives such as “restoring Ryukyuan self-esteem and confidence” and “restoring the cohesion between the younger and older generations” (Heinrich 2014: 298). In order to achieve this, tolerance of regional and social variety within the respective Ryukyuan languages is imperative. Ignoring variation for the sake of simplicity runs into the risk of disenfranchising other varieties and their speakers. More importantly yet, it would disqualify speakers of other varieties as potential language teachers. The inclusion of regional variation in learning materials must therefore be a central concern. Including a detailed description of every single regional variety of the target language is impossible, and it would also confuse learners. However, it is feasible to provide learners with a basic knowledge of the parameters of regional variation within the language they are learning. This, in turn, should enable them to carry out their own investigation with local native speakers as tutors. Learners could eventually start using the language as it is spoken in their own region, while acquiring a sense of the linguistic features of other regions in the process. A method using one variety as the medium of instruction while also touching upon

other regional varieties has been used successfully at the Uchinaaguchi Shūtoku Binchōkwai study group that is based at the University of the Ryukyus. Linguists can play a role in assisting in the construction of learning materials that introduce parameters of variation in the target language. It would be desirable to produce a template on how to do this that could then be applied to all Ryukyuan languages.

Outlook

Ryukyuan sociolinguistics involves very few scholars at the present and the list of research desiderata that have been identified in this chapter is way more detailed than the insights we could provide here. A number of important fields remain unstudied. These include gendered language, language attrition, language variation and change and (im)politeness. An expansion of Ryukyuan sociolinguistics into these fields is highly desirable, not only for the sake of gaining new scholarly insights but also to provide solid sociolinguistic insights without which there cannot be a larger, comprehensive and successful Ryukyuan language revival.

Learning materials

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Notes

- 1 Pellard (2015: 15) argues that only five subgroups can be distinguished: Amami, Okinawa, Miyako, Yaeyama, Yonaguni. Pellard groups the languages of Okinoerabu Island and Yoron Island with Amami on the basis that the varieties spoken there share linguistic innovations. The phoneme inventories of Okinoerabu and Yoron are closer to (Northern) Okinawa. This can be attributed to the strong cultural influence from the neighboring Okinawa Island. With regard to the southern Ryukyuan languages, the status of the variety spoken in Tarama Island is disputed. Karimata (2015: 115) groups it with Yaeyama while Pellard groups it with Miyako.

- 2 The islands were governed by US armed forces between 1945 and 1972. In May of 1972, the islands were “returned” to Japan, and Okinawa Prefecture was reestablished.
- 3 Ishihara Masahide went to elementary school in 1960s and to junior high school in 1970s. As far as he remembers, teachers brought the campaign into schools, but they did not enforce punishment by using the dialect tag.
- 4 Note that the above holds true for the Shuri-Naha area and Sokei specifically. Honorific styles equivalent to “commoner honorifics” can be used regardless of class in most areas with a commoner majority.

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