

# Action Research in endangered language communities

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- Overview **action research (AR)** to be a promising approach of language revitalization
- Examine some activities of the Port Language Revitalization Project using AR

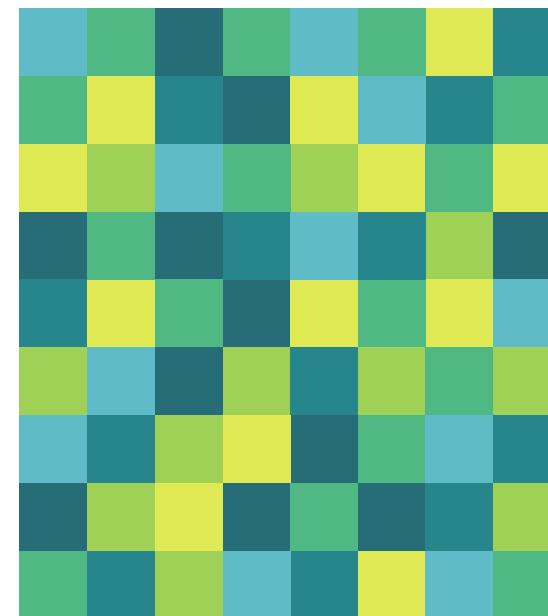


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2. What is “action research”?
3. Examine activities of Port Language Revitalization Project
4. Future issues



## 1. Background



## Background (1)

- All the languages in the Ryukyu Islands are **at risk of disappearing** (Mosely 2010)
- Increase in comprehensive grammar research and grammar sketches  
( Shimoji 2008, Pellard 2009, Hayashi 2013, Niinaga 2014, Harada 2015, Shirata 2016, van der Lubbe 2016, Yokoyama-Tokunaga 2017 and more...)
- Next step must be to **apply that knowledge to language revitalization**

Is a language revitalization research??



## Background (2)

- Language revitalization activities conducted outside of formal research as **social outreach**
- Documentation of activities usually **insufficiently rich** for future researchers to examine
- Need to **share** empirical knowledge, theoretical and methodological frameworks



## Background (3)

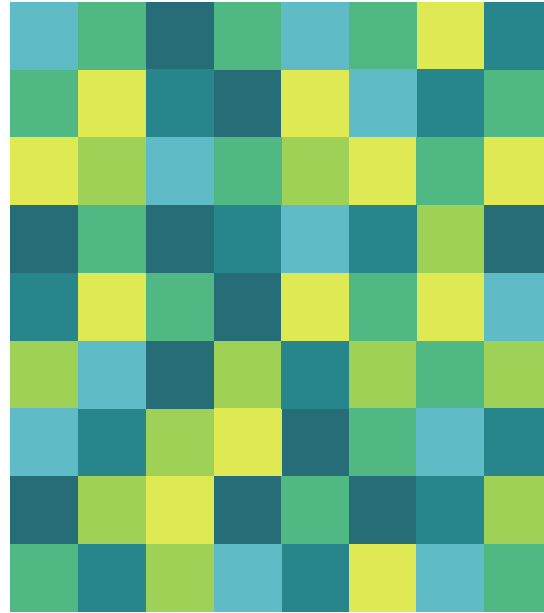
- Researchers have started to share researcher's experiences with language revitalization
  - Poster session at the 104<sup>th</sup> conference of the Dialectological Circle of Japan (May, 2017)
  - Workshop at the 32<sup>nd</sup> conference of the Phonetic Society of Japan (September, 2018)

and so on...



## 2.

### What is action research?



### What is Action Research?

- Aim to solve actual problems in real society and promotes social change
- Was started by Lewin (1946) and applied to various disciplines: socio psychology, education, health care, and nursing.

### What is Action Research?

1. **Highly conscious** that researchers are informed by their own beliefs (Yamori 2013: 13)
2. Assumes researchers and research subjects mutually affect each other, and regards them both as **participants** in the study (Stringer 2013: 14)
3. Seeks effective solutions which works in **specific situation and localized settings** rather than universal contexts (Densin & Lincoln 1994)

### Why Action Research?

- Language revitalization has a **concrete purpose** of maintaining or revitalizing a language
- Not researchers but **local people should play a main role** in order to achieve this purpose
- Need to find **effective solutions** which works in the specific community

“Although many similarities can be found in the causes of language loss, **this does not mean that similar approaches to language revitalization can be taken.** There are too many differences in the political, social, and economic situations facing”

(Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 4)

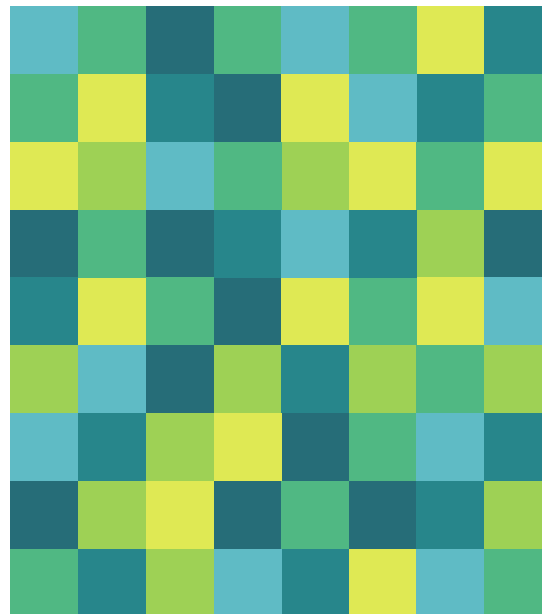


## The role of a researcher in AR

- **Facilitator** who acts as a **catalyst to assist stakeholders** (local people) to define their problems and to monitor and support their activity as they work toward effective resolution of the issues (Stringer 2014: 20)
- Researchers are not experts who **do** research **on** people but one of the participants who have resources and support others to do their activities



### 3. The Port Language Revitalization Project



## The Port Language Revitalization Project



- **Motivate** local people to get interested in traditional languages
- **Empower** them to produce and continue their **own activities** in the future

## The Port Language Revitalization Project

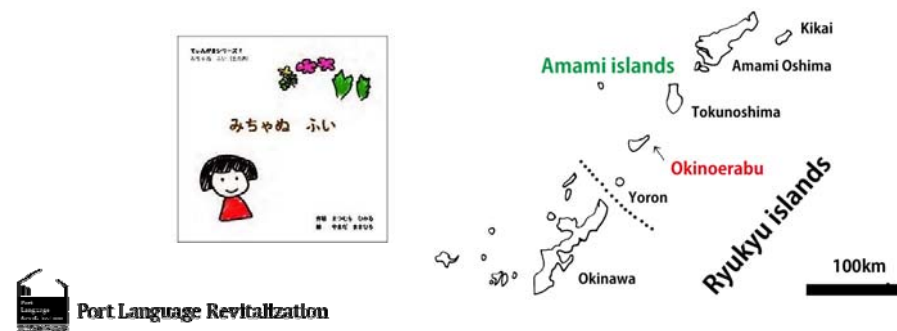
- Share the process of creating materials
- Discuss how to actively use them with local people



Workshops of creating picture books

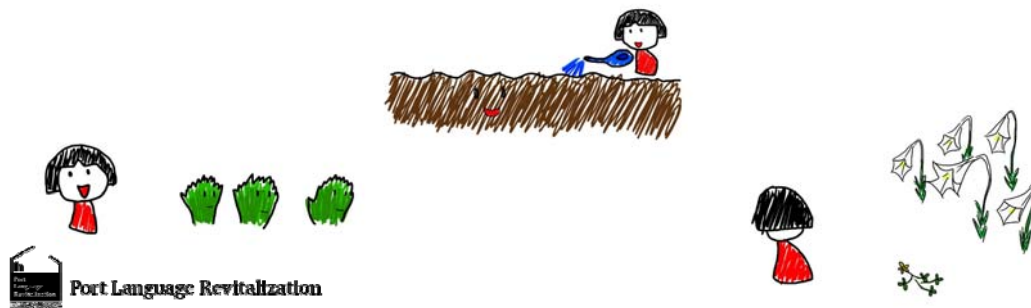
## Picture Book Project (1)

- Created a picture book in Ryukyu-Okinoerabu Island
- Tracked how activities spread after that



## Picture Book Project (2)

- *Michanu Fui* “The Voice of the Land”



## Picture Book Project (3)

Author: Yukie  
Matsumura



- Started with a manuscript originally written in standard Japanese

Author participated in projects:

(1) Collaborative Research by NINJAL, (2) Public seminars by linguists

- She rediscovered the value of her native language and realized the importance of documenting it

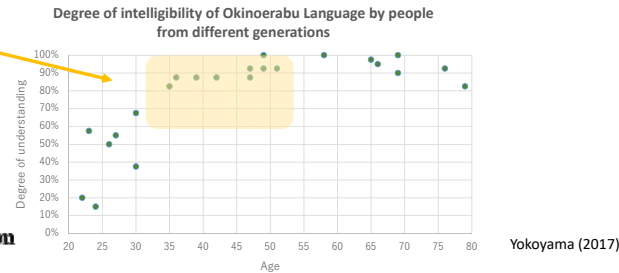
→ She translated the manuscript into Ryukyu-Okinoerabu Language

## Picture book project (4)

- At over 120 pages, became a largest text in Okinoerabu Language
- We planned to create a picture book to encourage **parents generations** (re)learn the Okinoerabu-Language

### Passive speaker

- Can not speak the Okinoerabu Language
- Understand 70%-80% of it



## Picture book project (4)

- We started to collaborate with other experts including an illustrator, book designers, and other researchers

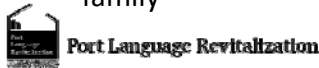


- Published a picture book package includes a picture book, CD and explanation for Okinoerabu Language

## Expansion after creating the picture book (1)

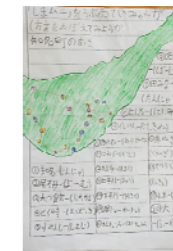
### School (but not school-setting) Project

- Donated 40 picture books to an elementary school
- Discussed with the headmaster and the top of the PTA about using the book
- “Summer Homework” project to create language materials in each family



## Expansion after creating the picture book (2)

- Four families joined our projects and created language materials



## Expansion after creating the picture book (3)

- Workshop at NINJAL



## Their own ongoing activities

- Four families has hold **regular meetings** and study Okinoerabu Language and traditional songs, work on social activities



- They gathered attention and have **started to talk about their projects in their own words** at local conventions

## Some difficulties

- **Coordination with local organizations**

- Failed to respond to personnel changes in local organizations
- Failed to share information with a person who should know it
- Caused some confusion and troubles

- We did not understand the **structure of local organization** and **decision-making processes** and **so failed to identify stakeholders** correctly

## Some difficulties

### Setting the stage for AR (Stringer 2003: 79)

- **Identify stakeholding groups or people**

- Determine the formal structure of relevant organizations
- Identify and communicate with people in positions of influence and authority

- **Ask local participants** about the people who researchers should talk with about the issues and can have an effect on it (“snowballing method”)



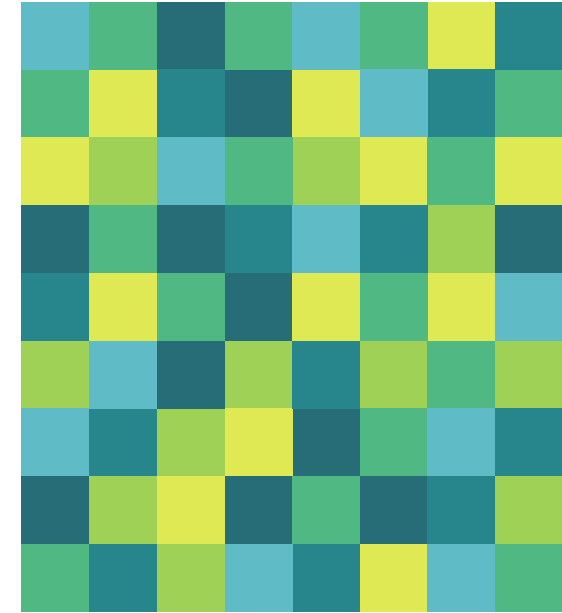
## Moving forward...



Port Language Revitalization

## 4.

### Summary and future issues



Port Language Revitalization

### Summary

- **Action research** can be a promising approach to language revitalization.
- Researchers can act as a **facilitator** to assist local people to resolve problems.
- Need to understand the social mechanisms in the local community, foster understanding among all the stakeholders and proceed with projects as carefully as possible.



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### Future issues

- Document the whole process of projects and their effects including failures and difficulties
  - Future practitioners can examine them
  - Can get predictive knowledge and useful information from it




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## Supported by


 Hakuho Foundation  
11<sup>th</sup> Hakuho Research Grant for Child Education


 DNP Foundation for Cultural Promotion  
Grant for Research on Graphic Culture

 Univer Foundation  
Towards a healthy society and wellbeing

 JSPS Grant-in-aid KAKEN  
Wakate-B #16K16824

JSPS KAKENHI  
Grant-in-Aid for JSPS Fellows 17J04617

 NINJAL Project  
“Description and documentation of endangered languages in Japan” (PI; Nobuko Kibe)

 Sumitomo Life  
10<sup>th</sup> Sumisei Woman Researcher Encouragement Prize

Thank you for listening!  
“Shittai Mihedirodoo”



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