

Documenting, Teaching, and Revitalizing Uchinaa-guchi: the Future of the Okinawan Language Stewart Curry, Kyoko Hijirida, and Leon Serafim (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)

Overview: Okinawan as a moribund language

Aging speaker population

Most Okinawans under the age of 45 are monolingual in Japanese, and while those roughly 45 to 75 may understand and use some Okinawan (generally preferring Japanese), it is mostly those 75 and older for whom Okinawan is a living language (and even these are bilingual in Japanese).

Official promulgation of Japanese and discouragement of *hōgen*

This state has come about due to active Japanese-only policies after the annexation of the Ryukyus to Japan in 1879 through the end of World War II. The ascendancy of Japanese continued during the American occupation period, as a means of expressing solidarity with Japan and support for reversion. Japanese is the language of modern life — media, education, business, etc. — in Okinawa.

Compounding the problem for Okinawan is the popular notion that it is a dialect of Japanese rather than a distinct language related to Japanese: a dialect in danger seems of less concern than a language in danger.

Okinawan today

There has been a steady and perhaps growing interest in public use of Okinawan, including radio, television, and internet. Traditional and contemporary Okinawan music, and traditional theatre are popular as well.

In addition, actual educational efforts are being made, with the production of language texts and teaching programs undertaken by various entities.

The idea that Okinawan — compared to other moribund languages — is relatively healthy and has perhaps bright prospects can be reasonably advanced. The speaker population is still fairly large, and use of the language, though limited in domain, is steady. Okinawan has also received a comparatively large amount of documentary attention and interest. It also has an indigenous written tradition, dating from 1532 with initial compilation of the *Omoro sōshi*, right up to the present day.

Conservationists working on languages in danger of complete disappearance may reasonably wonder: why Okinawan? Our response: a good foundation begs to be built upon, not only in Okinawa itself, but in the world-wide Okinawan diaspora as well.

Okinawan reference works in English (and other languages of the Okinawan diaspora)

Rationale for creation of non-Japanese reference works

Nearly all reference documentation of Okinawan is in Japanese, which limits access to materials by the general community of linguistics scholars, and by interested non-scholars in heritage communities where Japanese has limited currency. (The Okinawan diaspora numbers some 670,000 persons, including 50,000 in Hawai'i.)

Extant and planned works

The Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Hawai'i sponsored the publication of the first such work since Chamberlain's 1895 grammar and dictionary, the *Okinawan-English Wordbook*, published in 2006. Currently in preparation under the sponsorship of The UH Center for Okinawan Studies is *Compleat Okinawan — a Comprehensive Portrait of its Modern and Historical Vocabulary*, a full-scale dictionary of the language. In addition, as the majority of the Okinawan diaspora is in Latin America, publication of localized *Wordbooks* in Spanish and Portuguese is under consideration.

Selected resources

www.rokinawa.co.jp

www.okinawabbtv.com

ryukyu-lang.lib.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/index.html

Kishi Masanobu, trans., 2001. *Wannee mayaa du yaru* [original: Natsume Soseki, *Wagahai wa neko de aru*].

Naha: Shinpō Shuppan. ISBN4-916224-06-X C0095

yuntakusabira.ti-da.net

Sakihara, Mitsugu, 2006. *Okinawan-English Wordbook*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

A—

aa¹, *n.* [awa] A bubble; foam; froth; scum; suds.

aa², *n. inf.* Opening mouth.

aa-buku, *n.* [abuku] A bubble; suds.

Also **aabukuu**, **abuku**. Same as **aa¹**.

aachu-u, *n. inf.* Heat.

aa-in, *vi.* [au] **1** To fit; suit; be suited to. **2** To agree (with); fit together; correspond to; jibe. **3** To be right; be correct. **4** To pay.

aakee, *n.* A dragonfly. Also **aakeejuu**. [GSS]

aakee-juu, *n.* [akizu*] A dragonfly.

aaki, *n.* [aki] A crevice; a crack; a gap; an aperture.

aakii, *n.* Pathos; a scene of lamentation in drama.

aaki-in, *vi.* **1** To split; cleave; fissure; crack apart. **2** To be inconsistent; contradict.

aa-man, *n.* A hermit crab; a pagurian.

aa-mui, *n.* An indigenous liquor of Okinawa made from millet or rice; awamori.

aaranka-a, *n.* A person who is frank, candid, and artless.

aasa, *n.* [asa] A sea lettuce; a kind of green laver [*Monostroma nitidum* (Wittrock)]. [OD]

aasa-irichii, *n.* An Okinawan dish in which dried **moo'aasa** is stir-fried with pork, fish cake, and bean sprouts. [OD]

aashi, *n.* [awase] Lined clothes. Same as **aashimun**.

aashi-mun, *n.* [awasemono] A lined kimono.

aa-sun, *vt.* [awasu] **1** To bring together; unite; combine. **2** To set (fit, adjust, adapt, conform) one thing to another;

align; synchronize.

aa-sun, *vt.* To mix; compound; knead.

aataabii, *n.* Same as **atabichaa**, **watta-abii**.

aataabii-nu-kkwa, *n.* A tadpole.

aatcha, *n. inf.* [< **atchun**] Walking.

aatin-pu-u, *n.* **1** A rough-and-ready guess; a hit-or-miss business. **2** A person who makes haphazard guesses; a blunderbuss. [GSS]

aa-tootu, *interj.* Holy be the god! Amen! May the god be honored! Also **uu-tootu**.

aa-tu-i, *n.* [awa + tori] Removing the bubbles from the surface of boiling sugar cane juice during the process of making brown sugar. [UKH]

abaa, *n.* An elder sister. Same as **'nmii**. See also **appii**.

aba-chun, *vt.* [abaku] To divulge; disclose; expose. See **abasaa**.

abaichiri-in, *vi.* To suffer terrible hardships. [UKH]

abari-in, *vi.* [abareru] To be violent; riot; run amok; rage (about); be unruly; (of horses) lash out; go wild.

abasa-a, *n. pej.* **1** A prattler; a tattler. [GSS] **2** A hussy; a wanton woman. [UKH] See **abachun**.

abasaa-gii, *n.* Hard, tough hair. [UKH]

abi-in, *vi.* **1** To shout; cry; yell; shriek; scream; howl. **2** (Of dogs, cats) to bark; meow.

abii-suubu, *n.* Shouting match, in which parties insist on speaking without listening to the other party.

abii-takkwa-sun, *vt.* To argue (a person) into silence; talk (a person) down; confute. See **takkwasun**.

abu-gaa, *n.* Same as **kuragaa¹**.

abui, *n.* [abumi] A stirrup; a footstall.

abui-kuu, *n.* [aburi-ko] A grill used to

Explanatory Notes

The sample below illustrates the content and layout of a typical *Wordbook* entry. For specific information about abbreviations used, see the **List of Abbreviations** and **Bibliographical Abbreviations** following.

A Okinawan items, in headword or other position, in **bold**

B Homonyms distinguished with unique superscript numbers

C Part of speech and usage information about headwords in *italics*

D Conjugation information for verbs and adjectives, if not predictable from the headword form

E Etymological information about the entry word: Japanese cognates in plain text, related Okinawan terms in **bold**, words from other languages as marked

A **chi-in²**, *vt.* [**B**-*ran*, *-tchi*; **C** *kiru*] **D** 1 To cut; chop; hash; saw; clip; shear; **E** slash. **F** 2 To break off; hang up.

F, G Major definition categories numbered in **bold**; minor distinctions separated by semicolons

See also **chiriin**. **H**

H "See" or "see also" to indicate cross-reference to related terms; "also" to indicate variant forms with the same meaning as the headword

Additional information in entries

- The following markings give additional information about etymological citations:
 - < indicates the source of a word borrowed from another language, or the base form for a derivation
 - ? indicates an unproven etymological connection
 - * indicates a Japanese term that is no longer in current use or is used only dialectally
- A related term resulting from the addition of a grammatical marker ("particle"), the verb *-sun* 'to do', or certain other items to the headword is given as part of the entry:
 - chiidi**, *n.* [*tsuide*] Occasion; chance. **ni**, *adv.* By the way; incidentally...
 - chiki-bi**, *n.* [*tsukebi*] Arson; incendiarism. **-sun**, *v.* To commit arson...
 - shiduu-ga-fuu**, *n.* [*humble*] Thanks. **-deebiru**, *phr. formal* Thank you. ...
- For plants and animals, non-cognate Japanese equivalents and scientific names are provided when possible:
 - chiri-bira**, *n.* A leek; a scallion [*J nira*; *Allium ramosum* L.].
- Bibliographical information is presented in square brackets: [UKH]

A—

aa¹, *n.* [awa] A bubble; foam; froth; scum; suds. *Aa nu tachan.* A bubble formed. *Unu sekken ya yuu aa nu tachan* This soap has rich lather. *Aa nu neen natan* A bubble burst. *Aree motu inee, kuchi kara aa fuchun* When he talks, he foams at the mouth.

aa², *n. inf.* Opening mouth. *Aa see* Open your mouth. *Aa saani, haa mishiti maa* Open your mouth and show your teeth.

aa-buku, *n.* [abuku] A bubble; suds. *Biiru nu abuku ya maakoo neen* Beer suds are not tasty. *Kachaashiinee, aabuku nu tachun* If you stir it, bubbles will rise. *Duku achisa nu, nma nu kuchi kara aabuku fuchi tooritan* It was so hot that the horse frothed at the mouth. Also *aabukuu*, *abuku*. Same as **aa¹**.

aachu-u, *n. inf.* Heat. *Uree aachuu ya gutu, saatee naran* Don't touch it, because it is hot.

aa-in, *vt.* [au] 1 To fit; suit; be suited to. 2 To agree (with); fit together; correspond to; jibe. 3 To be right; be correct. 4 To pay. *Aain* It fits. *Aaran* It does not fit. *Aatan* It fit. *Aarantan* It did not fit. *Aaini?* Does (= will) it fit? *Aatii?* Did it fit? *Aasee!* Make it fit! *Aasakee!* Don't make it fit! *Mushi aaine...* If it fits... *Unu 'waaji ya ansuka aran* This coat is a poor fit. *Unu kutsu ya yuu aain* These shoes fit well. *Yamatu nu tinchi ya wan ninkai ya aran* The weather in Japan does not agree with me. *Ari too hanashi nu aain* He and I have common interests to talk about. *Unu shikuchi ya shin yin saanee aran* This job is not worth 1,000 yen. *Tai nu hanashi ya aatoon* Their stories jibe with each other. *Ari ga 'waaji tu booshi ya aran* Her coat and hat do not match. *Sannin ya aaini?* Do the accounts tally? *Mushi arannee, jin nu fusuku sun* If the accounts do not tally, we'll be short of money.

aakee, *n.* A dragonfly. *Aakee ya miji nu mii nkai wan* Dragonflies are found near water. *Aakee ya mintamaa yan* Dragonflies have big eyes. Also **aakeejuu**. [CSS]

aakee-juu, *n.* [akizu*] A dragonfly. *Aakeejuu ya nachi ni njin* Dragonflies appear in summer. *Chikaguru nu warabaataa ya aakeejuu ndi ichin*

wakaran shi ga, tombo ndi inee wakain Children nowadays don't understand the word **aakeejuu** but they do understand [Japanese] *tombo*.

aaki, *n.* [aki] A crevice; a crack; a gap; an aperture. *Hashiru nu aaki kara hijuru kaji nu itchi chuun* Cold draughts come in through the cracks in the shutters. *Madu nu aaki ya kabi hatan* I papered over the cracks of the windows.

aakii, *n.* Pathos; a scene of lamentation in drama.

aaki-in, *vt.* 1 To split; cleave; fissure; crack apart.

2 To be inconsistent; contradict. *Ari ga iiru kutu tu, suru kutu ya aakitoon* What he says and what he does are inconsistent. *Hashidu nu aakii, waritoon* The shutters are dry and cracked.

aa-man, *n.* A hermit crab; a pagurian. *Gata nu umi nkai aaman tui ga ita* Let us go to Gata Beach to catch hermit crabs.

aa-mui, *n.* An indigenous liquor of Okinawa made from millet or rice; awamori. *Aamui ya Yamatu nu saki yaka chuusan* Awamori is stronger than Japanese sake.

aaranka-a, *n.* A person who is frank, candid, and artless. *Ari ga gutooru arankaa ya achinee ya naran* A man as artless as he cannot be a merchant.

aasa, *n.* [asa] A sea lettuce; a kind of green laver [*Monostroma nitidum* (Wittrock)]. *Uchinaa nu umi ya aasa nu mandoon* The sea of Okinawa is rich in green laver. *Aasa ya ushiru nkai itti maasan* The green laver tastes delicious in the soup. *Ahas ya gata nkai njaa ni, aasa tutti kuuma* Go to the beach and get some green laver tomorrow. [OD]

aasa-irichii, *n.* An Okinawan dish in which dried **moo'aasa** is stir-fried with pork, fish cake, and bean sprouts. [OD]

aashi, *n.* [awase] Lined clothes. *Hawaii ya nukusa gutu, aashi ya iran* Lined clothes are not needed in Hawaii because it is warm. *Aashi nu neen too fuyu ya hiisan* It is cold in winter without lined clothes. Same as **aashimun**.

aashi-mun, *n.* [awasemono] A lined kimono. *Aree aashimonoo (aashimun ya) tiichin neen* He does not have even one lined kimono.

aa-sun, *vt.* [awasu] 1 To bring together; unite; combine. 2 To set (fit, adjust, adapt, conform) one thing to another; align; synchronize.

A—

aa¹, *s.* [awa] Burbuja; borbollón; ampolla; espuma.

aa², *s. inf.* Boca abierta.

aa-buku, *s.* [abuku] Burbuja; espuma; jabonadura. Igualmente **aabukuu**, **abuku**. Lo mismo que **aa¹**.

aachu-u, *s. inf.* Calor.

aa-in, *vi.* [au] 1 Venir, ajustarse, acomodarse, o conformarse (una cosa a/ con otra). 2 Convenir; concordar. 3 Tener razón. 4 Pagar.

aakee, *s.* Libélula. Igualmente **aakeejuu**. [GSS]

aakee-juu, *s.* [akizu*] Libélula.

aaki, *s.* [aki] Hendedura; raja; grieta; abertura; agujero; hueco.

aakii, *s.* Lo patético; lástima; (en el drama tradicional) una escena de lamentación.

aaki-in, *vi.* 1 Henderse; romperse; dividirse. 2 Contradecir; ser contradictorio o inconstante.

aa-man, *s.* Cangrejo ermitaño.

aa-mui, *s.* Licor alcohólico okinawense de arroz o mijo; *ataunori*.

aaranka-a, *s.* Una persona simple y ingenua.

aasa, *s.* [asa] Lechuga brillante [*Monostroma nitidum* (Wittrock)], un género de alga marina comestible. [ODJ]

aasa-irichii, *s.* Plato okinawense de **moo'aasa** seco frito en poco aceite con carne de cerdo, pasta de pescado cocida, y brote germinado de soya.

aashi, *s.* [awase] Ropa con forro. Lo mismo que **aashimun**.

aashi-mun, *s.* [awasemono] *Kimono* (ropa formal tradicional de Japón y Okinawa) con forro.

aa-sun, *vt.* [awasu] 1 Unir; juntar. 2

Conformar; concordar; sincronizar.

aa-sun, *vt.* Mezclar; componer; amasar.

aataabii, *s.* Lo mismo que **atabichaa**, **wattaabii**.

aataabii-nu-kkwa, *s.* Renacuajo.

aatcha, *s. inf.* [< **atchun**] Anda.

aatin-pu-u, *s.* 1 Conjetura. 2

Conjeturador. [GSS]

aa-tootu, *interj.* Que el diós sea santo! Amén! Igualmente **uutootu**.

aa-tu-i, *s.* [awa + tori] Quitando las burbujas de la superficie de jugo de caña de azúcar hirviendo durante el proceso de hacer azúcar moreno. [UKH]

abaa, *s.* Hermana mayor. Lo mismo que 'nmii. Vea también **appii**.

aba-chun, *vt.* [abaku] Descubrir; exponer. Vea **abasaa**.

abaichiri-in, *vi.* Sufrir dolientemente. [UKH]

abari-in, *vi.* [abareru] Ser violento; rabiar; ser silvestre.

abasa-a, *s. emp.* 1 Charla. [GSS] 2 Buena maula; perra; mujer asquerosa. [UKH] Vea también **abachun**.

abasaa-gii, *s.* Pelo correoso. [UKH]

abi-in, *vi.* 1 Gritar; vocear. 2 (El perro) ladrar, (el gato) miar o maullar.

abii-suubu, *n.* Combate de gritar, en el cual los participantes insisten de hablar sin escuchar a los otros.

abii-takkwa-sun, *vt.* Confutar. Vea **tak-kwasun**.

abu-gaa, *s.* Lo mismo que **kuragaa¹**.

abui, *s.* [abumi] Estribo.

abui-kuu, *s.* [aburi-ko] Parillas.

abu-in, *vt.* [aburu] 1 Asar. 2 Calentar. Igualmente **anjun**.

abuna-san, *adj.* [abunai] Peligroso.

Igualmente **ukaas(h)an**.

abushi, *s.* [abushi] Dique.

Revitalization of Uchinaa-guchi In Hawai'i

Community-Based Uchinaa-guchi Classes

Uchinaa-guchi Class at the Lanakila Senior Center

In June of 1985, Takenobu Higa, with the assistance of Chiyoko Shiroma, initiated an Uchinaa-guchi class at the Lanakila Senior Center.

Uchinaa-guchi Class at the Hawai'i Okinawa Center

The Uchinaa-guchi class at the Hawai'i Okinawa Center (HOC) began in 1996 based on ideas and discussions generated in a meeting of program officers.

Media-Oriented Community

KZOO 1210, an AM radio station in Honolulu, has developed strong ties with the Okinawan community. Keiko Ura, a native Okinawan, has been a central figure in the promotion of an Okinawan language program for young people in Hawai'i Okinawan communities since 2001.

Institution-based Classes: Uchinaa-guchi Courses at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Okinawan Language and Culture courses JPN 471 and JPN 472 are offered by the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures. The courses were implemented in 2004; currently Kyoko Hijirida teaches JPN 471 and Leon Serafim JPN 472 (for information on course content for JPN 472, see p.9).

JPN 471 Okinawan Language and Culture Course I

- (1) Okinawan Language
- (2) Okinawan Proverbs
- (3) Okinawan Folklore
- (4) Influential People in Okinawan History
- (5) Okinawan Songs and Dance
- (6) Okinawan Foods
- (7) Annual Events in Okinawa
- (8) Okinawan Communities in Hawai'i

Student research and presentations

When the basic studies are finished, students are free to pursue further the themes of their interest on their own, producing a paper for class presentation.

Course Objectives

The overall course objectives are: 1) While comprehending the linguistic significance of the Okinawa Language, students come to understand the basic grammatical rules along with the practical communication at the beginner's level; 2) While understanding the culture of Okinawa, students come to appreciate its value system and way of thinking through actual class participation; and 3) While encouraging and enabling students to participate freely in the cultural activities of the local Okinawan communities in Hawai'i, students attain cultural enjoyment and enrichment.

Teaching Strategies

For class activities, unique Okinawan values such as *yuimaaru* (cooperative way of thinking and doing) are adopted and practiced in the classroom. Students are divided into six groups which offer help to other class members as needed.

Using the Okinawan-English Wordbook as a language tool

The *Wordbook* is used to introduce new vocabulary so students can read works such as short stories, serving as a first step to guide students toward independent reading of folk tales and other works.

Future Agenda

Okinawan language textbooks

Instructional Materials Used for the Course

Wakai hitotachi no tame no Uchinaa-guchi nyūmon, Shigehisa Karimata
Champuru Handbook, Kyoko Hijirida and Tomoko Oshiro
Okinawan-English Wordbook, Mitsugu Sakihara, ed. by Stewart Curry
Uchinaa nu kurashi tu nkashi-banashi, Okinawago Fukyū Kyōgi Kai

キジムナー Tale of Kijimuna



昔、山原ぬ崎本部んかい砂糖屋ぬあたん。砂糖屋ぬ東 方んかい
ウスクぬ大樹ぬあたん。うぬ樹ぬ根元んかいキジムナーが住家そー
たん。キジムナーや背丈小さしが、赤茶髪そーてい大變敏 捷や
てい、魚業ぬ上手なてい魚ぬ目玉びけーん取てい食むたん。キジム
ナーや夏冬雨ぬ日ん風ぬ日ん毎日夜漁しーが出じていゆるつと
う
暮ちよーたん。

キジムナーぬ住家そーるウスクぬ大樹ぬ隣いんかいカマデーとうマカテーんてい言
る若夫 婦ぬ暮ちよーたん。ある夜、カマデーやキジムナ
ーとう一緒ん夜漁んかい行じやん。キジムナーや直に潮口
んかい一足入たがやーんてい思たれー、波ぬ上駆足つし
行じやん。カマデーやキジムナー様子見ち大仰天さん。
キジムナーやカマデーんかい早くなーふえーくなーんち急
まーちゃん。



カマデーがキジムナー後追てい行じやれー、イラブチャー、タマン、ミーバイ、
色々ぬ内海漁ぬ山積つとーたん。やしが、魚よー全部目玉ぬねーらんたん。
目玉まー、キジムナーが食だんでいぬ事やたん。多さぬ魚ぬ中にカマデーが好ちゆ
る蛸ぬ見らん。何やてい見らんがんでい問たくとう、キジムナーや「私ぬー蛸好かん
くとう蛸取らん。また、人間ぬ屁とう太陽好かん。あんし私
ぬー昼日中樹ぬ住家をうてい曲とーてい黄昏に起てい漁業す
ん」カマデーやキジムナーとう友達になてい毎日魚馳走そーた
しが、愛さる妻ぬマカテー寂らーさしみてい毎晩夜漁んかい
一緒ん行かんだれーならんなたくとう、夫婦だーいるいる相談
さん。



あんし、或日ぬ事、相談さるぐとくにキジムナーが住家そーるウスクぬ根焼ちゆ
 る事になたん。平常ぬ夜漁えー前ぬ海んかいどう行ちゆたしが、うぬ日や兼久原ぬ
 前ぬ遠さる干瀬んかい行ちゆる事になたん。幸うえーに海ん風てい干瀬なてい魚ん
 多く採とーたしが、急にキジムナーが鼻広ぎてい私住家ぬ焼臭すんでい言ち、岸ん
 かい向かてい一目散駆足すたん。うぬ仕様見ちやるカマデーや、妻ぬどう火付きたし
 が解らん様子っし、キジムナー追てい走えーなたん。キジムナーや住家ぬ燃とーし眺
 てい落胆っし、カマデーんかい向かてい涙ぐるまーいっし、今日から私ねー何処をう
 てい暮すがやーんでい泣ちかかたん。やしが、気丈者のキジムナーやシンナナ橋ぬ側
 ぬウスクぬ在しえーんでい言ち直に駆足っし行じやん。うりから後、キジムナーぬ
 音沙汰ねーらんなたんでい言る事やん。キジムナーや地域にゆつてい「キムナー」
 「セーマ」「ブナガヤー」んでいん言ん。

注：① ウスク「アコウ」 ② 敏捷やてい「すばやい」 ③ ゆるつと「平穩に」
 ④ 涙ぐるまーっし「涙ぐんで」 ⑤ 泣ちかかたん「泣いてよりかかった」



キジムナー Tale of Kijimuna

昔、山原ぬ崎本部んかい砂糖屋ぬあたん。砂糖屋ぬ東方んかいウスクぬ大樹ぬあたん。
 うぬ樹ぬ根元んかいキジムナーが住家そーたん。キジムナーや背丈小さしが、赤
 茶髪そーてい大変敏捷やてい、魚業ぬ上手なてい魚ぬ目玉びけーん取てい食むたん。
 キジムナーや夏冬雨ぬ日ん風ぬ日ん毎日夜漁しーが出じていゆるっとう暮ちよーたん。

1) Find the meanings of the words listed below using *Okinawan-English Wordbook*.

ことば	読み方	意味	頁
東	agari		p.5
ウスク	usuku		p.199
大	ufu-		P.188
キジムナー	kijimunaa	n. a tree fairy; a tree spirit	p.93
背丈	taki-fudu		P.172
赤茶髪	aka-gantaa		p. 7
大変	ip-pee		p. 71
敏捷	guru-mun		p.51
上手	katti		p.90
目玉	min-tama		p.118
びけー	bikee		p.17
食むん	kamun		p.84
夜漁	ijai		p.69
ゆるっとう	yuruttu		p.226

注) Noun (place) + んかい : Noun (place) + に

2) Summarize the paragraph in your own words.

Okinawan language revitalization in Okinawa — and elsewhere

Identifying the language in space and time

Just what *is* this thing called Okinawan? It is typically said to refer to the common language of the most heavily populated areas of the prefecture, roughly from Naha in the south to just past the Kadena area, the area of the old Chūzan Kingdom, which eventually encompassed all of the Ryukyus. This common language is thought to be based either on the language of the old capital of Shuri, or else the language of Shuri's former commercial town, Naha. For traditionalists, Uchinaaguchi is the speech of Shuri, and for those who think of the most vibrant and heavily populated area, it is the speech of Naha. Shuri is also the dialect that is considered to be the direct descendant of Old and Middle Okinawan. The different viewpoint is encapsulated in two dictionaries that share the same name, *Okinawago Jiten*, or Dictionary of Okinawan. The earlier one, from 1963, is a lexicon of the Shuri language, and the latter, from 2006, is a dictionary of the Naha dialect.

Okinawan in the context of Ryukyuan

Hattori Shirō believed that all of Northern Ryukyuan was really one language, but with a great deal of variation from village to village. Hattori also pointed out that a deep linguistic divide separated any Ryukyuan dialect from any Japanese dialect.

Linguistic legacy in the diaspora

The bulk of emigrants from Okinawa came from the areas roughly co-equal with the Chūzan Kingdom, although a fair number came from just north of there. The question of just what should be called Okinawan is close to a moot point for them.

From recording Okinawan to teaching Okinawan

Since the 1970s, the weakening of Ryukyuan dialects has been a concern for scholars. Uemura Yukio and others began large-scale work to record at least a homogeneous data-set for each dialect. Professor Karimata Shigehisa of the University of the Ryukyus, who studied under Prof. Uemura as an undergraduate, has continued this work in field linguistics and in teaching Okinawan as a living language. Now that Prof. Miyara Shinshō is teaching Okinawan as well, Prof. Karimata has focused on teaching the language of Miyako. In addition, the Okinawa-go Fukyū Kyōgikai [Society of Okinawan Language Revitalization] may soon support the teaching of Okinawan in the public school system, with the cooperation of the Prefectural Board of Education.

From Okinawa to the diaspora in Hawai'i — and beyond

Excerpts from the society's intermediate reader, *Uchinaa nu kurashi tu nkashibanashi*, and material from another textbook, *Shinpen · Okinawa no bungaku*, on Ryukyuan literature, which includes a great deal of material in the classical language, have been used in UH's second-semester Okinawan Language and Culture course, JPN 472.

Two scholars have come to Hawai'i at different times to study the local *Ryūka* — or Ryukyuan poetry — scene: the late Kadekaru Chizuko, of Okinawa Kokusai Daigaku, and Professor Nakahodo Masanori, of the University of the Ryukyus. The latter has been known to say that the *Ryūka* production scene in Hawai'i is more vibrant than that in Okinawa. The new generation here includes large numbers of people who are eager to learn more Okinawan.

So Okinawan is also being taught in the diaspora, including non-university classes in Hawai'i and South America. For the younger generation, a sufficient knowledge of Japanese can be a big stumbling block. For people such as these, Prof. Mitsugu Sakihara compiled his English-Okinawan work, on which the OEW is based. Work will continue on its successor, and as time passes, on the creation of more and more English-language-based study materials.

Selected references

- Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo, eds. 1963. *Okinawago jiten* (Dictionary of Okinawan). Tokyo: Ōkurashō Insatsukyoku.
- Uchima Chokujin and Nohara Mitsuyoshi, eds. 2006. *Okinawago jiten: Naha hōgen o chūshin ni* (Dictionary of Okinawan, Based upon Naha Dialect). Tokyo: Kenkyūsha.
- Hateruma Eikichi, gen. ed., & Okinawaken Kyōiku Bunka Shiryō Sentā, eds. *Shinpen · Okinawa no Bungaku* (The Literature of Okinawa, new edition). Naha: Okinawa Jiji Shuppan.
- Okinawago Fukyū Kyōgikai (= Uchinaaguchi Firumiiru Jinmi nu Kwai), eds. *Uchinaa nu kurashi tu nkashibanashi* (Okinawa's Daily Life and Folk Stories). Naha: OFK.