

Synchronic and diachronic issues in Ryukyuan phonology

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The Ryukyuan dialects are spoken in the southernmost areas of Japan, in the archipelago between Kyushu and Taiwan. Even though the population of the speakers is much smaller than that of those speaking mainland Japanese dialects, the Ryukyuan dialects can provide some very important clues for the diachronic studies of Japanese. It has been pointed out that the merger patterns of Otsu-rui vowels observed throughout the Ryukyus clearly shows that they were separated before documents appeared in the mainland in the 7th century AD (Arisaka 1934, Hattori 1932, briefly summarized in Matsumori 1995), although the exact date of separation between proto-mainland Japanese and proto-Ryukyuan has not yet been totally clarified. In addition, it has recently been made clear that the patterns of split and mergers of accentual classes suggest that they are not a sub-branch of any of the major groups of the mainland Japanese dialects (including those of Kyushu dialects) (Matsumori 1998, 2000, 2012).

Typologically significant phonological features have been reported so far, which are largely unresearched. Undoubtedly because the dialects were isolated from the mainland and developed independently, the dialects of the Ryukyus exhibit diverse phonological features not observable in many dialects in the mainland Japanese including Standard Japanese (SJ). Focusing on the northern Ryukyuan (especially on the Amami archipelago), this presentation briefly deals with such characteristic features of the phonology of the Ryukyuan dialects, such as post-coronal vowel centralization of /u/ (SJ *cura* (face), *cuno* (horn) vs. **Shodon** *tlra*, *tlno*), and further fronting of /I/ to /i/ (SJ *usu* (mortar), *icucu* (five) vs. **Masana** *usji*, *icjicji*); vowel raising of /e/ and /o/ (SJ *ame* (rain), *oto* (sound) vs. **Koniya** *amI*, *ut^hu*); aspiration of obstruents after non-high vowels (SJ *kome* (rice), *te* (hand) vs. **Shodon** *k^huml:*, *t^hI:*), and further spirantization of /k/ into /h/ (SJ *kagami*, *kosji* vs. **Kunigami** *hagami:*, *husji*). (Shodon and Koniya are dialects spoken in the southern part of Amami-Oshima, while Masana and Kunigami are spoken in the island of Okinoerabu-jima).

The presentation then focuses on the aspect of accentuation, emphasizing that instead of *Ruibetsu-goi*, a list of vocabulary developed for the diachronic accentual research for Japanese dialects which has been useful as a descriptive tool for a number of dialects in Japan, a new type of categorization (Classes A, B, and C) will be necessary for fully-fledged descriptive studies of languages of the Ryukyus. The words belonging to each category will be called “**Keiretsubetsu-goi** (categorized vocabulary).” Although some proposals were made with regard to the type of accentual systems in Proto-Ryukyuan (e.g., Matsumori 2001), the presentation will emphasize that it is difficult to make any conclusion on the type of accentual systems, unless more data are collected systematically based on *Keiretsubetsu-goi*.

As a sample of how the *Keiretsubetsu-goi* functions for the descriptive studies of the Ryukyus, this presentation focuses on the dialects of the southern parts of Amami-Oshima, examples of which are Koniya and Shodon, and show that this vocabulary list is useful for finding the reasons for the lengthened vowels for these dialects.

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