
**Language revitalization or language fossilization?
Some suggestions for language documentation
from the viewpoint of interactional linguistics**

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A language revitalization or language fossilization? Some suggestions for language documentation from the viewpoint of interactional linguistics

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issues addressed in this paper are the result of an application for funding of Ryukyuan language documentation in Japan.¹ In this project, it is our intended endeavor to develop theory and method of ‘documentation for revitalization’ (Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 68). This paper calls for the following perspective changes in endangered language documentation: a) moving away from language-as-system-view to language-as-practice-perspective; b) applying INTERACTIONAL LINGUISTICS as a potential approach to documentation studies; c) adding natural interactional data, especially intergenerational interaction, to the objects of documentation in order to support language revitalization efforts in the community.

Having exchanged information with several young researchers working on the documentation of endangered languages, I have come to note a lack of consideration of linguistic interaction. The main emphasis of the endangered language study remains on documenting an endangered language by eliciting data through interviews or story-telling of the oldest informants. Primarily, the data is to serve the research purpose of those responsible for the documentation, hence, for professional linguists. The notion of an ideal speaker and language as homogenous and monolithic objects of contemplation continue to be lurking prominently in the background of much endangered language research. Wright (2007) calls such perspective ‘language as system’ as opposed to ‘language as practice’, stressing the importance of the latter for linguistic research. From the viewpoint of interactional linguistics, a change of perspective in endangered language documentation and analysis appears desirable. This is so because empirical interactional data, in any given natural setting, abound in situated meanings, patterns of language use, language attitudes and cultural knowledge. These issues, I argue, are highly relevant for language maintenance and revitalization.

In this paper, I will briefly introduce some background information on and methods of interactional linguistics (Section 2) and then give an idea of

¹ The term ‘Ryukyuan’ is used for language varieties in Ryukyu Islands. Ryukyuan is the only language which is proven to be genealogically related to Japanese so far. Both languages have developed independently for more than 1500 years and mutual intelligibility with any Japanese variety is not available. Due to the historical and political reasons, however, the Ryukyuan language is often regarded as and spoken in terms of a dialect (*hōgen*) of Japanese both by the Japanese linguistic authority and by the local communities (cf. Kamimura 1997, Heinrich 2004 for details).

documenting intergenerational communication (Section 3) introducing a data analysis of our pilot study (Section 4). Finally, it discusses how such analysis could contribute to the revitalization efforts in the local community (Section 5).

2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As emphasized in the studies aiming at establishing ‘documentary linguistics’ as an independent research field in its own right (cf. Himmelmann 2004, Gippert et al. 2006), ethnography of communication has been regarded as one of the key frameworks for language documentation which transcends descriptive approaches (Himmelmann 2004: 62, Hill 2006). The direction of work such as proposed by Himmelmann and Hill are reminiscent of a research field which was originally initiated in Germany. This approach is called interactional linguistics and has developed over the past ten years as an interface between ethnomethodological conversation analysis, ethnography of communication and functional linguistics (cf. Selting and Couper-Kuhlen 2000, Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 2001). Following this approach, documentation of naturally occurring verbal/nonverbal interaction always precedes further analysis open to a wide range of research fields such as prosodic or segmental phonetics, phonology, morphology, lexical semantics, and pragmatics as well as language acquisition, and sociolinguistic, sociological and ethnographical issues (Selting and Couper-Kuhlen 2000: 76). Today we find various kinds of interactional linguistic studies across research domains, and, according to Himmelmann (2004: 50-51), these domains contribute to the formation of the documentation theory. At the heart of interactional linguistics is thereby the aim of revealing how specific linguistic phenomena are functioning in organizing the incremental and situational interaction on the basis of the documented data. Its concept of language, methods of transcribing data, as well as the research approach working rather heuristically on data (Deppermann 2001: 20) are congruent with the framework to be established for documentary linguistics as proposed in Himmelmann (2004).

3. DOCUMENTING INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTION

If we take seriously the idea of language practice as influenced by socio-economic and political changes which constantly take place, then language change in local communities should deserve our attention. Intergenerational activities should be the object of documentation more frequently as commonly practiced. Documenting a language as practice implies admitting the fact that ‘new forms of language are constantly developing in increasingly complex social and cultural relations’ (Patrick 2007: 125). In Okinawa, for example, there emerges Ryukyuan-Japanese as a new variety among the younger generation (Heinrich 2004: 174, Ōno 1995, Takaesu 2005). We are facing the fact that most young people under 40 years of age in Okinawa have very limited proficiency in the local language (Ryukyu Shimpō-sha 2006: 26). The young generation is

purposefully shifting away from Standard Japanese which replaced the local language in many domains to a mixed language *Uchinaa-Yamatuguchi* (cf. Heinrich 2007a for this language shift and Auer 1999 for language mixing). Takaesu (2002: 152) defines it as the local variety of Standard Japanese with morphological and lexical as well as grammatical interferences from Ryukyuan. From the language-as-practice-view, documentation should include such a new variety as well. From the language-as-system view, the variety would be labeled as a ‘non-authentic code’ and might fail to find the attention it deserves. Note that at present not one single empirical study of *Uchinaa-Yamatuguchi* language use exists. Lack of attention is not only to be found among many linguists; the local activists promoting language revitalization in the Ryukyu Islands are also critical towards *Uchinaa Yamatuguchi*. To change this requires, it seems to me, a change of perspective: the language revitalization activities should make full usage of the documentation and analysis of the language choices of the younger generation. In investigating the conditions under which the younger generation can be motivated to use the local language, researchers can, for instance, give advice to the local community in developing language education materials. As stated by Heinrich (2007b), many speakers of endangered languages themselves care about the loss of their heritage language. One survey report of people in Okinawa Prefecture in 2006 reveals that the majority of Okinawa people state that they feel an attachment to the local language and that they want their children be capable of using it (Ryukyu Shimpo-sha 2006: 25, 27). Specialists of different disciplines working on endangered languages should be aware of the possibilities and necessity to serve the local community with concrete ideas or methods for revitalization and REGENERATION efforts (see Spolsky 2003 for the term ‘regeneration’). After these methodological considerations, let us now turn to the empirical part in which intergenerational interaction is the target of documentation and analysis.

4. PILOT STUDY

As a pilot study to develop documentation methods for language revitalization, several analyses of intergenerational interaction collected from local radio broadcasting have been conducted. They show certain patterns of choice in language by the younger generation. In what follows, an example will be discussed to illustrate a possible documentation and analysis according to interactional linguistics. The data is culled from an internet streaming video of Radio Okinawa, local radio broadcasting in Okinawa. The interaction, a short talk between the newscaster and the radio host, follows immediately after the local news in a local variety of Ryukyuan language, and lasts approximately two minutes. The topic in the data is a local idiomatic expression from Ryukyuan, ‘*nankuru nai sa.*’ The male radio host M, who was 38 at the time of the recording, and the male newscaster O, who was 81, are talking about the usage of this and other similar expressions. The data in the Appendix is the last part of this short discussion, where M is talking about one of the two different usages of ‘*nankuru*

nai sa.' (Note that the way to use (practise) this expression needs to be explained.) My focus is on one phenomenon in which M switches language. M is not a full-speaker of the local Ryukyuan variety like the majority of the younger generation of Okinawa. However, his listening comprehension is much better than younger listeners of his radio programme. Especially when interacting with the older newscasters who speak both a Ryukyuan variety and Standard Japanese, however, M's language tends to be more Japanese than Ryukyuan-Japanese. The elderly newscaster O mostly speaks Japanese in the interaction. This is due to the special setting in the media which has to be taken into account when analyzing the data.² Nevertheless, M sometimes switches into Ryukyuan. This choice is not only on the morphological, syntactical or lexical level, but also on the level of action.

As the data shows (with Ryukyuan utterances shown in square brackets), reported speech is mostly uttered in Ryukyuan by M. This is also the case in other data. This phenomenon is not novel, but has frequently been observed in studies on code-switching (cf. Gumperz 1982: 75-76). The features of Ryukyuan such as prosodic features, idiomatic expressions, modals, and evaluative expressions are embedded in actions such as speech reproduction or description of the situation or persons. This implies that those kinds of actions can easily inspire younger generation to speak in Ryukyuan. When the speaker is involved in an event which s/he should describe, or reproduce what was experienced, s/he is likely to use the language used in the event. Such findings can be useful for the planning of bilingual education which is obviously needed in Okinawa for language revitalization.

In addition to the code switching phenomenon, this small excerpt actually reveals another interesting phenomenon, namely awareness of language use. The short discussion in the radio programme, which is very popular in Okinawa, must have also stimulated local people to be aware of their own language use.

5. LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION FOR REVITALIZATION

Although our pilot study is a special case, in that the interaction in a radio programme is taken as an object of study, it nevertheless reveals that the study of interactional linguistics can be a potential approach for documenting endangered languages as practice. Researchers should document and analyze intergenerational interaction to identify crucial factors involved in successful transmission of local languages. In so doing and where there is support from the local community, fieldworkers can also promote intergenerational activities in the community to enhance natural language transmission across generations (cf. Fishman 1991 for the importance of restoring local language in intergenerational communication).

Applying the results of the pilot study, I would like to propose the following steps to take as one possible educational and research practice:

² For example, most of the listeners of the radio programme are non-speakers of Ryukyuan and this influences language choices. For detailed analysis of the framework of broadcasting, see the concept of FOOTING in Goffman (1981).

1. Promotion of intergenerational activities concerning the local language, local culture and tradition (such as in kindergartens, schools, community centers or by means of media).
2. As follow-up activities, the younger generation could be asked to tell about the experience they had from the intergenerational activities, in families, in schools or other activity groups. They should report what the older generation talked about, explain the situations, or describe what they saw or heard.
3. By documenting intergenerational activities as well as the output of the younger generation after the activities, researchers should be able to identify crucial psycholinguistic/interactional linguistic factors involved in successful transmission of local languages for further language planning.

If linguists remain uninformed about the fact that languages are in no way self-contained linguistic entities or systems (Auer 2007: 320), they might succeed in fossilizing endangered languages and, what is more, might fail in supporting the local community's attempts at language revitalization. It is necessary for researchers to tackle the question of why the situation has hardly changed since Spolsky (1978: 332) lamented that most students of endangered languages 'felt little responsibility to preserve them except in grammar books and archives.'

Appendix: Data³

- (1) M [v] • *[[Sakkoo]] ganbat-te shigoto shi-te. i/ i-te:*
 M [mt] [[very]] make.effort-PAR job do-DUR-PAR
 M [en] • 'To the person who is working [[very]] hard, but
- (2) O [v] N:
 O [mt] yeah
 O [en] Yeah.
 M [v] *nayan-de: ['Caasju ga yaa. Caasju ga yaa.] tte*
 M [mt] worry-PAR [what should I do? what should I do?] QUT
 M [en] being worried like ['What should I do? What should I do?'] being
- (3) M [v] *na/ mainichi nayan-de-ru hito ni: .hh [['Daijoobu*
 M [mt] every day worry-DUR-ATT person DAT [[take it easy
 M [en] worried every day, (you say) .hh [['Take it
- (4) M [v] *yo'.]] [Anshi] nayan-de. mo [yaa,] isshookenmei*
 M [mt] FP]] [such] worry-CON AUG hard
 M [en] easy'.]] Don't worry [so much]. [When you are working so]

³ Ryukyuan is romanized according to the orthography established by the Okinawa Center of Language Study.

- (5) O [v] *'kuru naisa'.*
 O [mt] [will work out]
 O [en] ['will work out'.]
 M [v] [s-oo-ru bun] .hh ['nankuru nai sa'] to.
 M [mt] [do-DUR-ATT portion] [it will work out] QUT
 M [en] hard, .hh ['it will work out'.]
- (6) O [v] N:
 O [mt] yeah
 O [en] 'Yeah.'
 M [v] .hh Iu tsukai-kata: ryhoohoo aru wake
 M [mt] such use-way both exist it is that
 M [en] .hh 'It is that we have two different usages,
- (7) O [v] *Ryooohoo aru.*
 O [mt] both exist
 O [en] 'We have both.'
 M [v] desu yo ne:.
 M [mt] VPRT.FRM FP FP
 M [en] right?'
 (Source: *Hōgen Nyūsu* 'Dialect News' on Radio Okinawa (ROK), Video Streaming http://www.okinawabbtv.com/news/h_news.htm 26/01/07)

Abbreviations and Symbols

| Transliteration | Morpheme category | Forms in Japanese/Ryukyuan |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ATT | nominal attribute inflection | <i>V-ru, V-ta, Adj-i, Adj-katta</i> |
| AUG | augment | <i>(Ryukyuan) yaa</i> |
| CON | concessive construction | <i>V-te mo, Adj-kute mo, N de mo</i> |
| DAT | dative particle | <i>ni</i> |
| DUR | durative construction | <i>V-te i-ru > V-te-ru</i> |
| FP | final particle | <i>ne, yo, (Ryukyuan) sa, yaa</i> |
| PAR | participial | <i>Verb-te, Adj-kute</i> |
| QUT | quotative particle | <i>to</i> |
| VPRT.FRM | formal particle verb. | <i>desu</i> |
| Symbols | | |
| [v] | verbal line | |
| [mt] | morphological transliteration | |
| [en] | translation in English | |
| [...] | Ryukyuan (variation) | |
| [[...]] | Ryukyuan-Japanese | |
| • | pause, less than 0,3 seconds | |
| : | syllable lengthening | |
| / | repair | |
| .hh | inhalation | |

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