

Standardization and Dialect Leveling in Tokunoshima*

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1. Introduction

The island of Tokunoshima of the Amami Archipelago in Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan is known for its high dialectal variation, similar to that of many other small islands of the Ryukyu group. This is a fact confirmed by a geolinguistic survey of the whole island conducted by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Tokyo in 1975-1976. Our research group has followed up on this prior study amid conditions of accelerated dialectal loss. Our goal has been to produce a comprehensive record of the dialect of Asama, one particular locality of Tokunoshima and also to describe ongoing language change on the island. Today we will report the linguistic variation and change on the island based on the recent surveys.

2. Background

The 1975-1976 geolinguistic survey revealed its high dialectal variation on the island. The most prevailing distribution patterns of linguistics features were found out, with most focus on lexical and phonological variation. Figure 1 shows regional variation based on the interpretation of this survey results. First, new words have been spreading from the eastern town to the western town or to the southern town. Second, the oldest words are found in the northern area and in the southern

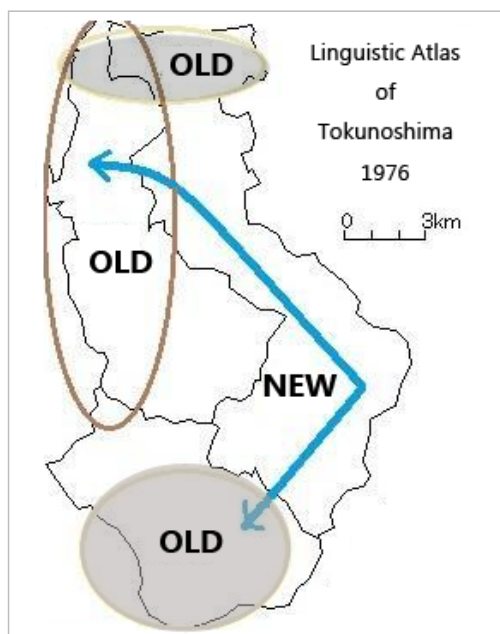


Figure 1: Lexical distribution patterns in Tokunoshima

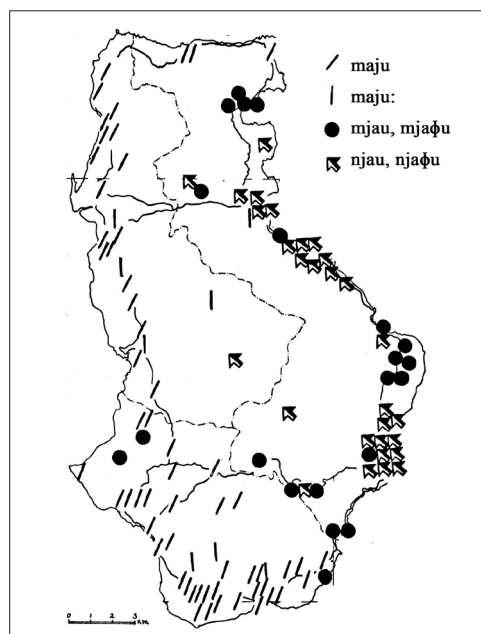


Figure 2: Map for 'Cat'
(Sibata T. et al. (1977))

area. Third, older words are often found in the western area. Figure 2 is one of the maps that show the distribution patterns from T. Sibata et al (1977).

3. The 2012 survey and its results

We have previously published a multimedia dictionary based on a dialect corpus (T. Okamura et al 2006 and 2009), which includes various data and studies on morphology and is useful as a dialect database. This is a dictionary of a traditional dialect. The 2012 survey, conducted using a face-to-face interview, targeted at men and women from 30s to 50s since special focus was given to the variation and change in phonology and morphology expected in the younger generation.

3.1 Phonological variation and change

3.1.1 Central vowels

Traditional Tokunoshima dialects have seven vowels in total including two central vowels /I/ and /E/ as in /mI:/ ‘eye’ or /mE:/ ‘front’. (The central vowel [i] expressed as ‘I’ above: thus sI [sI] and sjI [sjI] include the central vowel.) In the language of the younger generation, the two central vowels were lost: /I/ merged into /i/ and /E/ merged into /e/. Thus now young people have a system of only five vowels which is the same as in Standard Japanese.

Traditionally, there is a regional phonological variation as shown in Table 1. Thus, [sjI] , [sI] or [sjI] are used for /se/. According to the 2012 survey, variants of /se/ are [sjI] and [se] and do not include either [sjI] or [sI]. It seems that central vowels are rarely used, and 91% of informants use [sjI] while 9 % (actually three persons aged 36, 41, and 43 respectively) use [se].

Area	/sa/	/si/	/su/	/se/	/so/
North	sa / sja	sI		sjI	sju
South	sa	sjI	sI		su
New Trend	sa	sjI			su

Table 1: Regional variation of phonological correspondences in Tokunoshima (Fukushima 2011)

3.1.2 Glottalized sounds

Traditional Tokunoshima dialects have glottalized vowels, semi-vowels and consonants (M. Sawaki 2001): the distinction between vowels and semi-vowels with or without a glottal stop, as in /waN/ ‘I’ (without a glottal stop) and /Wa:/ ‘pig’ (with a glottal stop); and a distinction between consonants with or without glottalization, as in /ta:/ ‘eagle’ (without glottalization) and /Ta:cI/ ‘two’ (with glottalization). According to the 2012 survey, the younger generation now have glottalization only in a limited number of words. Frequently used words such as /Wa:/ ‘pig’ and /Ja:/

‘you Informal’ have glottalization, while /ma:/ is more often used for ‘horse’ than /Ma:/ because one rarely sees horses in Tokunoshima. As for glottalized consonants, 64 % use [Wa:] for ‘pig’.

3.2 Morphological variation and change

3.2.1 Verb adverbial forms

There is a special usage of verbal forms in Tokunoshima. In Standard Japanese, adverbial forms of verbs (ren'yokei) cannot be used to end a sentence.

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) watasi-wa iki-masu. | *watasi-wa iki. |
| I Topic go Formal | I Topic go Adverbial |
| ‘I will go.’ | ‘I will go.’ |

However, in Tokunoshima dialect, adverbial forms of verbs can be used to end a sentence.

- | |
|----------------------|
| (2) waN-ja 'iki. |
| I Topic go Adverbial |
| ‘I will go.’ |

Based on the 2012 survey, a linguistic map of ‘DERUKA: Will your wife join?’ was drawn (Figure 3). Two types of adverbial forms have been found. The older form /'izji/ is used only at a couple of separate localities, whereas the newer form /'izjiri/ prevails throughout the island. Also, an adverbial form /deri/ is unique as this is made of the Standard Japanese stem /der-/ instead of the traditional dialectal stem /'izj-/. This is one of verb conjugation innovations or ‘reinterpretation’.

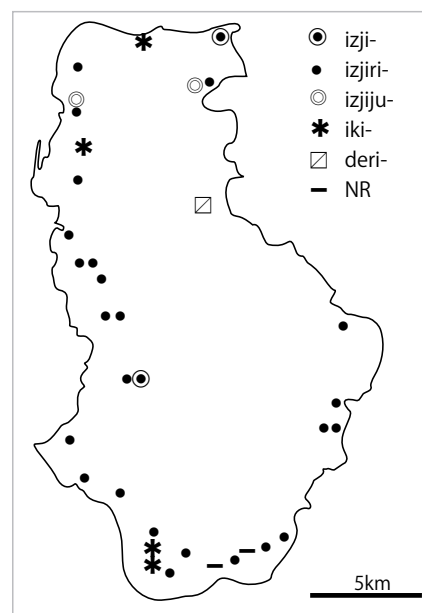


Figure 3: ‘Will your wife join?’
(Survey 2012)

3.2.2 Honorific forms

The 2012 survey has found that the younger generation have failed to learn complicated verb forms such as traditional honorific forms. Figure 4 is a map of ‘IKAREMASUKA Will you go? Formal’. In the map, /-dareN/ and /-dani/ are forms of politeness and /moi/ and /mo:ri/ are forms of respect. They are still used, but several informants responded with forms without honorifics (small circles plotted in Figure 4). Also, four informants gave no response. They said, ‘I use Standard Japanese when I talk to seniors,’ ‘I cannot use dialect properly with seniors as we were prohibited from using dialect at school as education of Standard Japanese was promoted at that time,’ or ‘I can only use dialect when talking informally to peers.’ Figure 5 is a map of ‘IKIMASEN I will not go. Formal’. Less than half of the informants responded with /-are:raN/, a negative form of politeness

Figure 4: ‘Will you go?’ [Formal]
(Survey 2012)

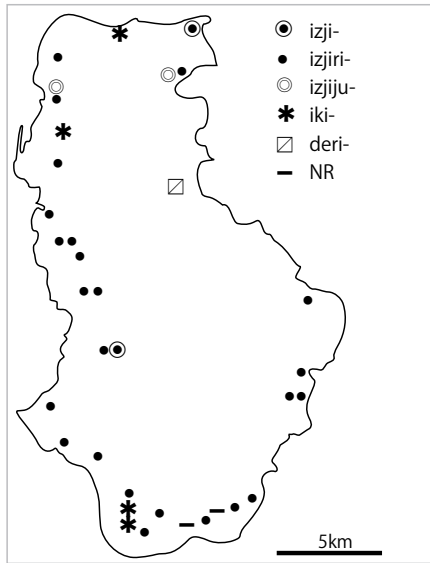


Figure 5: ‘I will not go.’ [Formal]
(Survey 2012)

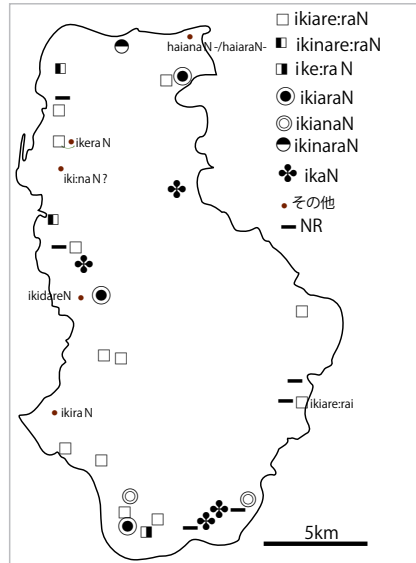


Figure 6: ‘Thank you.’ [Formal]
(Survey 2012)

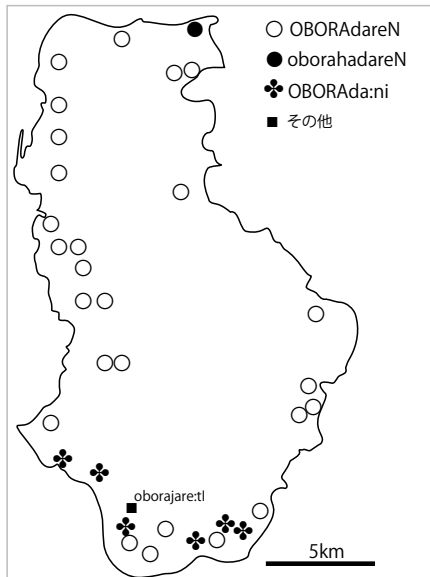
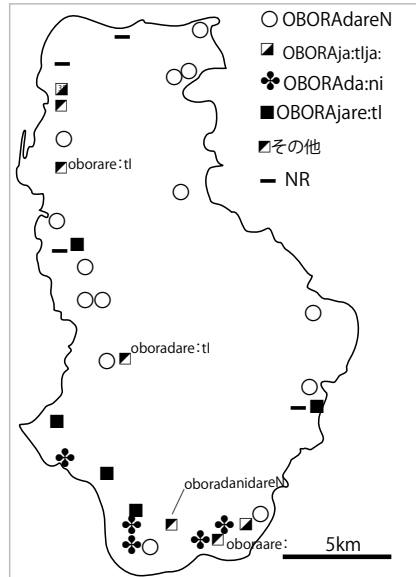


Figure 7: ‘Thank you.’ [Formal+Past]
(Survey 2012)



(small squares plotted in the map). Other informants used forms without honorific forms or gave no response. The rate of people who failed to make a proper response was higher for Figure 5 than for Figure 4. Clearly, a negative construction of honorific forms is more difficult for the younger generation.

Other examples of honorific forms are Figure 6 and 7. There are three traditional ‘Thank you’ expressions: 1) /’obora/ (Informal), 2) /’obora/ + Formal, and 3) /’obora/ + Formal + Past. Figure 6 is ‘Thank you.’ [Formal] and Figure 7 is ‘Thank you.’ [Formal + Past]. Figure 6 shows that a polite expression /’oboradareN/ is popular throughout the island as a local standard while a local form /’oboradani/ has a limited distribution. Figure 7 shows that a past form of politeness

/-jare:ti/ is used only by nine informants, one-third of the total and we can find more ‘No Response’ in Figure 6 than in Figure 7. This means that the past form of politeness is as complicated as the negative form of politeness.

3.2.3 Personal pronouns

Traditional personal pronouns have the following system: 1st person singular /waN/ and /wa:/ depending the environment, and 2nd person singular Informal /Ja:/. However, new 2nd person pronouns have been produced due to analogy: /Ja:/ and /JaN/. See Figure 8 ‘1st person singular’ and Figure 9 ‘2nd person singular Informal’.

/Jan/ is found as a regional distribution. When local dialects change, they are often standardized. However, the changes found above are not standardization but rather should be called dialect leveling.

Figure 8: ‘1st person singular’ (Survey 2012)

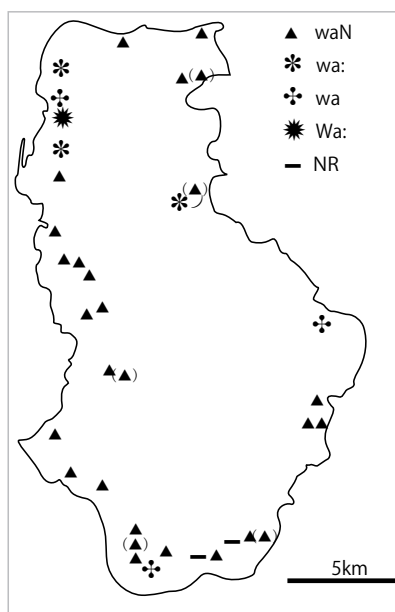
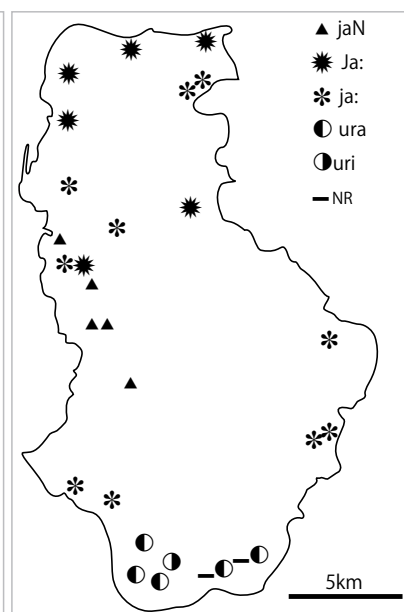


Figure 9: ‘2nd person singular’ [Informal] (Survey 2012)



4. Changes of sociolinguistic situations

The 1975-76 survey supplies us with a good deal of socio-linguistic material too, so we can compare it with our new 2012 survey results, which enables us to consider the relation between language and social changes. We have following 3 main points for the comparison:

1. Mobility of people to outside the island
2. Interrelation between the villages of the island
3. Daily life activities (their areas for shopping)

These factors enable us to identify the characteristics of language change in Tokunoshima.

4.1 Mobility of people to outside the island

Figures 10 and 11 show the mobility of people outside the island from the 1975-76 survey data. In the 1975-76 survey our informants were in principle men over 60. There were few informants who had not lived outside of the island, most had experience working in the Kansai (the western districts of Osaka, Kobe and so on) area at least once. There was a correlation

between education levels and the number of years lived outside of the island. At that time almost 90 % of the inhabitants were engaged in primary industry. The rapid industrialization after Meiji era let the people of Amami islands sail across to the Japanese main land, especially the Kansai areas to work as lower factory workers.

The informants of the 2012 survey are both men

and women, mainly from 35 to 55. There are few people who have not lived outside of the island, too, and many had lived outside for 5-10 years, including for school or university. Most informants had experience working in Tokyo or Kansai areas as company employees. A few married there and returned with non-island-born partners, which was rarely seen among informants of 1975-76 survey.

When we consider the mobility of islanders to main land, we cannot forget the period of High economic growth in Japan in 1970s. Mass numbers of middle school graduates from rural districts were employed in main land industries, and it was a turning point for the rapid standardization of the language in all over Japan. In Tokunoshima young boys and girls under 16 also left the island ‘unsocialized’, i.e. before they developed mature dialect skills, and must have adopted to lives in standard Japanese. The results of mass extrusion for many years has naturally led to a decrease in the number of inhabitants, and so their ‘language’.

4.2 Interrelation between the villages of the island

The results from the 1975 survey show very interesting features of the island, those being that in many villages people were inclined to marry only members of the same village, or if not, selected from close neighboring villages (Figure 12). Each village is highly isolated as a microcosm, especially in the northern region, and there were no interrelations between the northern and southern parts. So we can see there are ‘islands in the island’. The high isolation of villages was reflected in their language self identification. They had a strong perception that ‘each village has its dialect’ (Figure 13).

Figure 10: Living experience outside the island (Survey 1976)

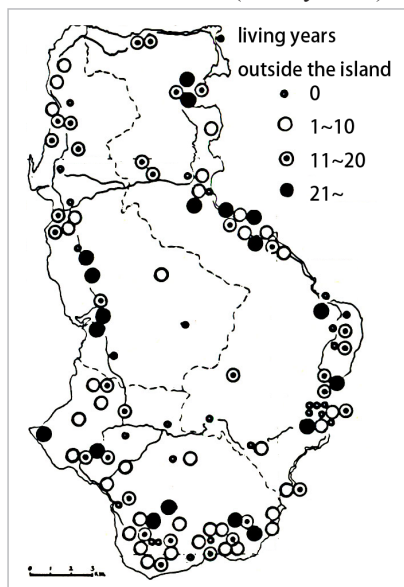


Figure 11: Living experience outside the island (Survey 2012)

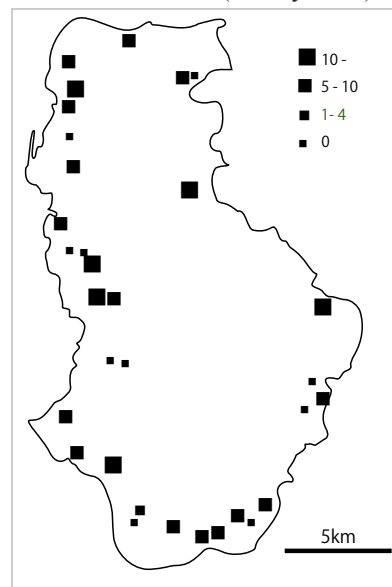


Figure 12: Language identity
(Survey 1975)

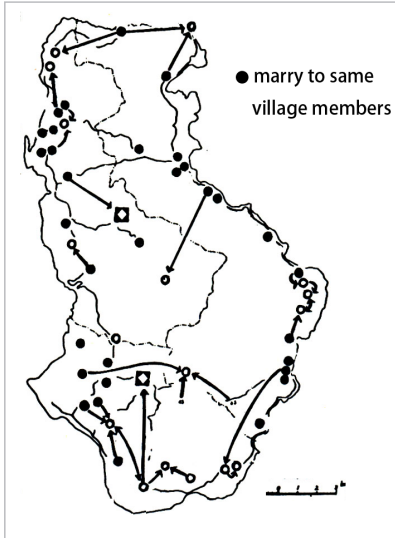


Figure 13: Marriage relations
(Survey 1975)

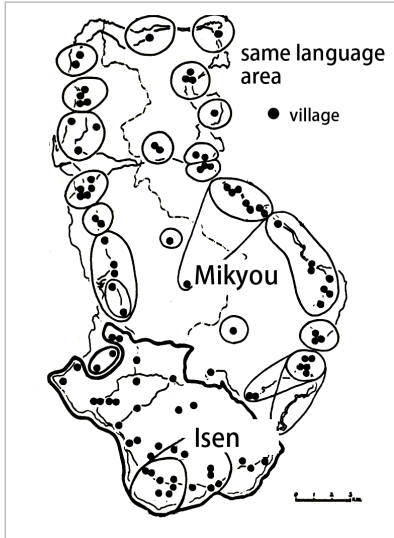
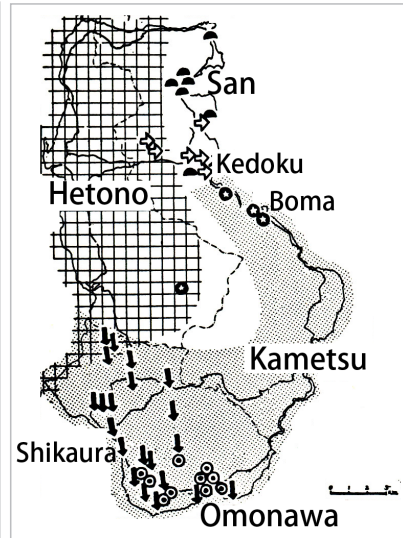


Figure 14: Shopping areas
(Survey 1975)



4.3 Daily life activities

Figure 14 shows the areas for daily life activities, particularly their areas used for shopping. We asked the informants where they used to go to buy hand towels, and where they now (the 1975-76 period) usually go. We learnt that in former times there had been more small scale commerce centers in local areas, such as Omonawa, San, Kedoku and others, which had small ports for fishermen and local transportations. Today those mini-centers do not function as centers, while mobilization has accelerated the decrease of ‘jack-of-all-trades’ shops at the main bus-stops in villages too. Instead, each of the three towns in Tokunoshima now has 2 or 3 main big supermarkets, where housewives inevitably go by car for daily life necessities.

The highly isolated microcosms had naturally been ground for their language isolation, which had some influence at least during the 1975-76 survey period. The drastic changes brought on by high economic growth deprived the microcosms of their centripetal force. They were reintegrated into wider, medium-size commerce centers; however, at the same time, a much stronger trend of new culture began to pour into the people's daily lives on the island from the outside world. Through these internal changes —and external forces— the people of Tokunoshima gradually gained a new identity, i.e. concept of the whole ‘Tokunoshima island’, which required a ‘common language form’, or one representative of the ‘island dialect’. Thus, instead of losing their dialects completely in favor of standard Japanese, they experienced dialect leveling towards the new ‘Tokunoshima dialect’.

5. Conclusion

The 2012 survey has proved that there have been new changes and variation in Tokunoshima. Are these considered as standardization or dialect leveling? In the case of lexical changes, standard words have been adopted instead of fading dialectal words. For example, this is the case for words denoting ‘east’, ‘west’, ‘north’ and ‘south’ in the 2012 survey (details not described in this paper). This should be called standardization, but we have found that there are other ways how the informants have dealt with the dialect. First, some loss of phonetic characteristics (central vowels, glottalized consonants etc.) has occurred. This is simplification towards standard pronunciations. Second, application of grammatical characteristics to standard words (verb conjugation innovations or ‘reinterpretation’) has occurred. Third, use of dialectal honorifics decreased due to individual’s lack of ability to construct honorific verbal forms and make proper conjugations. As we have argued, these should be considered dialect leveling influenced by standardization, which resulted in a decrease of traditional regional variation. Changes of social situations have accelerated these linguistic changes.

References

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