

Miyako-Ryukyuan and its contribution to linguistic diversity

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Abstract

The paper provides introductory information on Miyako-Ryukyuan (Miyakoan). Miyakoan belongs to the Sakishima branch of the Japonic language family, the concept of which counterbalances the until-recently prevalent notion that Japan should be a linguistically homogenous country, and Japanese a language isolate with many unintelligible “dialects”. Following the statement that the endangered Miyako-Ryukyuan language is in an urgent need of extensive documentation and in-depth description, as well as producing more works in English devoted to it, the author introduces a few topics that may be of interest to Japanese/ Japonic linguists and language typologists alike: the “apical” vowel, syllabic consonants, focus marking strategies and formal modality markers. Each topic has been exemplified by Miyako-Ryukyuan samples from Nikolay Nevskiy’s Taishō-era handwritten fieldnotes, as retrieved and analyzed by this author.

1 Foreword

The goal of this paper is to exemplify the ways in which Miyako-Ryukyuan (or Miyakoan), an endangered language of the southern periphery of Japan, contributes to the linguistic diversity in Japan and worldwide.

The concept of Japonic languages – i.e. of the family to which Miyako-Ryukyuan belongs – which interprets the ethnolects of Japan as multiple related languages rather than as Japanese and its dozens of often unintelligible “dialects”, is still relatively new, only gaining popularity in the last ten-fifteen years. Few research results have so far been made available to the English-speaking readers¹, and therefore, the topic of Japan’s endangered languages is still often absent from discussions concerning language documentation or linguistic typology. This author hopes that with this paper, even if just a little, she will be able to help improve the situation.

This paper features seven sections, among which two first are of an introductory nature, explaining the genetic affiliation, area and demographics of Miyako-Ryukyuan. The subsequent four are devoted to specific features of Miyakoan phonetics and morphosyntax, which have been arbitrarily chosen by this author as representative of the language as unique in the Japonic family and/or typologically noteworthy. In the

¹ The major works in English dedicated to the description of Ryukyuan/ Japonic languages include Uemura 2003, Pellard & Shimoji 2010 and (partially but notably, given the prestige of its Routledge *Language Families* series) Tranter 2012. Also, for 2015 in Mouton de Gruyter there has been planned a long-awaited publication of the *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages*, edited by Patrick Heinrich, Shinsho Miyara and Michinori Shimoji. There are also some monographs and Ph.D. dissertation devoted to specific Ryukyuan varieties, such as Izuyama 2003 or Shimoji 2008.

final section, preferable future contributions to the documentation and research on Miyako-Ryukyuan have been pinpointed.

Examples, their interpretation and conclusions (unless indicated otherwise) are a result of the author's first-stage analysis of the 1920s fieldnotes on the language compiled by the Russian Nikolay A. Nevskiy, in retrieval and editing of which the author has been engaged for the last two years. These fieldnotes are a very valuable and precise source on the pre-shift era of the Miyako language, and the subject and nature of this paper makes it all the more appropriate to base it on such a fieldwork reflection of the not-yet-endangered period of Miyako-Ryukyuan history.

Modernized writing conventions based on the contemporary IPA standards have been applied when quoting Nevskiy's examples (For a transcript of Nevskiy's fieldnotes see Jarosz 2013.). For Japanese examples, Hepburn transliteration has been used.

2 Miyako-Ryukyuan basics

Miyako-Ryukyuan, known also simply as Miyako, is one of the Japonic languages spoken on the islands of the Miyako island cluster in the Okinawa Prefecture, the southernmost area of Japan. Miyako belongs to the Sakishima sub-group of Japonic languages, along with its closest genetic relatives, Yaeyama and Yonaguni. A proposal of the internal classification of the Japonic family including the precise placement of the Miyako language is shown in Figure 1².

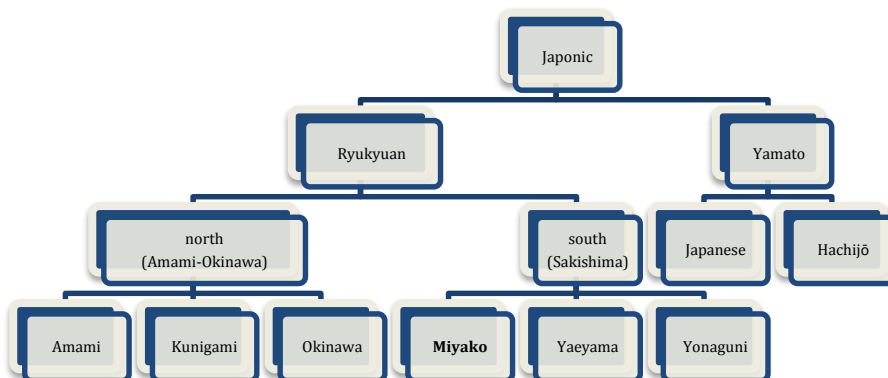


Figure 1: Genetic classification of Japonic languages

Miyako is now considered to be spoken on six of the eight islands traditionally known to be inhabited³: Miyako main island, Ikema, Kurima, Ōgami, Irabu and Tarama. As an insular language, it is characterized by great internal diversity, and the major regional varieties have a small degree of intelligibility with one another (cf. Hokama 1977: 213). One can divide Miyako-Ryukyuan either, according to the areal criteria, into three major variety groups or “blocks”: Miyako, Irabu and Tarama (cf. Hokama 1977: 212-213), or, according to the genetic proximity criteria, into two major groups: Miyako proper and Tarama, with Miyako proper further divided into central Miyako and Ikema-Irabu varieties (Pellard 2009: 295).

² The number and names of the languages have been quoted from the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. For different possibilities of classifying Japonic languages, see for example the 2013 edition of *Ethnologue* or Miyara 2010.

³ Of the remaining two islands Shimoji is not inhabited and Minna, with six inhabitants left as of 2007, is doomed to face depopulation in a few years' time. Source on the population of Minna: <http://www.taramajima.net/>. [accessed 2013-10-26.]

Typologically, Miyako-Ryukyuan displays most of its family's characteristics: it is predominantly agglutinative and dependent-marking, with the SOV basic word order and modifier – head constituent order. Some of the less typical Miyakoan features will be presented later in this paper.

3 Demographics and level of endangerment

According to the census estimation of July 2013, the Miyako islands are currently inhabited by a population of 53,015⁴. However, the actual Miyako-speaking population should be many times smaller. Currently, we have at our disposal no complete data (i.e. covering all the islands of the group as well as any possible enclaves of Miyakoan immigrants elsewhere in the Ryukyus or on the mainland of Japan) concerning the number and age of Miyako-Ryukyuan speakers. However, some research has been conducted on a few smaller communities representing particular Miyakoan varieties, some providing quite exact data on both the number and age of their speakers. From these data one can attempt to estimate approximately the population and vitality of the whole language.

The Ikema variety (see Hayashi 2010) is reported to have about 2,000 users with the youngest speakers perhaps in their mid-fifties. The Irabu ethnolects (meaning the “genetic” Irabu, i.e. without Sarahama, which as a village of Ikema immigrants remains a sub-variety of Ikema-Miyakoan) include about 1,000 fluent speakers, virtually all over 60 (see Shimoji 2008). The indigenous variety-speaking population of the tiny island of Ōgami could be about 150 speakers (with only 30 still living on the island), of which the majority is said to be 70 or older (see Pellard 2010). In addition, there are no figures on the Karimata variety from the northern tip of the Miyako main island, but a source from the mid-nineties (Majewicz 2006 quoting his fieldwork in 1996) claims only for the generation over 60, and presumably not the whole of it at that, to have some indigenous variety native speakers left; today, almost twenty years after that study, and with no major revitalization movement to have been heard of, one might as well consider this variety to have become extinct.

From the information above there emerges the impression of a language spoken mainly among the elderly people, not used among the younger generations and no longer taught to children. One could assume with some degree of confidence that the sociolinguistic situation of other Miyakoan ethnolects should not differ drastically from that of the four varieties mentioned above. Thus, if we only take into consideration the inhabitants over 60 years of age, yet introduce a margin for the probability that not every person over 60 can speak Miyako and not all the persons below that age cannot, we get a rough estimation of 10,000 – 15,000 Miyako native speakers still living in the islands.

With such an approximation, how should the vitality of the language be described? It seems that in terms of the five-degree endangerment scale applied in the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* Miyako falls into the category of *severely or seriously endangered*, which is defined in the following way: “language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they

⁴ Data quoted after *Okinawa-ken tōkei shiryō* : <http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/toukeika/so/so.html>. [accessed 2013-10-26]

do not speak it to children or among themselves”⁵. On the other hand, among 13 levels of EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) used to assess language development in *Ethnologue*, Miyako would be best described by level 8a, which is *moribund*: “the only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older”⁶. Interestingly, both UNESCO and *Ethnologue* estimate Miyako-Ryukyuan to be healthier by one grade than this author does (the labels are *definitely endangered* for UNESCO and 7 – *shifting* for *Ethnologue*). One of the possible reasons for this judgment discrepancy could be that both aforementioned works rely on some outdated sources (eg. a publication from 1989 claiming that people under 20 are generally Japanese monolinguals; currently, almost 25 years after that publication, these “Japanese monolinguals” are now well in their forties, and therefore the population’s shift into Japanese has seriously advanced).

Regardless of the descriptive label one could use for the present-day Miyako status, the one fact – that the language is in considerable trouble – seems undeniable. With children of at least two or three previous generations no longer acquiring the language at home, the language having little prestige (not taught at schools, still widely considered a “dialect” of Japanese, regardless of a definite lack of intelligibility and centuries of development virtually uninfluenced by any mainland Japanese variation) and the only speakers being the most elderly age group who can now only use the language to communicate with their peers in less and less contexts, the outlook for Miyako-Ryukyuan is indeed bleak. Moreover, as the degree of documentation and description of Miyakoan remains far from sufficient⁷, for now it should be counted as one of those unfortunate languages threatened with “double extinction” – not only may it cease to serve as a communication tool, but also with the passing of the last speakers, most of its legacy may be wiped from the planet forever.

Consequently, strengthening the efforts to record and describe the language strikes as an urgent matter. And as protecting and cherishing worldwide language diversity is the baseline of all language documentation and revitalization efforts, it is appropriate to point out at least a handful of features in which Miyako-Ryukyuan enriches the linguistic map of Japan and the whole world.

4 Sounds of Miyako-Ryukyuan: the “apical vowel”

One of the most unique features found in the phonetics of Miyako-Ryukyuan is the so-called “apical” vowel, conventionally marked with the non-standard symbol <ɿ> in Ryukyuan studies, as there seems to be no appropriate character to denote this sound in the standard IPA chart. Apart from being a phonetic endemite in the linguistic map of Japan (elsewhere found only in a geographically close Aragusuku variety of Yaeyama-Ryukyuan, cf. Uemura 2003: 46), it has also played a crucial role in the development of the contemporary Miyakoan phonemic inventory.

The sound of [ɿ] in Miyako is produced with the front part of the tongue in a manner similar to that of the front close vowel [i], but with the tip of the tongue shifted upwards

⁵ Quoted from the homepage of the UNESCO *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>. [accessed 2013-10-26]

⁶ Quoted from the homepage of *Ethnologue*: <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status>. [accessed 2013-10-26]

⁷ Wayne Lawrence expresses his view that “all of the Southern Ryukyuan languages are underdescribed, with the possible exception of the Ishigaki dialect (Yaeyama)” (Tranter 2012: 381).

against the alveolar rim (hence the “apical” attribute in the name of the sound). In most contexts this results in a sound similar to the central vowel [ɨ], and therefore this vowel often happens to be simply described as a central one. One could thus define this sound as a front vowel in terms of its articulation and as a central vowel from the acoustic point of view⁸.

The “pure” apical vowel, with features as described above, in present-day Miyako-Ryukyuan can be interpreted as a realization of the phoneme /i/⁹. Corresponding with Japanese phonemes /i/ and /u/, [ɨ] follows alveolar fricatives and affricates, prohibiting their palatalization. (On the other hand, the realization of [i] enforces palatalization on the preceding sibilants.) The “apical” realization also may optionally occur after the bilabial nasal in Tarama and Irabu varieties. Examples: *mɨz* ‘new’ (Sawada-Irabu variety); *sɨtiz* ‘to throw out’ (Hirara-Miyako, cp. Japanese *suteru*); *cɨ*: ‘blood’ (Hirara-Miyako, Sawada-Irabu, cp. Japanese *chi*).

Since the apical vowel is articulated in a position close to that of alveolar fricatives, after bilabial and velar stops it has developed into syllabic realizations of /s/ (following /p/ and /k/) and /z/ (following /b/ and /g/). Examples: *ksks* ‘to listen’ (Hirara-Miyako, Tarama, cp. Japanese *kiku*), *pagz* ‘leg, calf’ (Hirara-Miyako, cp. Japanese *hagi* ‘calf’). Furthermore, historical *ɨ in intervocalic position, or in general in no-onset syllables, has also developed into a syllabic allophone of /z/. Example: *tue:u:z* ‘elderly person’ (Hirara-Miyako, cp. Japanese *toshiyori*).

Thus, due to these “fricativizing” characteristics of the apical vowel and the influence it exerted on the development of Miyakoan phonemic inventory, Japanese phoneme /i/ corresponds with contemporary Miyakoan /s/ after voiceless plosives, with /z/ after voiced plosives and in no-onset syllables, and with /i/ elsewhere (to the effect of depalatalizing the preceding sibilants). On the other hand, Japanese /u/ corresponds with Miyako /i/, or precisely the apical [ɨ] after sibilants, with /z/ in no-onset syllables, and with /u/ elsewhere.

5 Moraic and syllabic consonants

As shown above, Miyako-Ryukyuan phonotactics allow for alveolar fricatives to take the coda slot in a syllable, which is very unusual for a Japonic language, as the majority of the Japonic family members have a predominant (C)V syllable structure. In the case of standard Japanese, the only coda consonant is the uvular nasal /N/ which, interestingly enough, at the same time cannot take the onset slot, which means that it is actually a “coda-fixed” phoneme. In some other languages other syllable-final nasals exist, such as /m/ and /n/, and in this case they can both take on the role of an onset and a coda. However, in Miyako-Ryukyuan there is a whole set of coda consonants which can also be observed elsewhere as syllable onsets: they are the nasals /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, fricatives /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/ and retroflex lateral flap /l/ in varieties which have this phoneme (Irabu and Tarama).

Furthermore, all consonants which can take on the coda slot are moraic in this position. Examples: *iv* ‘heavy’ (Hirara-Miyako), *jaf* ‘bad luck, disaster’ (Shimozato-

⁸ For further discussion of the subject see for example: Uemura 2003; Pellard 2007; Karimata 2006; Karimata 2010.

⁹ Most researchers take a different approach and define two separate phonemes, /i/ and /ɨ/.

Miyako, cp. Japanese *yaku*)¹⁰, *pail* ‘to grow’ (Tarama, cp. Japanese *haeru*). This fact also has a far-fetched consequence in that the long equivalents of these consonants are syllabic, and they also bear the role of syllable nucleus when preceded by a plosive (not all of them, however, but just the fricatives /f/, /s/, /z/ and the lateral flap). The result is a lexicon, which is rather exotic from the Japonic point of view, as some items consist of “consonants alone”, i.e. they contain no vowels on the phonemic level. Examples: *blbl* ‘a kind of inedible potato’ (Sawada-Irabu), *m:* ‘fish meat’ (Sawada-Irabu), *psks* ‘to pull’ (Hirara-Miyako, Tarama, cp. Japanese *hiku*).

6 Focus markers and interrogative clauses

Miyako-Ryukyuan has reportedly developed a few nominal focus-marking strategies (“nominal” also includes the medial form of a verb, which actually acts like a nominal in respect of taking on discursive markers such as topic or focus or having no TAM marking in itself, even though for other reasons, such as the ability to function as predicate in clause-chains, traditionally in Japanese studies the medial has been described as a part of the verbal paradigm). These strategies are sensitive to the type of the utterance (i.e. whether it is a declarative or an interrogative), not unlike many other Ryukyuan languages (Shimoji 2010: 11). For example, it has been confirmed that the Irabu variety distinguishes not two, but three sentence-function dependent focus clitics: *-du* for declaratives, *-ru* for Yes/No interrogatives, and *-ga* for open interrogatives. Examples (all from the Sawada-Irabu variety):

- (1) *fai=du=uz*
eat.MED=FOC=PROG.NPST
‘I am eating.’
- (2) *vva=ga=ru tu-ltal*
you=NOM=FOC take-PST
‘Was it you who took that?’
- (3) *nza=ηkai=ga mm’a:mma:-l*
where=DIR=FOC go.HON-NPST
‘Where is it that you will go?’

Nevskiy also reports a focus clitic *-nu* for the Hirara variety, introducing it as a counterpart of the Yes/No interrogative *-ru* in Sawada. It may be, however, that this clitic has a limited distribution: so far it has been observed to appear after medial forms of verbs in auxiliary constructions and after argument-marking clitics, with an exclusion of nominative and accusative markers (which is not to say it cannot take these slots, just that it has not been witnessed).

- (4) *kanu pst-u: εci=nu=ura:-z*
that man-ACC know.MED=FOC=PROG.HON-NPST
‘Do you know him?’

¹⁰ Example from Karimata 2013: 207.

It also appears that apart from declaratives, *-du* is also used as a focus marker in utterances modified for epistemic (5) modality, unless the utterance includes an interrogative pronoun which implies an open question. In open questions, accordingly, focus is indicated by *-ga*, the same as in Irabu, also if such utterance is modified for modality (6).

(5) *a: antɛi:=du jar-ama-z=bja:ja:*

oh like that=FOC COP.IRR-HON-NPST=CONJ

‘Oh, so that is how it is, correct?’

(6) *ago: nza=ɲkai=ga pi-z=tarja*

friend.TOP where=DIR=FOC go-NPST=CONJ

‘Where it is that you go, my friend?’

Note: as is the case with other Japonic languages, focus markers are attached to nominals, which makes them a reasonable candidate to be included in the nominal inflection paradigm. They always follow the “basic” case marker (i.e. the one that indicates the argument relation between the nominal and the predicate), such as the nominative clitic *-ga* or *-nu* or the directive clitic *-ɲkai*.

Interestingly enough, for interrogative sentences with no overt focus marking (i.e. those interrogatives where it is the verbal phrase that is focalized), there can be instead applied clause-final affixes with an interrogative meaning. Distribution and formal status of these affixes shows a lot of regional variation.

In the Hirara-Miyako variety, a Yes/No question marker *-ma* is attached to an infinitive form of the verb (presumably irrealis, although too little data has been found on this morpheme so far for this author to decide about it definitely), whereas its probable Irabu equivalent, *-mu*, is attached to a finite, fully TAM-equipped verbal phrase. In the case of Hirara, there are legitimate reasons for calling this marker *-ma* a suffix, while its Irabu counterpart seems a clitic, but nevertheless one attached to predicates alone. (Both *-ma* and *-mu* tend to double the initial bilabial nasal, a phenomenon that may depend on the final sound of the preceding word.)

Hirara example: Irabu (Sawada) example:

(7) *zo: karji u-mma*

good luck be-INT

‘Have you been doing well?’ (= How are you?)

(8) *zau kari: ur-amal=mmu*

good luck be-HON=INT

‘Have you been doing well?’ (= How are you? – honorific version)

On the other hand, another Y/N question marker, *-na*, which has been observed in Hirara, Tarama and Sawada-Irabu examples, seems definitely a clitic due to the fact that it can be attached to virtually any lexical class in any form, nominals (as in example 9) and predicates (10) alike. One more difference from *-ma/-mu* suffixes is that *-na* can be combined with a focus marker (11), which means that it cannot be considered a focus indicator in itself.

Examples (non-variety specific):

(9) *kai=na*

he=INT

‘Is that him?’

(10) *kama=ηkai ik-adi=na*

there=DIR go.IRR-HOR=INT

‘Let’s go there, all right?’

(11) *imi sɣma=gama=du jar-ja:=na*

small island=DIM=FOC COP.IRR-CONJ=INT

‘I guess it is a small island, right?’

Finally, interrogative sentence marking for Wh-questions in Miyako-Ryukyuan seems rather complex. In Hirara (central Miyako representative), if the nominal part in such a clause is focalized, then it is marked with the previously mentioned *-ga* clitic (12). However, there are also examples with non-focalized Wh-questions (13), a fact which implies that the marking of the focus in this type of utterance is optional and adds extra meaning – or it may also be the other way round, i.e. that there is something marked and unusual about a non-focalized Wh-question. So far the investigation of examples recorded by Nevskiy has brought no answers regarding this matter.

(12) *no:baɛi:=ga ks-ta:z*

how=FOC come-PST

‘How it was that you got there?’

(13) *kur-ja: no: jar-ja:*

this-TOP what COP.IRR-CONJ

‘What is this?’ (lit. ‘What this could be?’)

On the other hand, clause-final clitic *-ga* (as opposed to the nominal focus clitic *-ga*) actually has been observed in Hirara and Sawada examples, but only following a “special finite” verbal form with a final *-m* (as opposed to the “normal finite” with a final *-z* or *-l* respectively)¹¹. So far, too few examples of this clause structure have been found in Nevskiy’s field notes to draw any even tentative conclusions concerning this issue.

(14) *ifɯcɰ am=ga*

how many be.SF=INT

‘How many are there?’

¹¹ Shimoji 2008 interprets this form as a *realis mood marker*, and Izuyama 2003, who describes the Miyara variety of Yaeyama-Ryukyuan (Miyako’s close relative), considers the presumably related to the Miyako *-m* form Miyara suffix *-N* as a kind of *speaker’s recognition or judgement indicator*. This author believes that these Southern Ryukyuan suffixes should be relatable to the Old Japanese conjecture and volition marker *-mu*. If Miyakoan *-m* verbs are indeed proved to co-occur with the interrogative marker *-ga*, it would then have to be interpreted in terms of an interplay of sentence type and modality.

7 Classification of modality markers

As in other Japonic languages, mood is one of the basic inflectional categories for Miyako-Ryukyuan verbs (along with time, aspect and polarity). Verbal morphology, by means of affixation and cliticization, is but one of a few ways to indicate the modality of a given proposition in the language, with others depending on the usage of function words (nouns and adjectives) and phrase-final clitics whose distribution is not limited to any particular lexical class. Examples of each type of mood markers (inflection, function words, phrase-final clitics) have been introduced below. By no means should this exemplification be treated as an attempt to systematically describe the category of mood in Miyakoan, which is too complex a phenomenon to take up at this early stage of the author's research.

1. Verbal suffixes and proclitics have been found to mark:

- epistemic modality, roughly divided into conjecture (here understood as what the speaker estimates to will or have taken place, or assumes to be true) and inference (understood as what speaker deduces from the facts available to them);

(15) *icɣ-ka kunu vcɣ agar-adi*
 when-INT this inside enter.IRR-CONJ
 'I will come by sometime soon.'

(16) *fa:-dis-taz*
 eat.IRR-CONJ-PST
 '[He] Probably ate/has eaten.'

(17) *aha antei:=du dzin=na mo:kirai-z=sa:i*
 indeed like that=FOC money=EMP earn-NPST=INFR
 'I see, so this is how you make money.'

(18) *o:saka=ɲkai cɣk-amaz-ta-m=dara=ti umui:=uz*
 Osaka=DIR arrive-HON-PST-IND=INFR=QUOT think.MED=PROG
 'I suppose you may have arrived at Osaka by now.'

- deontic modality, such as various kinds of the imperative mood (prohibitive, precativ, hortative), along with the standalone imperative form of the verb, which is homophonic with the medial/nominalized form as discussed in the section 5¹²;

(19) *ninn-u zzi:-fi:-sa:tei*
 attention-ACC include-BEN.MED-do.HON.IMP
 'Please kindly pay attention/ take [this] into consideration.'

¹² The homophony of imperative and medial forms of a verb is analogical with the modern standard Japanese *-te* form, as in *shite* 'do!'/ 'doing', *itte* 'go!'/ 'going' etc, even though the nominal status of *-te* form in Japanese is slightly different from the medial in Miyakoan.

(20) *pja:=kari azzi=ra*

fast.=VRB.MED say.IMP=HOR

‘Come on, just tell me now!’

(21) *fo:=na=ra*

eat=PROH=HOR

‘Don’t you eat [it]!’

(22) *a:g-u: asɣmja: su:-di*

songs-ACC reciprocally do-HOR

‘Let’s sing songs one by one!’

(23) *kanu p^sɣt-u: zo:kai-ja ei:-fi:-sama-djanna*

That man-ACC introduction-TOP do.MED-give.BEN.MED-do.HON.IRR-PREC

‘Would you please introduce him to me?’

- irrealis modality, such as conditionals and possibly interrogatives (compare the marker *-ma* or the behavior of focal *-ga* from the section 5).

(24) *ati pja:-pja:=ti azza:-cka: ba=nunna ssa-ij*

too much fast-fast=ADV talk.IRR-COND I=DIR know.IRR-NEG.NPST

‘If you talk too fast, I won’t understand you!’

(25) *ba=ga tigabzz-u kaka-ba mutci:-ki-fi:-ru*

I=NOM letter-ACC write-COND bring.MED-come.MED-give.BEN.MED-IMP

‘When I have written the letter, please take it [to the mailbox]¹³.’

2. Function nouns, by which this author understands lexically bleached nominals which can only appear in a sentence when combined with a modifier clause, in general seem to express epistemic (like inferential *pazɣ* ‘must be’, cognate with Japanese *hazu*) or deontic (like debitive *gumata/ gumuta* ‘may, shall’) modality.

(26) *kanu pst-o: ksnu=nu funi=kara=du mm’a:-taz=pazɣ*

that man-TOP yesterday=GEN ship=INST=FOC come.HON-PST=DED

‘He must have come with yesterday’s ship.’

(27) *vv-a: jurja:zbaka=ɣkai pa-z=gumata*

you-TOP mass grave=DIR enter-NPST=DEB

‘May you fall into a mass grave!’ (a curse)

¹³ Possibly a mistake on Nevskiy’s part: the sentence says clearly *kifiru*: ‘please come’, but the only option that fits the meaning of the sentence would be *ikifiru*: ‘please go’ (in Miyakoan, as in standard Japanese, compounds with the movement verbs *kss* ‘to come’ and *iks* ‘to go’ indicate if the action is happening *towards* or *away from* the speaker; hence the compound verb *mutci:kss* as in (25) should mean ‘bring sth to me’ and *mutci:iks* ‘take sth away from me’.).

There also exists a marker *ki* (often voiced as *gi*) with a similative ('seems like') function. It was initially believed to be one of the function nouns, because it is attached to adjectives, as in *apara-gi* 'beautiful' (lit. 'seems beautiful'), or *upu-gi* 'big' (lit. 'seems big'). However, this assumption has been revised, and *-ki* has been reinterpreted as an adjective clitic – structures such as adjective + *ki* can modify an NP (as in 28 and 29), but they can neither head an NP nor appear as a predicate accompanied by the copula.

(28) *ami=nu=du fu-z=bus=ki munu*
 rain=NOM=FOC fall-NPST=DES=SIM thing
 'It seems like it's going to rain.'

(29) *daraka=gi munu=∅*
 lie=SIM thing=COP.NPST
 'Seems to be a lie.'

Desiderative mood is expressed by a function (lexically bleached) adjective *pusʔ* (cognate with Japanese *hoshii*), often observed in one of its derivative forms – nominalized *pussa* or verbalized *puskaz* (central Miyako)/ *puskal* (Irabu, Tarama).

(30) *kwass-u=du fo:=busʔ-ka-z*
 sweets-ACC=FOC eat=DES-VRB-NPST
 'I want to eat some sweets.'

(31) *mja:ku=ŋkai iks=busʔ munu=ja:*
 Miyako=DIR go=DES thing=EMP
 'Oh, how I want to go to Miyako!'

(32) *mi:=bus-sa=nu mi:=bus-sa=nu bzi=mai tatei=mai ur-aiŋ*
 see.MED=DES-NOMN=NOM sit.MED=INCL stand.MED=INCL be.IRR-NEG
 'I want to see it so badly that I can't hold still.'

3. Finally, there is a range of phrase-final, or rather utterance-final morphemes used for expressing emphasis, volition (in this function called the optative) or insistence, much like the many utterance-final morphemes of Japanese (compare *ne*, *yo*, *zo* and other). An important feature of these morphemes is that they often appear after a nominal phrase, following the post-positional case marker, and thus they finish the utterance instead of a predicate.

(33) *ja:=ŋkai gjo:*
 home=DIR OPT
 'I've gotta go home.' (= I am emotionally inclined to go home.)

(34) *irav=ŋkai iksʔ=∅ gjo:*
 Irabu=DIR go=NPST OPT
 'I will go to Irabu'

(35) *ban=ta=ga*¹⁴ *ja:=ŋkai zu:*

I=PLUR=GEN house=DIR HOR

‘Let’s go to our home!’

(36) *ba=ga munu=∅ do:*

I=GEN thing=COP.NPST EMP

‘Hey, this is mine!’

8 Directions in documentation and preservation of Miyako-Ryukyuan

This paper has thus briefly discussed a few aspects characteristic of the Miyako language system, which are: a unique for a Japonic language abundance of close syllables and syllabic consonants, speech-act sensitive focus marking strategies with different markers dependent on the region of the varieties in question, and the various formal means to express modality. Each of these aspects, as well as many more which have not been mentioned here, deserve a much more in-depth exploration, for which purpose just the analysis of Nevskiy’s fieldnotes, priceless as they are, is sure to prove insufficient. That is to say that this author’s own fieldwork with Miyakoan speakers is necessary, and given the constantly decreasing and aging population of the speakers, the matter is urgent.

Considering the assessed level of endangerment displayed by Miyako-Ryukyuan, it is obvious that with no conscious and efficient revitalization efforts on the community level the language will cease to exist by ca. 2050 – and that is still a relatively optimistic prediction. Needless to say, these efforts would primarily concern the community members themselves, i.e. the ethnic population of the Miyakos; in other words, linguists, educators, language activists and other people involved in the case from the outside can only offer the community of interest their expertise and good will, but this is where their role ends. The future of Miyako-Ryukyuan and chances for the restoration of the language ultimately depend on the decision, hopefully as conscious and informed as possible, made by both the existing and the potential speakers.

On the other hand, what can and should be done by the linguists in the case of Miyako-Ryukyuan is to fill the still persistent gap of language documentation and description. So far, only two fairly complete descriptive works on the Miyako-Ryukyuan varieties have been published (or at least two that this author is aware of¹⁵), both Ph.D. dissertations: one by Thomas Pellard (2009) on the Ōgami and one by Michinori Shimoji (2008) on the Irabu variety. What is still lacking are the thorough

¹⁴ The nominative-genetive case marker *-ga* (nominative when the noun is in the agent or subject position and genetive when modifying another noun), attachable to personal pronouns, kinship terms and demonstratives, is not to be mistaken with the focus marker and interrogative clitic *-ga*, which have been described in the section 5.

¹⁵ The *References* section of Pellard & Shimoji 2010 stated that around the time the publication was issued, a Ph.D. dissertation by a student of the Ikema variety, Yuka Hayashi, was in the preparation stage. The dissertation was supposed to have the title of *Ryūkyūgo Miyako Ikema hōgen-no bumpō* (琉球語宮古池間方言の文法) with the English translation of ‘A grammar of Ikema Ryukyuan’. This author does not know whether the said dissertation has already been completed; if it has, then naturally it would constitute a third full modern description of a Miyakoan variety.

descriptions of all the other varieties, most prominently central Miyako and Tarama, and even more so – a synthesized, general work on the Miyako language as such, one which would take into its scope all the varieties and while taking note of their many differences could take a full account of their similarities, often very distinct from the other areas on the linguistic map of the Ryukyus. Only then can the features of Miyakoan grammar be satisfactorily explored, and our understanding of Japonic linguistics enhanced. Updated sociolinguistic accounts on the situation of Miyako-Ryukyuan, most basically the number and age of speakers and the exact domains where the language still happens to be used, would also be called for.

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative
BEN	benefactive
CONJ	conjecture
COP	copula
DEB	debitive
DES	desiderative
DIM	diminutive
DIR	directive
EMP	emphasis
FOC	focus
GEN	genitive
HON	honorific
HOR	hortative
IMP	imperative
INCL	inclusive
IND	indicative
INFR	inferential
INT	interrogative
IRR	irrealis
MED	medial
NOM	nominative
NOMN	nominalizer
NPST	non-past
OPT	optative

PLUR	plural
PROG	progressive
PST	past
QUOT	quotative
SF	“special finite”
SIM	similative
TOP	topic
VRB	verbalize

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