

What Hachijoan can reveal about Eastern Old Japanese poetry, Proto-Japanese, and Proto-Japonic

Category: historical linguistics, phonology/phonetics

The Hachijoan language is comprised of at least seven dialects spoken on Hachijō-jima, Hachijō-kojima and Aogashima. It is the last direct descendant of Eastern Old Japanese (EOJ), which is attested in the 8th century CE. Based on historical records it most likely descends from the Idu or Sagamu dialect of EOJ. While still very much understudied, recent publications by Kaneda (2001, 2005) and Yamada (2010) have shed light on this fascinating group of dialects. It has long been known that Hachijoan contains some important retentions from Proto-Japanese, the common ancestor of Western and Eastern Old Japanese. However, linguistic literature rarely goes beyond mentioning its adjectival verb adnominal suffix *-ke* and verbal adnominal suffix *-o*, which descend from Proto-Japanese **-ke* and **-o*, respectively. Furthermore, Proto-Japanese retentions only found in Hachijoan have yet to be described.

This talk will cover three topics. First, I will discuss a number of words in Hachijoan that give new insight into words in the EOJ poetry attested in *Man'yōshū* books 14 and 20, such as *mama* 'cliff' and *atayami* 'sudden stomach pains'. Next, I will discuss retentions in Hachijoan from Proto-Japonic, the common ancestor of Proto-Ryukyuan and Proto-Japanese, shared with Ryukyuan but not attested in Eastern Old Japanese, such as Hachijoan *mija* 'earth' and Okinawan *ncha* 'id.'. Lastly, I will discuss unraised vowels from Proto-Japanese only found in Hachijoan that possibly also go back to Proto-Japonic, such as those in *kuzoreru* 'crumble' and *memezume* 'earthworm'. Here I will also demonstrate that the mid-vowels **e* and **o* were more prevalent in Proto-Japanese than previously thought.

Ryukyuan data is undeniably a crucial part of any reconstruction of Proto-Japonic and thankfully much work is being done on those dialects by linguists today. One aim of this talk is to show Japonic linguists that they should take Hachijoan as seriously as Ryukyuan, because both are sister languages to Japanese that hold important clues to the reconstruction of Proto-Japonic.

References

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