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Introduction

Since 2009, six Ryukyuan languages have been included in the UNESCO ‘Atlas of the world’s languages in danger’, of which two (Yaeyama and Yonaguni) are severely endangered, and four (Amami, Kunigami, Okinawa and Miyako) are classified as definitely endangered. Given this worrisome background, the increase in publications in English on various aspects of the Ryukyuan languages in the last years, is a welcome development (e.g. English language dissertations (Shimoji 2008; Anderson 2009), monographs (Shimoji and Pellard 2010; Arakaki 2013; Heinrich and Anderson 2015) and book sections (De Boer 2010: 208-246; Tranter 2012: 349-457). The latest addition, *Handbook of the Ryukyuan languages: History, structure and use*, surpasses all previous works in scope and size. As the title indicates, this volume treats a broad range of subjects.

Contents

Part I, on the history of the Ryukyuan languages, includes articles on the history of the description and study of the languages (Osterkamp), a description of the first grammar of Ryukyuan by Bettelheim in 1849 (Griesenhofer), the history of Ryukyuan as can be reconstructed by means of the comparative method (Pellard), as well as an overview of past and present attempts to reconstruct proto-Ryukyuan (Bentley).

Part II, dealing with the structure of the language, starts with a concise but clear overview of the phonology and grammar of classical Ryukyuan and the Northern and Southern Ryukyuan languages (Karimata). The following chapters are devoted to focusing in Okinawan (Miyara), variation in lexicon across different Ryukyuan languages and dialects (Lawrence), an overview of the phonology of different Ryukyuan languages (Miyara), intonation in Okinawan (Nagano-Madsen), an overview of tense-aspect-mood systems in different Ryukyuan languages (Arakaki), and tense-aspect-mood in Miyara Yaeyama (Davis and Lau). The final chapter is on *kakari musubi* (the use, under certain conditions, of non-finite verb forms in clause-final position) in Okinawan, compared with the similar phenomenon in Old Japanese (Shinzato).

Part III contains grammars of individual Ryukyuan languages. The first chapter deals with a cluster of divergent dialects on the Amami Islands (Niinaga). Subsequent chapters focus on the description of language varieties on a single island: Okinoerabu (Van der Lubbe and

Tokunaga), Shuri Okinawan (Miyara), Tarama Miyako (Aoi), Hateruma Yaeyama (Aso), and Dunan (Yonaguni) Ryukyuan (Yamada, Pellard and Shimoji).

Parts IV (Sociolinguistics) and V (Sociology of language) deal with the internal and external sociological characteristics of the Ryukyuan languages, respectively. The scope of the topics addressed in part IV is too broad to do justice to here. It varies from substrate influence of Ryukyuan on the use of standard Japanese and code switching (Anderson), the use of local language varieties in the media (Sugita), the use of signs in the local language in marketplaces in downtown Naha (Petrucci and Miyahira) and the vitality, status and symbolic meaning of Ryukyuan in the Okinawan diaspora (Miyahira and Petrucci). Part IV ends with an insightful chapter on the history of writing in the Ryukyus, and the problems in developing orthographies that can be used for language revitalization (Ogawa).

The endangered status of the Ryukyuan languages is a recurring topic in part V, the last part of the book: There are chapters on the spread of the Japanese language (Heinrich) and language shift (Heinrich) and on the attitudes towards local language varieties versus Japanese as the language of the state, as well as on possible strategies for the survival of at least some varieties of Ryukyuan (Clarke). Language revitalization is also the topic of the next chapter (Hara and Heinrich) which gives an overview of difficulties and conflicts, but also of successful initiatives and interesting proposals (such as combining care facilities for the elderly and schools in one building, in order to encourage language transmission). The final two chapters address different themes, and it is not completely clear why they have been included in this part of the book. The first is a study of Chinese language textbooks for Ryukyuan from the time when the Ryukyu kingdom was still a vassal state of the Chinese empire (Kádár), a chapter that would probably have been better at home in part I. The final chapter is on the use of Ryukyuan languages in Ryukyuan music. The book ends with a selected bibliography of Ryukyuan dialectology (Shigeno, Shimoji, Matayoshi and Nishioka), classified along different topics.

Significance

The endangered status of the languages of the Ryukyus makes their documentation urgent, but this is not the only reason why the study of the Ryukyuan languages deserves - and is attracting - more and more attention. The Ryukyuan languages show a fascinating combination of both archaic (from the standpoint of Japanese) and highly innovative features.

The phonological developments that transformed the sound systems of these languages from one island to another are sometimes so extreme, that it is impossible not to be filled with astonishment and delight, especially when comparing present-day Ryukyuan forms with their familiar standard Japanese or Old Japanese cognates. As evidence for substratum influence so far has not been proven, the cause behind these astounding sound changes is most likely the serial founder effect that occurs when small groups of people migrate from one island to the next. It is hard not to be reminded of Darwin and his finches when reading some of the descriptions of individual languages in the book. The Ryukyu archipelago can truly be regarded as a linguistic Galapagos Islands.

Discussion

In the *Handbook of the Ryukyuan languages*, the importance of treating the different varieties of Ryukyuan as languages in their own right is stressed. The negative effects of treating them

as dialects of Japanese - as they traditionally have been - are indeed numerous; attempts to relate all things Ryukyuan to Japanese distorts the synchronic analysis, the study of language shift and language loss, as well as language documentation have remained underdeveloped. Most importantly, a language policy supportive of the Ryukyuan languages is not yet in place, even now.

In this light, it is disappointing that almost all of the contributing authors (with the exception of Yamada, Pellard and Shimoji in chapter 18), refer to the prosodic systems of the Ryukyuan languages as ‘accent’ when they are mentioned (including in the selected bibliography at the end of the book). This is a misnomer adopted from the way in which the prosodic system of Tokyo-based standard Japanese is usually described. The prosodic systems found in the Ryukyuan languages should be analyzed as tone systems. Unlike in standard Japanese, it is for instance not possible to point to a specific syllable or mora as accented (De Boer 2010: 11-20). Typically, a number of (at most) three word-tones are mapped over the word or tonal phrase as a whole.

The confusing use of the word ‘accent’ may also stem from the fact that in Japanese the word *akusento* is used to describe anything prosodic related to Japanese. It is applied to the tone systems of all dialects of mainland Japan, whether appropriate or not. Although it is possible to analyze the prosodic systems of some dialects (such as the standard language) in terms of pitch accent, this is certainly not true for all dialects. Many are better analyzed as having syllable or mora-based tone, or even word-tone systems similar to those common in Ryukyuan (e.g. Kagoshima Japanese).

As the book argues, the Ryukyuan languages should be described and analyzed as autonomous linguistic systems, not merely lexicons for comparison with those of the main islands. Nevertheless, the precise nature of the genetic relationship between Ryukyuan and Japanese is, and will remain, an important issue: The position of each in the genetic tree has important implications for the reconstruction of the proto-language.

Throughout the *Handbook of the Ryukyuan languages*, the genetic relationship between the Ryukyuan languages and Japanese is presented as that of two sister languages; two equal branches in the Japonic language family that are clearly separated. The reason for this is as follows: As already briefly mentioned, Ryukyuan is characterized by archaic as well as innovative features. In chapter 1, Pellard shows that the Ryukyuan languages not only share a number of common innovations, but have also preserved traces of vowel distinctions that had already disappeared from Old Japanese in the 7th century. The fact that these features once existed in mainland Japanese as well, and are not Ryukyuan innovations, is apparent from internal reconstruction in Japanese. Ryukyuan also preserves traces of a special distinction in the vowel of the attributive form of consonant-stem verbs, which is lacking in Old Japanese. These distinct vowels are definitely old, as they are attested in dialect material from Eastern Old Japanese and have left traces in a number of modern dialects in eastern Japan.

It is therefore clear that proto-Ryukyuan was not a daughter of Old Japanese, as Old Japanese was more innovative. The two are sister languages that split before the 7th century. Although at the time, proto-Ryukyuan (still located on Kyushu) was more archaic than Old Japanese, the

difference between them was most likely not yet very large: After all, the serial founder effect that would radically transform the Ryukyuan languages had yet to take place.¹

It seems that the strong divergence from Japanese that developed in the Ryukyuan languages after the migration away from Kyushu has lent intuitive support to assigning the Ryukyuan languages the status of a branch within a language family. Other dialects that also descend from a more archaic stage than Old Japanese, but that are spoken closer by, and are less innovative than the Ryukyuan languages (e.g. the dialects of Hachijō, Toshima and Akiyama-gō discussed below) are not given any special status. This is one objection that I have against the way in which the genetic make-up of the Japonic language family is presented in the book.

It has to be remembered, that Old Japanese does not represent the language of ancient Japan as a whole. The archaic features preserved in proto-Ryukyuan did not disappear from the periphery of Japan as early as they disappeared from Old Japanese. Old Japanese should properly be called Central Old Japanese as it represents the 7th and 8th century language of the central Yamato region. Only one other variety of contemporary Japanese is attested, namely Eastern Old Japanese, or the so-called Azuma dialects, but this only very deficiently. (It is, for instance, rather unclear what the phonological contrasts of Eastern Old Japanese were like, as the spelling is extremely inconsistent and seems to have been applied to Eastern Old Japanese from the standpoint of Central Old Japanese.)

Because of the Eastern Old Japanese rubric, Central Old Japanese is often mistakenly called Western Old Japanese, and treated as if it represented all other dialects of Japan of the time. Of the segmental phonology or morphology of the real Western Old Japanese (all varieties of the language to the west of the central Japanese Yamato region) however, there are no attestations.

The innovative Central Old Japanese dialect lost certain archaic features early on, which initially survived in both the eastern and western periphery. Due to the growing influence of the language of the Yamato state, most Japanese dialects on its periphery eventually lost these archaic features, but, in the Ryukyus, they were preserved because the speakers of (what became) proto-Ryukyuan, at some point, migrated from Kyushu. In the eastern periphery, traces of the special attributive form of consonant stem verbs were preserved on the island of Toshima in the southern Izu archipelago (Ōshima 1984), in the village of Akiyama-gō on the border of Niigata and Nagano provinces (Mase 1992) and on Hachijō island. Strictly speaking, these dialects should therefore be regarded as sister languages of Japanese, just as Ryukyuan, but no-one assigns them that status.²

A second objection against the way in which the genetic make-up of the Japonic language family is presented is the following: The fact that proto-Ryukyuan and Central Old Japanese were sister languages does not automatically mean that at that point, proto-Ryukyuan had split from all other varieties of contemporary Japanese. Ryukyuan may very well have split off at some later point, from Western Old Japanese. For Ryukyuan to be a sister language of all modern Japanese dialects, also those not from central Japan, there would have to be a clear-

¹Archaeologists nowadays think that the migration away from Kyushu may not have occurred earlier than the 10th century (Asato and Doi, 1999).

²Pellard (p. 15) does tentatively posit the language of Hachijō island as a third branch of the Japonic language family, but no such status has ever been proposed for the other dialects.

cut division between Ryukyuan and these dialects in all respects (segmental phonology, lexicon, tone, morphology etc.). In particular, there should be no common innovations that Ryukyuan and any dialects of western Japan share.

When the fact that Old Japanese represents only the central Yamato dialect is taken into account, there is no need to posit a complete separation of proto-Ryukyuan from the mainland Japanese dialects as a whole, in all respects, as early as the 6th century. The morphology, lexicon and phonology of the variety of Japanese spoken on Kyushu may very well have been influenced by, and itself may have influenced, other dialects of western Japan, specifically those of Kyushu, until it spread from there into the Ryukyus no earlier than the 10th century.

I stress this because of the nature of the differences in the tone systems between Ryukyuan and Japanese. The segmental phonology of Proto-Ryukyuan is more archaic than Central Old Japanese, as far as the vowel system is concerned, but the relationship between the two is transparent and the split between them does not seem to go back very far in time before the Old Japanese period. The situation as to the tone systems of Japanese and Ryukyuan is completely different. Some tone classes coincide, and Ryukyuan and the dialects of Kyushu (both the Kagoshima type word-tone systems in the south-west, and the syllable based Gairin Tokyo type tone system in the north-east of the island) even share mergers between certain tone classes that are separate in the more central regions of Japan. (Or, alternatively, they lack splits in them, if one does not want to regard this agreement as a shared innovation). However, the distribution of lexical items over certain other tone classes differs in such a way in the Ryukyuan and non-Ryukyuan branch, that if one combines the evidence from both branches, one ends up with an unrealistically large number of tone classes in proto-Japonic. The result is a proto-Japonic tone system that does not look like the tone system of a natural language. It is hard to imagine what these tonal contrasts could have been like in concrete terms.

One could of course say, that the tone system of proto-Ryukyuan must be given more weight, as proto-Ryukyuan is more archaic in segmental phonology. The richer tonal contrasts of the dialects of mainland Japan would then have developed later, through unknown causes. But unlike was the case with respect to segmental phonology, nothing similar to the proto-Ryukyuan tone class divisions has been preserved in earlier attested forms of Japanese, or as traces here and there in the periphery of Japan. Neither can such a system be recovered by means of internal reconstruction in (dialects of) Japanese. There seems to be little reason therefore, to give precedence to the tone system of a variety of the language originating from one south-western corner of Japan (i.e. Kyushu) over the tone systems of other mainland dialects.

There have been attempts to reduce the unrealistically large number of tonal contrasts that would have to be reconstructed for the proto-language in other ways, such as replacing some of them with vowel length in proto-Japonic, but these attempts have not been convincing (Pellard, 2009, De Boer 2010:233-245). Reconciling the two systems by reconstructing such unknown features in the proto-language would also require a considerable time-depth in the split between proto-Ryukyuan and Central Old Japanese, much larger than the relatively superficial difference in segmental phonology suggests. I think this discrepancy can be resolved, if we assume that the typical Ryukyuan distribution of lexical items over the tone

classes does not go back to proto-Japonic, but developed later, while proto-Ryukyuan was still located on Kyushu.

The Kyushu dialects share certain mergers in the tone classes with the languages of the Ryukyus, and the south-western part of Kyushu has word-tone systems just as in the Ryukyuan languages. I regard these two things as shared innovations. The divergent division of lexical items over the tone classes in the Ryukyus was the product of local conditions on Kyushu, namely dialect mixing between two dialects: One that had a system with three word-tones,³ and one that had a system with two word-tones. This led to the divergent distribution of lexical items over the tone classes typical of proto-Ryukyuan.

A shift from syllable or mora-based tone to word-tone may develop gradually, as a result of consecutive rightward tone shifts. As more and more tone classes merge, the remaining tonal distinctions lose their link to specific syllables, and are reanalyzed as word-melodies that are linked to the word or tonal phrase as a whole (De Boer 2010:209-212). I think this process started in south-west Kyushu, first leading to a system with three word-tones, and then gradually to a system with only two word-tones, such as still found in the Kagoshima type dialects there.

In the end, only the simpler system with two word-tones survived in south-west Kyushu, but a dialect type that was still at an intermediate stage, spread to the Ryukyus, where it survived, being cut off from further influence by the dialects of mainland Japan.

In sum, even though the segmental phonology of proto-Ryukyuan preserved a stage older than Central Old Japanese (being located in the periphery, far from the innovative center), the tone systems of Kyushu need not have been archaic. Proto-Ryukyuan tone may have developed as the result of innovations in the Kyushu branch of mainland Japanese.

If other explanations for the puzzling discrepancy in the division into tone classes between Ryukyuan and Japanese (or convincing reconstructions of proto-Japonic that explain them) fail to come forward, the explanation I outlined above is a realistic alternative. The now prevalent view of the split between Japanese and Ryukyuan may have to be modified.

As to the timing of these developments: In central Kyushu, there is a large toneless area, stretching like a wedge from the south-east of Kyushu to the north-west. Such areas are found in other regions of Japan as well, typically in-between areas with different tone systems. The toneless area in Kyushu most likely resulted from the clash between the word-tone system in the south-west of the island (Kagoshima type) and the syllable based tone system in the north-east of the island (Gairin Tokyo type).

The toneless area is quite large, and a considerable amount of time would have been required for it to develop and spread to its present extent. This means that the clash between the two tone systems that caused it, cannot be recent. The development of word-tone systems in the south-west, and the gradual shift from a three word-tone system, to the present-day Kagoshima two word-tone system, occurred even earlier. At some point, as this shift in south-west Kyushu was under way, but had not yet been completed, proto-Ryukyuan spread to the Ryukyus.

³Or possibly a tone system in which tones were still linked to specific syllables. (See De Boer 2010: 234-237).

Both Pellard (p. 24) and Bentley (p. 54) quote Serafim (2003), who argued for eastern, rather than south-western Kyushu as the starting point of the migration to the Ryukyus. Some *i*-stem verbs in standard Japanese (*oki*- ‘arise’, *oti*- ‘fall’ and *ori*- ‘descend’) were *e*-stem verbs in proto-Ryukyuan (**oke*-, **ote*- and **ore*-), and, according to Serafim, these verbs have *e*-stems in eastern Kyushu as well. However, according to Hirayama (1992: 286) in Miyazaki prefecture in eastern Kyushu **all** *i*-stem verbs have merged with *e*-stem verbs, not just these three. This means the *e*-stem reflexes in eastern Kyushu need not be old. In Oita prefecture to the north of Miyazaki “almost all” (Hirayama 1992:282) of the *i*-stem verbs have merged with the *e*-stem verbs, but it is hard to find examples showing which *i*-stem verbs merged with *e*-stem verbs in this area, and which not. Tōjō (1952) lists the form *iken* as negative of *ikiru* ‘to live’ in Oita prefecture, and Hirayama (1983: 334) gives *jekemon* for ‘a boil’ (standard Japanese *dekimono*) in Notsu-machi (Oita prefecture). It seems therefore that the merger with *e*-stem verbs in Oita is not limited to *oki*-, *oti*- and *ori*-, calling Serafim’s claim of an agreement with proto-Ryukyuan into question. Finally, according to Kamimura (1983:17), the areas where *oki*- and *oti*- are *e*-stem verbs do not even coincide.

Igarashi and Hirako (2016) recently discovered that the Kishima dialect in Saga prefecture on Kyushu shows similarity in the division of lexical items over the tone classes with Ryukyuan. The fact that this dialect is located on the western border of the toneless area, agrees well with my ideas on the origin of the Ryukyuan tone class divisions. Although more research is needed, at the very least, the exciting discovery of this dialect raises new questions as to the exact nature of the split between Ryukyuan and Japanese. For instance, if the proto-Ryukyuan tone system is as old, or older, than the split in segmental phonology with Old Japanese (and did not develop later, on Kyushu, as I propose), should the Kishima dialect be counted as a sister language of Japanese?

As a final note, although the relationship between Ryukyuan and Japanese is a fascinating and important issue, the status and importance accorded to each of the two branches, is - and should be - a separate issue.

Conclusion

The *Handbook of the Ryukyuan languages* covers a wide range of subjects. It is well organized, and the contributions are varied and of high quality. The selected bibliography at the end of the book is very valuable. The book contains examples of incorrect English (e.g. the use of ‘Ryukyuan’ instead of ‘Ryukyuan languages’ in chapter 8), and more unity in the way in which Ryukyuan phonology is transcribed in the different chapters would have been desirable. Despite these minor shortcomings, the *Handbook of the Ryukyuan languages* is an indispensable resource, that can be recommended to anyone interested in the historical background, grammar, present state, sociology and many other aspects of the Ryukyuan languages.

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