

Kyushu dialects and the difference between Northern and Southern Ryukyuan languages

Shigehisa Karimata

Professor, University of the Ryukyus

It is evident that within the Ryukyuan language group there is a large linguistic gap between the Northern and Southern Ryukyuan languages. However, the origin of the North-South difference within Ryukyuan has not been discussed much thus far. Grammar is more conservative in character compared to lexicon and phonology. When comparing Ryukyuan with the Kyushu dialects, it can be established that some of the features of Southern Ryukyuan date back to Proto-Japano-Ryukyuan, and that Northern Ryukyuan has certain features in common with Kyushu dialects. We argue that the linguistic gap between Northern and Southern Ryukyuan can be attributed to two large-scale migrations from Kyushu to the Ryukyu Islands.

1. Ryukyuan and Japanese

Japanese and Ryukyuan are called sister languages based on the fact that they have many basic words in common and that there are sound correspondences established between the two. Hattori states that “Present Kyoto and Present Shuri (the language of the former capital of the Ryukyu Dynasty) are in a genetic relationship, so that it is possible to give linguistic evidence for their development from proto Japanese” (“Proto Japanese 1” 67) .

The labial plosive */p/ in pJR changed into /ϕ/ in the Central dialect of the Nara Period (710-794 AD) while it is still reflected as /p/ in modern Ryukyuan. Ryukyuan also retains Kakari particles, which were vanishing at the later stage of Heian Period (794-1192AD). Thus, Ryukyuan retains a number of features that were lost in Japanese, allowing the study of Ryukyuan to play an important role in the historical study of Japanese.

2. The Dialectal Difference in the Nara Period and the Kyushu Dialect

During the final phase of the Nara Period, a collection of songs, or *Man'yōshū*, was compiled. The 14th and 20th volumes of *Man'yōshū* contain songs called *azumauta* and *sakimori no uta*, which are helpful for us to have a

basic idea of what *Tōgoku* dialect, or the eastern dialect of that period, was like. When used as a compound stem, the stem ending in /ki/ (otsu) alternates either with /ku/ or with /ko/, as illustrated in (1). Hattori reconstructed the former as *ui and the latter as *əi for pJR (“Proto Japanese 8” 101). The latter also emerges when deriving a transitive stem from an intransitive stem, as in (2). It is a well-known fact that there were two /ki/ sounds, *kou* and *otsu*, in the central dialect of the Nara period.

- (1) *tuki* ‘moon’ → *tuku-jo* ‘moonlit night’
 ki ‘tree’ → *ko-dati* ‘clump of trees’
 (2) *oki* ‘rising’ → *okosi* ‘raising’

The vowels *ui and *əi correspond to *i and *e in pR respectively. This is illustrated in (3).

(3) Central dialect of Nara Period		pJR		pR		Modern Shuri
[ki] (<i>kou</i>)	<	*ki	>	*ki	>	[tʃi] /ci/
[kii] (<i>otsu</i>)	<	*kui	>	*ki	>	[tʃi] /ci/
[kii] (<i>otsu</i>)	<	*kəi	>	*ke	>	[kji] /ki/

Hattori pointed out that in the Central dialect, the verb *oku* ‘rise’ inflects as *oki* (otsu) in the *ren’yō* (infinitive) form and in the negative form whereas the same verb inflects as *oke* in the dialects of the Chikuzen, Buzen, Bungo and Hyūga areas (which henceforth are collectively called the North-central dialects), a fact that he regards as ample evidence for the analysis that the vowel raising that occurred in the Central dialect of the Nara Period did not occur in these dialects (“Proto Japanese 8” 101). Hattori notes as follows: We find examples of /ke/ (otsu) ‘tree’ in place names of Buzen and Chikugo and in *Sakimori no uta* of Kazusa and Shimotsuke. As for *okeru* ‘rise’, we find the form *oke-* in Chikuzen, Buzen, Bungo and Hyuga, and *ogeru* in Iwate (“Proto Japanese 8” 101).

Table 1 summarizes the description of Kyuushuu Hougen Gakkai (154), which demonstrates that the stem-final /i/ of the negative form and the *ren’yō* form (as found in past stem) of *oku* ‘rise’ in the Central dialect, corresponds to *oke* in the north-east dialects such as Miyazaki and Ōita (249.324).

Table 1

Conjugation of *oku* ‘rise’ in the northeast dialects of Kyushu

‘rise’	Basic	Negative	Intentional	Imperative	Conditional	Past
Miyazaki	ok-uru	oke-N	ok-u:	ok-i:	ok-ureba	oke-ta
Ōita	ok-uru	oke-N	okj-u:	ok-i:	ok-urja:	oke-ta

This pattern also holds in other verbs like *oti-* ‘fall’ and *ori-* ‘go down’ (i.e., verbs of /i/ type mixed conjugation). Note that in these dialects, /u/ and /i/ also occur in the other conjugated forms. That is, the /i/ type mixed conjugation is integrated to the /e/ type mixed conjugation. On the other hand, the /i/ type mixed conjugation also changes to the /i/ type weak conjugation pattern. In the other dialects of Kyushu, the /i/ type mixed conjugation pattern and the /e/ type mixed conjugation pattern changed to the /i/ type weak conjugation pattern and the /e/ type weak conjugation pattern respectively.

In Ryukyuan, /e/ occurs throughout the conjugated forms of verbs of the /i/ type mixed conjugation in the Central dialect, such as *oku* ‘rise’, *otiru* ‘fall’, and *oriru* ‘go down’. That is, in Ryukyuan, these verbs are of the /e/ type weak conjugation (see table 2). In Ryukyuan, the /e/ type mixed conjugation in the Central dialect also corresponds to the /i/ type weak conjugation pattern.

Table 2

Conjugation of *oku* ‘rise’ in Ryukyuan

	Basic	Conditional	Negative	Past	Imperative
Old Japanese	ok-u	ok-ureba	oki-zu	oki-tari	oki-jo
Modern Japanese	oki-ru	oki-reba	oki-nai	oki-ta	oki-ro
Shuri (Okinawan)	uki-juN	uki-re:	uki-raN	uki-taN	uki-re:
Hirara (Miyako)	uki-z	uki-riba	uki-n	uki-ta:	uki-ru

Based on Hattori’s hypothesis that **ɔi* in pJR changed to /i/ (otsu) in the Central dialect of the Nara Period and to /e/ in proto Kyushu-Ryukyuan (pKR) (“Proto Japanese 8” 101), the current state of affairs of Kyushu and Ryukyu is summarized as follows:

- (4) a. The /i/ type mixed conjugation was integrated to the /e/ type mixed conjugation in pKR.
- b. In certain groups of Kyushu dialects, the /e/ type mixed conjugation pattern changed to the /e/ type weak conjugation pattern while the /i/ type mixed conjugation pattern changed to the /i/ type weak conjugation pattern. This emergent pattern spread to the whole Kyushu area.
- c. The /e/ type mixed conjugation in the northeast Kyushu dialects is viewed as a retained feature of pKR.
- d. In pR, which diverged from pKR, the /e/ type mixed conjugation changed to the /e/ type weak conjugation.

Verbs that correspond to the verbs of the /i/ type mixed conjugation in the Central dialect have /e/ stem-finally in Ryukyuan and the northeast dialects of Kyushu, and the /e/ alternates with /o/ when deriving transitive verbs, as in:

- (5) *ote* ‘fall’ → *otosi* ‘make sth fall’
ore ‘descend’ → *orosi* ‘make sth descend’

This indicates that the distinctions between the *kou* and *otsu* types that must have been found in various syllables, including /tI/ and /rI/ (where /I/ is filled by either type of vowel) in pRJ, have been lost except in the syllables /kI/, /gI/, /pI/, /bI/ and /mI/ in the Central dialect, and that the distinction in pRJ has been retained in the northeast dialects of Kyushu and in Ryukyuan.

3. Onbin

The strong conjugation in the Central dialect of the mid Heian period is characterized by a morphophonemic process called *Onbin*, where (1) the inflectional-suffix-initial vowel or (2) the stem-final consonant underwent deletion in several conjugated forms, such as past forms. Onbin that involves (1) falls into two types, Soku-Onbin and Hatsu-Onbin. In Soku-Onbin, the consonant cluster that arises from the Onbin process (i.e., a cluster that consists of a stem-final consonant and the now suffix-initial consonant) forms a geminate consonant cluster (conventionally written as /QC/, where /Q/ is identical to /C/). In Hatsu-Onbin, the stem-final consonant changes to a homorganic nasal, giving rise to the partial geminate /N+/C/. Onbin that involves (2) falls into two types, i-Onbin, where the stem-final consonant

changes to /i/, and u-Onbin, where the stem-final consonant changes to /u/.

In NR languages, the verb stems of strong conjugation that ended in /k/, /g/, or /s/ underwent i-Onbin; those that ended in /m/, /b/, or /n/ underwent Hatsu-Onbin; those that ended in /t/ underwent Soku-Onbin; and those that end in /w/ underwent u-Onbin. All these stems additionally underwent the deletion of the stem-final consonant, except for the verb stems that ended in /t/.

Kyushu dialects are similar to NR in that verb stems of strong conjugation that ended in /s/ underwent i-Onbin and those that ended in /h/ underwent u-Onbin.

An examination of *Omorosōshi*, which is a collection of traditional songs and was compiled by the Ryukyu Kingdom (the first volume published in 1531), reveals that the language of *Omorosōshi* (henceforth the *Omorō* language) had the same Onbin features that are found in Shuri. That is, in *Omorō*, all the attested Onbin patterns (Soku-Onbin, i-Onbin, u-Onbin, Hatsu-Onbin) were present, together with the deletion of the stem-final segments (N, Q, i and u). In *Omorō*, the consonant that follows the high front vowel *i was regularly palatalized. The stems that underwent i-Onbin, i.e., the stems that ended in *i, also palatalized the initial consonant of the inflectional suffix, while the other Onbin verbs did not undergo palatalization, indicating that Onbin occurred before the regular palatalization occurred. This and the additional fact that the stem-final segments of Onbin verbs (N, Q, i) underwent deletion as in Shuri and other NR languages enable us to suspect that Onbin occurred no later than 1531, which was followed by palatalization after *i and then the stem-final segment deletion.

On the other hand, there is no Onbin feature in SR languages, in sharp contrast to Kyushu dialects and NR languages. The presence or absence of Onbin features thus serves to characterize the fundamental difference between NR and Kyushu dialects on the one hand and SR on the other. A reasonable hypothesis is that pKR, which must have lacked Onbin features, spread southward to SR before a language group that had the same Onbin features that are found in Kyushu dialects came southward as far as NR.

Table 3

Onbin forms in Japanese and Ryukyuan: a comparison

	k stem	g stem	s stem	t stem	b stem	m stem	p stem
	kak-itari	kog-itari	sas-itari	mote-itari	job-itari	jom-itari	kaϕ-itari
Japanese	kai-ta	koi-da	sas-ita	moQ-ta	joN-da	joN-da	kaQ-ta
Kyushu	kai-ta	koi-da	sai-ta	moQ-ta	joN-da	joN-da	ko:-ta
<i>Omoro</i>	ka-teï	ko-dzi	sa-teï	mote-iteï	ʔasu-di	tsu-di	nega-ti
Amami	ka-teï	ku-dzi	sa-teï	muQ-teï	ʔasi-di	tsi-di	niga-ti
Shuri	kateaN	kuzjaN	sateaN	muQeaN	ju-daN	judaN	ko:taN
Hirara	kak-staz	kug-ztaz	sas-taz	mut-staz	jub-ztaz	jum-taz	ko:-taz
Ishigaki	kak-uda	kug-uda	asub-uda	muts-uda	jub-uda	jum-uda	ka-uda

4. The *siari* Form

Japanese has a narrative converb called the *site* form (or *-te* form), which is used to encode sequential events and other temporal/aspectual meanings. The *site* form also serves as the auxiliary verb component of an aspectual or benefactive complex predicate. NR languages have cognate forms of the *site* form, whereas SR languages do not have cognate form of the *site* form; instead, SR languages have what is called the *siari* form as a functional equivalent to the *site* form.

It is noted that the *siari* form is also found in NR languages (see table 4). Shuri and other central-southern Okinawan dialects, for example, have the *siari* form, which functions as the predicate of a subordinate clause. In the Iheya dialect and the Izena dialect of northern Okinawan, the *siari* form also functions as the auxiliary, but there is no *site* form in these dialects.

- (6) *ʔamaNzi ʔasine: hwa:* ‘Go there and play.’ (Gakiya dialect of Iheya)
bo:si hauje: ʔaQcjuN. ‘walk wearing a hat.’ (Gakiya dialect of Iheya)
hunu ʔisi kije: Nri. ‘Try kicking this stone.’ (Gakiya dialect of Iheya)
ʔnama ʔami hujo:N. ‘It is raining now.’ (Shimajiri dialect of Iheya)

Table 4

The *siari* forms in NR and SR

	write	play	get up	descend	wash	resemble
Hirara (SR)	kaki:	aspi:	uki:	uri:	arai:	ni:
Ishigaki (SR)	kaki:	asʔbi:	uke:	ure:	araja:	nija:
Shuri (NR)	katʃa:i	ʔaʃiba:i	ʔukija:i	ʔurija:i	ʔaraja:i	nija:i

Iheya (NR)	katʃe:	ʔafine:	ʔukie:	ʔurie:	ʔarae:	nie:
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Omoro (see section 3) had both the *site* form and *siari* form.

- (7) a. *anziosoini jo sofete miojase*. ‘Give the world to our Aji (ruler).’ (Volume 1, 36)
 b. *tojomu ofokimi ja momosima sorofejari miojase*. ‘Let Ofokimi (the oracle) give a hundred islands altogether (to *Ajiosoi*, or the king).’ (Volume 4, 176)

The fact that the *siari* forms are found in the Iheya (NR), *Omoro* (NR), and SR languages indicates that it existed in pR, and the current *siari* forms in these languages are a retention of the pR *siari* form.

Table 5

A comparison of NR and SR with respect to the availability of the *site* and *siari* forms

	Function	Shuri	Iheya	Hirara	Ishigaki
<i>site</i> form	Subordinate	○	×	×	×
	Auxiliary	○	×	×	×
<i>siari</i> form	Subordinate	○	○	○	○
	Auxiliary	×	○	○	○

To sum up, the *site* form is found in modern NR languages and in *Omoro*. The *site* form in NR has Onbin forms, just as in the case of Kyushu dialects. By contrast, all SR languages and Iheya (NR) lack the *site* form but have the *siari* form instead. Both forms are found in central-southern Okinawan dialects.

These facts enable us to make the following hypothesis. That is, the *siari* form existed in both NR and SR before the *site* form was introduced to NR areas via Kyushu. This can lead to two possible situations, i.e., a situation where the older *siari* form and the new *site* form may coexist in an NR language, and the other situation where the *site* form failed to spread to certain NR languages. The first situation holds in central-southern Okinawan, where the *siari* form is still found in subordinate clauses. The second situation is arguably true for

Iheya-Izena, where there is no *site* form.

A similar distributional pattern that holds true for the *site* and *siari* forms is observed for other grammatical constructions in Ryukyuan. For example, the limitative case ‘as far as’ in Ryukyuan languages has different forms in NR and SR, with two historically different sources. Miyako (SR) has the case form *gami*, whereas NR languages generally have *madi*, which is cognate with *made* in Japanese. *Omoro* had *gjame*, which is argued to be cognate with *gami* in SR. Another example comes from the infinitive form of the negative verb: it is *gutu* (a cognate of *goto* in Kyushu dialects) in most NR languages, whereas it is *dana* in *Omoro*, SR and Okinoerabu (NR).

5. Aspect: Dichotomic vs. Trichotomic System

The perfective form of a verb in Okinawan and Amami developed from the infinitive (or the ren’yo form in traditional Japanese grammar) followed by the existential *woru*, as illustrated in (8). This structure is parallel to the progressive aspectual form *sijoru* (*si* + *oru*) in Kyushu dialects.

- (8) *jomi wori* > *jumiuri* > *jumjuri* > *jumjui*
jomi womu > *jumi um* > *jumjum* > *jumjuN*
jomi womu > *jumi uN* > *jumjuN* > *jumiN*

In Okinawan and Amami, the imperfective (progressive) form of a verb developed from the *site* form (see section 4) followed by the existential *woru*, as illustrated in (9). This structure is parallel to the completive form *sitjoru* (*site* + *oru*) of Kyushu dialects.

- (9) *jomitew ori* > *juNdi uri* > *judi uri* > *judui*
jomite womu > *juNdi um* > *judi um* > *juduN*

Thus, the aspectual system of NR languages is based on the Kyushu system, which is characterized by a trichotomic contrast of aspects: perfective (basic) vs. imperfective vs. completive.

The imperfective form in NR designates the progressive and resultative aspects when the verb is an activity verb and a change-of-state verb respectively. This is similar to *siteiru* form in eastern Japanese dialects (including Standard

Japanese).¹

- (10) *warabinu micikara ʔaQcjo:N*. ‘A child is walking on the street.’
(Activity verb: progressive)
ʔamaNkai Qcjunu taQcjo:N. ‘Someone is standing (lit. Someone has
stood up) there’ (Change-of-state verb: resultative)

In contrast to NR languages, the perfective form of SR languages (Miyako and Yaeyama) does not contain the existential *oru*.² The imperfective form of SR languages developed from the *siari* form followed by the existential *oru*. The aspectual system of SR languages is dichotomic, perfective vs. imperfective (progressive), as in the case of eastern Japanese dialects.

- (11) *psto: sn. asga na:ju nukus*. ‘A man dies, but leaves his name.’
jukja: atsan naztska: kja:ri. ‘Snow will disappear tomorrow.’

SR and Eastern Japanese are similar in that the imperfective form designates progressive aspect in the case of activity verbs and resultative aspect in the case of change-of-state verbs. However, they differ in the historical development of the imperfective form: the lexical source for the auxiliary verb component of the imperfective form of Eastern Japanese is *wiru*, whereas that of SR is *oru* (like Kyushu and NR). What makes SR unique is that it makes use of the *siari* form rather than the *sie* form for the lexical verb component of the imperfective form.

- (12) *jarabinudu parinu nako: azki: u:*. ‘A child is walking in the field.’ (Nobaru dialect of Miyako)
ku:mujanudu sni: u:. ‘The cockroach is dead.’ (Nobaru dialect of Miyako)
jarabinu hataginu naka aragiN. ‘A child is walking in the field.’ (Shika dialect of Ishigaki)
madunu akin. ‘The window is open.’ (Shika dialect of Ishigaki)

The aspectual system of Iheya-Izena (NR) is trochotomic, as in the case of other NR languages, but differs from the latter in that the imperfective form is made up of the *siari* form and the *oru*, like SR languages. Like SR and Eastern

Japanese, the imperfective form designates progressive aspect in the case of activity verbs and resultative aspect in the case of change-of-state verbs.

- (13) *ʔnama ʔami hujo:N*. ‘It is raining now.’ (Shimajiri dialect of Iheya)
ʔnaNma ʔaminu hujo:N. ‘It is raining now.’ (Moromi dialect of Izena)

In summary, SR has the dichotomic aspectual system, and there is an indication that NR used to have the dichotomic system. A reasonable hypothesis is that pR had the dichotomic system, and that in NR it was rearranged by the introduction of the new trichotomic system via Kyushu, leading to a ‘surface’ trichotomic system (i.e., trichotomy only in terms of form). The NR aspectual system is still argued to be a dichotomic system at deeper, functional level, which is a retained feature of pR and is found in SR and in Eastern Japanese.

6. The Verb *nafu*: A Common Feature with Old Tōgoku Dialect

In Japanese, the adjective *nai* ‘not exist’ is used to designate the non-existence of an inanimate subject. In Ryukyuan, the negative existential word is a(n irregular) verb *neN*, not an adjective.

Adjectives in NR languages and the Yaeyama language group of SR are characterized by the suffix *-sa*, which derives a kind of infinitive stem from an adjective root. The derived stem with *-sa* then takes the existential *aN*, and the latter is grammaticalized to varying degrees. By contrast, adjectives in the Miyako language group of SR consist of the infinitive suffix *-ku* attached to an adjective root and the existential *az* that follows the infinitive stem. Miyako dialects also have another adjectival form, which is created by reduplicating an adjective root. These morphological features and inflectional patterns easily distinguish adjectives from negative existential words in any given Ryukyuan dialect.

Table 6

Adjective and negative existential: a comparison

	Tatsugō (Amami; NR)	Naha (Okinawan; NR)	Shimozato (Miyako; SR)	Shika-Ishigaki (Yaeyama; SR)
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‘not exist’ (verb)	nëN	ne:N	nja:n	ne:nu
‘high’ (adjective)	takasan, takasai	takasaN	takakaz, taka:taka	takasaN

The existential verb *uN*, which designates the existence of animate referents, serves as a lexical source for an imperfective (progressive) aspectual auxiliary whereas the existential verb *aN*, which designates the existence of inanimate referents, serves as a lexical source for a resultative aspectual auxiliary. The negative existential verb for inanimate referents (e.g., *ne:N*, *nja:n* and *ne:nu* [see table 6]) may serve as a lexical source for a completive aspectual auxiliary.³

- (14) *damato:kaNditei ?umuto:taeiga ?asakoga na: ?itei ne:N.*
‘(I) wanted to keep it secret, but Asako has already told.’
ku:natei: azzattanibadu kairja: kiei: nja:n.
‘(He) wasn’t told not to come, so he has come.’

There is no Japanese dialect in which the negative existential word for inanimate referents is a verb rather than an adjective, an important fact that distinguishes Ryukyuan from Japanese. One exception is the Tōgoku dialect of the Nara period, where there was a negative existential verb, *nafu*.

7. Lexical Differences

This section compares the lexicons of Ryukyuan and Japanese, although one needs to be extremely careful when dealing with lexical comparisons for historical linguistic purposes since vocabulary is easily borrowed from one language to another.

pR had a pair of kinship terms for referring to siblings, **wekeri* and **wonari*, a pair that is not found in Japanese, including Kyushu dialects. The former is used when a sister refers to a brother (either elder or younger) whereas the latter is used when a brother refers to a sister (either elder or younger). Ryukyuan languages also have a word for an elder brother that is used exclusively by his younger brother and another word for an elder sister which is used exclusively by her younger sister, though these words show considerable dialectal variation. The term for younger siblings is **ututu* in pR, which is used

without respect to the sex of the referent.

Like **wekeri* and **wonar*, **tendau* ‘the sun’ and **iwako* ‘oal’ are words that can be reconstructed for pR but do not have their cognate forms in Kyushu dialects. It is noted, however, that the Nakanoshima dialect of the Tokara Islands, which lie between the Amami Islands and Yakushima Island, does have the cognates *tendo* and *ijako*.

8. Conclusion

It is a widely shared view that pR speakers went southward via Kyushu. This paper argued for the possibility that pKR existed before pR branched off, i.e., before the Nara period. Through our investigation of the grammatical differences between Northern and Southern Ryukyuan, we were able to confirm the features that Kyushu dialects and Ryukyuan languages have in common.

If the group of people that migrated to the Southern Ryukyus originated from Kyushu, the language of that group of people must have been different from present-day Kyushu dialects in that it lacked *onbin*, had a dichotomic aspect system, and possessed a negative existential verb. Supposing that this group migrated south from Kyushu, this would mean that there used to be a speech group in southern Kyushu that spoke a language markedly different from present-day Kyushu dialects.

Grammar tends to be less prone to change than lexicon and phonology. If one takes into account that there is a north-south difference in grammar in Ryukyuan, then it can be considered that the group of pR speakers that migrated from Kyushu to the Northern Ryukyus had a different language from the pR speakers that migrated to the Southern Ryukyus. The group of pR speakers that migrated to the Northern Ryukyus must have stayed there without moving further to the Southern Ryukyus. Furthermore, one can consider that migration to the Northern Ryukyus must have been largescale, but apparently there was not enough interaction with the Southern Ryukyus to cause a shift towards a more Kyushu-like language.

A detailed comparative study of the entire lexicon and phonology of Ryukyuan and Kyushu dialects will be necessary to verify the hypotheses above.

Appendix: This presentation is part of the preliminary results of the

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¹ Kudo analyses the aspectual systems of Shuri and Yoron as the complex system of the dichotomic eastern Japanese type and the trichotomic western Japanese type (520-28).

² The perfective (simple present) in Miyako corresponds to the infinitive (ren’yo) or adnominal (rentai) form, whereas the perfective in Yaeyama corresponds to the infinitive or adnominal plus /N/.

³ The completive aspect designates the completion of an event or a change of state, as in *nudi ne:N* ‘has drunk up’ and *?utiti ne:N* ‘has dropped’. The completive aspectual form contrasts in tense, as in:

na:ma teika:ri:rumuNnu hititi ne:NtaN

‘(It) was still usable, but (my younger brother) had thrown (it) away’.

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