

# Language Crisis in the Ryukyus



# Language Crisis in the Ryukyus

Edited by

Mark Anderson and Patrick Heinrich

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P U B L I S H I N G

Language Crisis in the Ryukyus,  
Edited by Mark Anderson and Patrick Heinrich

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# FOREWORD

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### MARK ANDERSON

In 2001, the Okinawa Times ran a year-long feature entitled *Nukusabira na, shimakutuba!* ('Let's save our community languages!'). Each week there was a series of articles about Ryukyuan languages, and some of these included interviews of Ryukyuan people talking about various aspects of local languages and language shift and revitalisation. Below are some examples of quotes from the interviewees, some of whom are native speakers of Ryukyuan languages. Their comments provide an insight into how Ryukyuan evaluate their local vernaculars. We feel that it is appropriate to include these comments here as they reveal the extent of people's emotional attachment to their mother tongue, and a natural understanding of what "language" actually means. Names and ages (where available) are included with each quote, and extracts in Ryukyuan languages have been included in their original form with a note about the specific dialect and an accompanying English translation.

*'Ikusa 'atoo, 'uchinaaguchi shidee ni shitariti, yamatuguchi saani 'uchinaajuu nu hanashii suru kutu nkai natan. Kuree 'ippee yii kutoo ya shiga, 'unu kawai, shima nu shinasaki washitan ... Shimakutuba 'ashee mashi ya shiga, nama madi nu 'uchinaa nu shiijee ya, shima nu kutuba muru neerannasuru hakarei ru yatee kutu. Kangee nu tiichi nai nee 'ukashikoo nara ni.*

"After the war, *Uchinaaguchi* fell gradually out of use, and people started using Japanese in the whole of Okinawa. This was a really good thing, but as a consequence we've forgotten the islanders' spirit of warm-heartedness ... It would be better to have our language, but until now the Okinawan government has tried to eliminate it completely. Wouldn't it be strange just to have a uniform way of thinking?" (Okinawa Times, January 10, 2001). Makishi Kōchū (1923-2011), actor/playwright, Shibaikutuba.

*'Uchinaanchu nu 'umui katairu basu ni, 'uchinaaguchi marumaru chikaran yooiin, chiteeiru kutu nu nai ga yaa. Naran haji.*

“When it comes to speaking about Okinawan people’s thoughts, could they be communicated without using *Uchinaaguchi*? I doubt it” (Okinawa Times, January 21, 2001). Uehara Naohiko, Central Okinawan, Naha dialect.

*Shima nu bunkazai, shima nu kutuba sshi chukutai chiteerrattai sooibiishee. Ya kutu, shimakutuba nkai ya 'uchinaa nu magukuru nu kumutoobiin. Teeshichi ni sanee, naran di 'umuyabiin dee.*

“The community culture is created and communicated in the community languages, so the heart and soul of Okinawa is encapsulated within our language. I think we have to nurture it” (Okinawa Times, January 31, 2001). Kanashiro Michiko, Central Okinawan, Maaji (Mawashi, Naha) dialect with Shibaikutuba intonation.

*Yamatuguchi saanee “kotoba wa kuni no tegata” ndi 'ii shiga tee, kikyuku 'unu ... mibunshoomeeshu nairu baa dee yaa. Kutuba ndi shee deejii ya ssa ... “Kutubaa bunka roo yaa” tu ka “kutuba nukusa-waruu dee ya shiga” tu ka dii ... yuu 'irarii shiga, yappari 'uree teeshichi ndi 'umuee sun.*

“In Japanese people say ‘language is the mark of a nation’, but it’s like a personal identity card. Language is amazing really, isn’t it? People often say things like ‘language is culture’ and ‘we have to save our language’, but I actually think that really is important” (Okinawa Times, March 28, 2001). Kayō Yasuo (born 1924), author, Central Okinawan, Tumai (Tomari) dialect.

“Language is culture. There are aspects of the Okinawan spirit (*chimugukuru*) and warmth that cannot be expressed by Standard Japanese” (Okinawa Times, April 25, 2001). Arakaki Yōko, chairperson of the Nishihara Culture Association.

“There’s a certain emotion in the Okinawan language, and it’s because of the existence of *Uchinaaguchi* that the culture developed. So Okinawan culture was shaped by the linguistic culture” (Okinawa Times, May 15, 2001). Aoyama Yōji (1921-2010), Okinawa City *Uchinaaguchi* Association chairperson, chief editor of *Uchinaaguchi shigo korekushon* (‘*Uchinaaguchi* Extinct Language Collection’).

*Kutuba ndi 'ishee, kurashi nu naka wuti chikari-waruu bunka n nayui, 'atu 'atu nu yunkee n 'uki-chiji 'ikarii ndi 'umuiru.*

“Language is culture precisely because it is used in everyday life, and it is something that should be passed on down the generations” (Okinawa Times, February 21, 2001). Quote from same individual, Aoyama Yōji, Central Okinawan, Yamachi (Yamauchi) dialect.

*Chikee-nariti yuu chimugukuru ga sunawati 'ajigwaa 'ubitooru shima nu kutuba ndi 'ishee, yappari shitiiru kutoo naibiran yaa. Shima nu chimugukuru ga 'uma nkai niichichoo ndi 'umutooibiin.*

“These words that we have learnt from our language that are familiar, intimate and expressive, cannot simply be discarded, because the spirit of the islands is deeply rooted within them” (Okinawa Times, May 9, 2001). Tamaki Denii (born 1959), radio personality turned politician, imitation of Nufi (Nohen) dialect, Yunagushiku (Yonashirochō), Okinawa Island.

“Language is the treasure of an era. As it disappears, you begin to notice its importance, and you only worry about it afterwards. There has been a tendency to take one’s own community heritage lightly, and selfishly assume that ‘someone else will take care of it’. It will probably be difficult to revitalise the dialects now. You do feel a twinge of sadness for the loss” (Okinawa Times, July 11, 2001). Inafuku Seiki (born 1923), from Shuri, author of *Okinawan Medical Dictionary* (published 1992).

*“Duu sīma nu muni basikikkaa, 'nmarizīma yun basiki du sīi” de 'anku mukasimuni nu 'ason ga, pītuningin ya muni kutuba shi du munu n 'umoori kangai n shirari, muni nu neenaa-narukkaa 'unu 'umui 'unu kangai n neenaa du naru de 'anku kutu yuu. Kanji shikasa gamarisaari kutu de 'anneera.*

“There’s an old proverb which goes: ‘Forgetting the language of your homeland is forgetting your homeland itself.’ This means that it is through language that humans are able to think about things and conceive ideas. If the language disappears, then so do those thoughts and ideas. Do we really want that to happen?” (Okinawa Times, November 21, 2001). Miyagi Shinyū, chairperson of the Society for the Study of Yaeyaman Culture, Yaeyaman, Shika’aza (Ishigaki) dialect.

*Nkashi n chu nu 'ukukuru shiran kutu, 'ugwansu nu nukushi-misoocharu tiikata 'ashikata nnchi n, yamatunchu nu kukuru sshi nnju kutu, funtoo nu kutoo wakai yuusan saa. Shitaneemun yaa.*

“We don’t think in the same way as the Okinawan people used to, so even if we look at our cultural heritage, we’re looking at it from a Japanese perspective, and we therefore cannot fully comprehend it. It’s awful really” (Okinawa Times, December 12, 2001). Miyazato Chōkō (born 1924), chairperson of the Society of Okinawan Language Revitalization, Central Okinawan, Shuri dialect.

Perhaps the most poignant quote of all comes from an article in which Yamada Yoshihide (born 1913), an Okinawan expatriate living in Brazil, recounts how he had once been shopping in Okinawa, and a shop assistant who could not understand his dialect laughed behind his back: “I was horrified”, he says, “losing the words of your heart is like losing your

parents ... like being plunged into darkness” (Okinawa Times, November 7, 2001).

The striking thing about the content of these quotes is that they communicate the speakers’ direct emotional connection to their language, and their instinctive gut reaction to its demise. Whether or not one agrees with the statements, they show that these speakers have enough emotional attachment to their language to want to save it. Any revitalisation strategy would do well to attempt to harness this positive attitude by encouraging these speakers to channel their energies into motivating others to work towards language revitalisation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume is the outcome of discussions between various scholars involved in some way or another with the Ryukyuan Heritage Language Society. Its members form social networks held together by a concern for the future of Ryukyuan languages and cultures in daily life. These members also share a strong belief that much of what has been written in the past about Ryukyuan languages needs to be re-considered and re-written. Hence, the kind offer from Cambridge Scholars Publishers to publish a book on Ryukyuan language and society was greeted with enthusiasm.

This book offers insights into Ryukyuan language society which are in many cases available for the first time in English. In addition, it features new authors who have fresh information to share. More seasoned authors have shifted the focus of their research to suit the format of a *book* which can be read from start to finish, and it is hoped that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Many people have helped us in completing this work. We are indebted to Yuko Sugita, who assisted by commenting on topics relating to her field of specialization. We would also like to thank the translators Yuka Ando and Philippa Heming for their excellent work, Tomoko Arakawa and Shinako Oyakawa for taking the time to participate in an interview, Wayne Lawrence and Chris Davis for their invaluable help with Yaeyaman transcriptions, Hugh Clarke and Nerida Jarkey at the University of Sydney, and Michael Gill for his creative cover design. Last but not least, we wish to extend our sincere gratitude to everyone at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for helping us to produce this book.

Just like the Ryukyuan languages, many languages around the world are in crisis today. It is important to understand that something can be done about it. The crisis can be averted. Understanding the origin and the scope of the problem may only be a first step, but a step it is. Just as for everyone who was involved in this book, all further steps will involve commitment of various sorts. Or seen the other way around, without the commitment and involvement of many people, things will not improve. The popular saying that “time heals all wounds” is wrong. One actually has to be active in bringing about change that will lead to healing. Truth be

told, this book was not written simply to be read but as an effort to convince many more to engage.

Sydney and Venice  
Mark Anderson and Patrick Heinrich



# CHAPTER ONE

## REVITALISATION ATTEMPTS AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN THE RYUKYUS

MARK ANDERSON

### 1. Introduction

This chapter aims to present a broad summary of activities oriented towards the preservation and revitalisation of Ryukyuan languages conducted up until the early 2000s and into the 21st century. These endeavours are evaluated in terms of their success in achieving their aims, and the islanders' attitudes towards language revitalisation are examined in order to ascertain whether or not there was a general sense of the value of Ryukyuan languages at the time. It is hoped that, in taking stock of the recent sociolinguistic situation in the archipelago, this chapter will serve as a reference point for the reader to contextualise discussions relating to the various historical, social and linguistic aspects of the Ryukyuan language crisis covered by other authors in the following chapters of this book.

One of the main sources of data for this chapter is a regular column that was published in the Okinawa Times in 2001 called *Nukusabira na, shimakutuba!* ('Let's save our community languages!'). For a total of 50 weeks, a series of articles was printed, each beginning with a short monologue transcribed from a recording of a speaker of one of the Ryukyuan varieties. The recordings and articles were posted on the internet and remained in the archives for a few years. They offer a wealth of information about the activities of different groups and individuals in the archipelago for that whole year. Because the articles provide anecdotal evidence and actual quotes from Ryukyuan people from all walks of life, they are a good indicator of how Ryukyuan people viewed their own languages at the time, and whether their attitudes were generally positive or negative. Furthermore, the articles reveal some of the motivations behind language revitalisation activities that were ongoing at the turn of the millennium.

However, the articles were never summarised, translated, republished or otherwise presented outside the journalistic sphere despite the fact that the content was potentially valuable to those involved in Ryukyuan Studies. And, given that they have now been deleted from the archives and are unavailable online, it has become all the more important to put together some of the main findings. This chapter therefore attempts to summarise the findings to provide a snapshot of revitalisation activities and attitudes around the beginning of the 21st century in the Ryukyu Islands at a time when the local languages were experiencing a surge in public interest. The discussion is organised according to type of activity, e.g. preserving and recording material, teaching in schools, media broadcasts and so on.

All quotes from speakers interviewed by the main author of the articles, journalist Funakoshi Miki from the Social Affairs Section of the Okinawa Times, have been translated into English from Japanese or Ryukyuan varieties. The information provided in these articles is supported by transcripts of audio recordings and anecdotal accounts from my own experiences in the field during the period in question. In many of the quotes in this chapter, Ryukyuan languages are referred to as *hōgen* ‘dialects (of Japanese)’. They have long been classified as such, in line with the conventions of Japanese national (identity) linguistics (*kokugogaku*), a discipline which is strongly influenced by the nationalistic ideology of the Meiji era. This classification perpetuates the idea of a monolingual Japanese nation (Heinrich 2012) and is significant in the context of the discussions in this book because it has had the effect of stigmatising the languages and has continually reproduced negative language attitudes in successive generations.

## **2. Efforts towards documentation in the form of books and recordings**

Revitalisation activities in the Ryukyus have focused on documentation in the form of dictionaries or video/CD recordings, in other words “salvage linguistics”, rather than attempts to foster grass-roots transmission of the spoken language to younger generations as advocated, for example, by Heinrich’s interviewees in the final chapter of this volume<sup>1</sup>. The importance attached to language preservation rather than maintenance as a living language may be due to the predominant perspective of “language-as-system” as opposed to “language-as-practice” (Sugita 2007). Interpretations of what constitutes “saving” a language vary considerably, and even if speakers appear to be generally enthusiastic about language

maintenance, it is often unclear what such maintenance would actually entail<sup>2</sup>. In the Okinawa Times articles, there is frequent use of the Japanese word *nokosu* in reference to saving the language. This means literally ‘to make something remain’, but the notion of *nokosu* is general and does not specifically denote either preservation in the sense of documentation or maintenance as a living language via intergenerational transmission at home.

At the turn of the millennium, types of activity that were geared towards preservation were being carried out by both academics and amateur enthusiasts in the Ryukyus. As is the case with any endangered language, it is vital to undertake such documentation efforts while full speakers are still active in the community. This point is expressed in the stated aim of the Yomitan-based Ryukyu Islands Historical Society (*Ryūkyū-ko o kiroku suru kai*, established 1997) in collecting video footage of elderly people reciting folk tales, ceremonial rites and accounts of war in Okinawa: the society wished to “preserve (*nokosu*) the language in the form of recordings, with no intent to promote intergenerational maintenance (*keishō*).” The reasoning behind these efforts reveals a certain resignation to eventual language loss. Higa Toyomitsu (aged 50 in 2001), who was involved in the project, stated: “The dialects will disappear in another 50 to 100 years. Once they’re gone there might be revival movements as is the case with the Ainu language, so any recordings we manage to preserve could prove useful for that purpose.” (Okinawa Times, February 7, 2001).

For many researchers, the collection of recordings or written vocabulary is as much motivated by emotion as academic interest. Aoyama and Arakaki (2001) compiled the rather pessimistically titled wordbook *Uchinaaguchi shigo korekushon* (‘Uchinaaguchi Extinct Language Collection’). Editor Arakaki Kōyū stated the following a week after its publication:

There used to be a lot of powerful words in everyday use, but you just don’t hear them anymore. You feel a sense of crisis and urgency when you think about the fact that the language is going to disappear... It’s natural that languages should change, but while the Okinawan language is still alive, it has the potential to be revitalised. I would like action to be taken so that that happens. (Okinawa Times, August 15, 2001).

The sense of urgency communicated in these quotes is often accompanied by a determination to succeed. Kiku Chiyo (aged 74 in 2001), founder of the Yoron Folklore Village, said: “I am absolutely determined to do my bit to help preserve the Yoron dialect. Even if it takes years, I’ll stick at it.”

(Okinawa Times, August 22, 2001). At the time, Kiku was involved in a joint project compiling a Yoron dialect dictionary, which was eventually published four years later (Kiku and Takahashi 2005). Her actual words, as quoted in the Okinawa Times, were *zettai yoron no hōgen o nokoshitai*. The use of *nokoshitai* (literally ‘want to allow to remain’) here implies that her aim was to document as much Yoron vocabulary as she could for posterity.

Kiku’s family is unusual in that the determination to document their local language is accompanied by efforts towards intergenerational language transmission at home. An article about Kiku’s son, Hidenori, is entitled *Hanasanai to nokoranai* (‘If we don’t speak it, it will disappear’, or literally, ‘will not remain’), and the word *keishō* ‘inheritance’ appears elsewhere in the text. Kiku Hidenori, who has since published his own series of Yoron language books (Kiku 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011), is one of the few people who uses some Yoron dialect with his children. In explaining his reasons for doing so, he states that “the dialects are disappearing, and non-speakers are becoming parents. We have to save them now. It’ll be too late in ten years time.” (Okinawa Times, August 22, 2001). Like his mother, who also speaks to her grandchildren in the local language, Kiku uses the word *nokosu*, but his efforts to transmit his local language to his children indicate that his concepts of *nokosu* and *keishō* mean actual intergenerational transmission.

Some Ryukyuan non-academics involved in various forms of preservation or maintenance efforts appear to have felt as though it was their “mission” to compile material on their own, without the assistance of academics. Ikema Nae, who runs a private Yonaguni Folklore Information Centre and is the author of the *Yonaguni kotoba jiten* ‘Yonagunian Dictionary’ (Ikema 1998) has been one such person. Despite several offers of assistance from language specialists who had heard about his project, Ikema initially refused each time on the grounds that “if you’re not from Yonaguni, it’s impossible to express the emotional content of Yonagunian.” (Okinawa Times, October 31, 2001). Like Kiku, Ikema was also motivated by a sense of urgency, as the following quote reveals:

It’s shameful that elderly people are using Standard Japanese ... they should be teaching dialect to the children. We have to save the dialect now by getting young people to use it. I’m not saying that they should have to speak *only* in dialect, but at this rate it’s going to die, and that would be a very sad thing to happen. After all, language is our means to communicate our history, folklore and culture. (Okinawa Times, October 31, 2001).

One particularly notable ongoing documentation activity is the Kōki

Dialect Dictionary, which is based on a wordlist of 16,052 items compiled by an enthusiast from Kōki, near Nago in North Okinawa Island. The man, named Miyagi Kazuo, died in 1985 at the age of 69, but his work was taken up from the year 2000 by Karimata Shigehisa from the University of the Ryukyus. Karimata's work involved interviewing the man's wife, Fumi, and her relative, Yuriko (then aged in their 80s), with the aim of obtaining detailed information about the meaning, pronunciation, intonation and usage of each word (Okinawa Times, February 2, 2001). He then further expanded the dictionary to around 18,000 words for publication (Karimata forthcoming). The dictionary contains more items than previously published major works of this type such as Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo (1963) and Miyagi (2003), which include 15,000 and 16,000 items respectively (Ryūkyū Shinpō, March 9, 2010).

Preservation-oriented activities are often characterised by an emphasis on the importance of “purity” in the language. Such ideologies relating to the authentic speaker and authentic language are evidently common in minority language communities and among the linguists who study them (Bucholtz 2003:404). In one project, for example, Neho Yukunori (aged 67 in 2001), from Miyagi Island (an islet off the east coast of Okinawa Island), collaborated with four other people of a similar age from the area, and produced a booklet called *Shimakutuba – Miyagijima no hōgen* (‘Community Language – The Dialect of Miyagi Island’). From 1981, the group met once a month and compiled vocabulary from questionnaires distributed to elderly people in the local area. Three years later, a list of over 1,200 words was published. Neho's comments reveal his frustration at his inability to speak a “pure” form of the dialect: “I would like the language to stay alive, but it's annoying that I can't speak it perfectly (*kanpeki ni*) myself. The loss of a language is the same as losing your home. Maybe the only people who can speak pure (*junsui na*) dialect are the expats living in places like Peru and Argentina.” (Okinawa Times, March 21, 2001).

There are also practical problems with the type of revitalisation efforts aimed at preservation only. For example, how does one generate public interest in collections of Ryukyuan-medium folk stories if most of the local people understand little of their local language? One of the most significant contributions to the body of reference material was a CD produced by the Ginoza Museum entitled *Ginoza-son no mukashibanashi* (‘Folk Tales from Ginoza Village’) (Okinawa Times, January 31, 2001). For this project, two hundred speakers over the age of 65 were recorded in Ginoza, a village located in the Kunigami district of Okinawa Island, and 1,221 folk tales, legends and other stories were collected and burnt onto 76

CDs, each 74 minutes long. Ten of these stories were selected for the final CD publication. Some portions of the CD were recorded in Standard Japanese in order to widen the collection's appeal by making it easier for children to understand. Although much of the actual dialogue in the stories is in the local language, this bilingual approach illustrates the dilemma faced by people involved in such projects who find they have to strike a balance between authenticity and audience appeal.

Other projects are monolingual, containing only passages of local language, with no Japanese. Higa Toyomitsu (aged 50 in 2001), of the aforementioned Ryukyu Islands Historical Society, made a conscious decision to include only local language in his video recordings of elderly people's verbal accounts of the war, religious ceremonial words, and folk stories. Higa points out that, "when elderly people are talking about the history and culture of the islands, they can't express their memories in anything other than their dialect. There are nuances that simply can't be conveyed by any other language." (Okinawa Times, February 7, 2001).

### **3. Uchinaaguchi teaching in schools, colleges and evening classes**

*Uchinaaguchi* has not been introduced as a medium for teaching in schools, and is generally only taught as a second language in lunchtime groups, which may only be held weekly or fortnightly. Heinrich (2005a:4) reports that the introduction of *Uchinaaguchi* classes requires the approval of the Okinawa Education Council, which has so far "not been supportive of the scheme." This is concerning because, given the generally positive attitudes among Ryukyuan towards their local languages, such classes have the potential to be successful in increasing speaker numbers, even without reinforcement via intergenerational transmission in the home<sup>3</sup>.

With regard to those schools where some form of Ryukyuan language instruction is being provided, one must not assume that language maintenance is necessarily a priority for the institution. It appears that, like those who attempt to preserve the language through recordings of monologues such as folk tales, some institutions view the Ryukyuan languages primarily as a means to learn about local history and culture, rather than a potentially viable means of communication in the community. Nakamura Hajime, headteacher at Koza Primary School, explains the reasons for establishing a fortnightly "dialect club" at his institution: "We felt that if they [the children] are to become citizens of the international community, then they must first gain an understanding of their own roots" (Okinawa Times, January 24, 2001).

There are reported to be many practical problems involved in the actual teaching and planning processes. Some of these are listed below:

*(a) Resources*

Some teachers report that they are not equipped with adequate resources. One teacher voiced the following concern: “Teaching dialect in schools makes you feel complex feelings of incongruity. There are no textbooks or set guidelines like you have for other subjects, so it’s a case of groping around in the dark.” (Okinawa Times, January 17, 2001). The article goes on to explain that, owing to the lack of written material in *Uchinaaguchi*, newspaper and magazine articles are used in class, and the teacher tries as best s/he can to explain the texts.

*(b) Staffing*

There appears to be no formal procedure for the provision of teachers who are able to teach Ryukyuan languages<sup>4</sup>, and a headteacher would have to approach some sort of external organisation involved in the promotion of local languages and entrust them with the provision of personnel, materials, and planning of course content. For example, in the case of the aforementioned Koza Primary school, the headteacher discussed these issues with the *Uchinaaguchikai* (‘Okinawan Language Association’), a local organisation involved in the promotion of Okinawan in Okinawa City and chaired by Aoyama Yōji, editor of Aoyama and Arakaki (2001).

*(c) Standardisation*

There is disagreement as to which language should be taught in the various geographical locations, and which local variety should be used as a standard. Historically speaking, *Uchinaaguchi* (Central Okinawan) has enjoyed a status unequalled by the languages of other island groups, and the Naha/Shuri variety would therefore be the most likely candidate for designation as the standard for that particular language. However, as journalist Funakoshi Miki points out in a feature about *Uchinaaguchi*-medium education in Haeburu High School, any formal standardisation could entail neglect of other languages and dialects, which are no less valuable than the Naha/Shuri variety:

I can see a problem with teaching Ryukyuan in schools. In [this] school, traditional dance and sanshin are being taught, so knowledge of those aspects of our culture will be handed down to the younger generation, and that’s fantastic. But there are limits to how well a textbook can teach the diverse dialects, which are said to differ from village to village. Even if there were one “unified” textook, it would probably be in the Naha/Shuri

dialect. Ryukyuan languages would then just become homogeneous, and the Yaeyama and Miyako dialects would not be “inherited” in the true sense of the word. (Okinawa Times, January 17, 2001).

(d) *Proficiency*

Some of the teachers themselves feel a lack of confidence in their ability to speak authentic Ryukyuan language that is “appropriate for teaching.” Miyagi Yōko, local language teacher at Ginowan nursing care school, expresses her concerns: “I’m from Gushikawa so I speak the Gushikawa dialect. I still worry about which variety I’m supposed to be teaching.” (Okinawa Times, January 31, 2001).

Some tertiary education institutions offer formal instruction in Ryukyuan languages. Since all six universities in the Ryukyus are located on Okinawa Island, the variety taught there is *Uchinaaguchi*, more specifically the Naha/Shuri dialect (Heinrich 2005a:4). In the above-mentioned specialist tertiary institution for care of the elderly in Ginowan, Okinawa Island, *Uchinaaguchi* has been included in the curriculum to facilitate communication with elderly residents in nursing homes. This is one example of a minority language education programme that is reinforced by later requirements in the work domain. However, comments from the then headteacher, Nakamura Yoshiaki, reveal a typically oversimplistic view of cultural continuity, and perhaps also a lack of long-term planning in these endeavours: “In the future, the students will be able to become teachers themselves, and they can pass on their knowledge of the language to children, so that cultural continuity (*bunka no keishō*) is achieved.” (Okinawa Times, January 31, 2001).

Comments from students in this class also show that there may have been little attention paid to long term goals and changes in language attitudes. When the Okinawa Times journalist interviewed the students in this class, their comments were generally positive while their teacher was present; for example, one 23 year old female student said, “At this rate the dialects will disappear. I want to treasure the language of the islands where I was born.” However, in an informal chat after the lesson, another female student’s comment probably reflected the actual views of many of her peers: “You can get by with Standard Japanese [for communication], so you don’t really need *Uchinaaguchi*.” (Okinawa Times, January 31, 2001). This suggests that individuals do not feel directly affected by the loss of *Uchinaaguchi*, even if the culture as a whole is impoverished as a consequence of language shift<sup>5</sup>.

Evening classes targeted at older Okinawans have also been set up in response to the perceived effect of language shift but, like the classes in

tertiary institutions, appear to be lacking in clear long-term goals. During my stay in Okinawa in 2003, I attended evening classes in the Shuri dialect, held every Tuesday in the Shuri Community Centre. The name of this group is *Junsuikai* ('Pure Shuri Club'). The teacher, Matayoshi Genryō, reveals that one of his reasons for concentrating on the Shuri dialect was the sense of crisis as it disappeared: "The Shuri dialect isn't being used on the TV, radio, commercials or in Okinawan theatre, so it will probably be the first to disappear." (Okinawa Times, March 7, 2001). Much of the class time at *Junsuikai* is spent reading the *Omorosōshi* – a major Okinawan literary work compiled between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries<sup>6</sup>. The vast majority of members were born before 1950, and there are no plans for activities involving children. Heinrich (2005a:4) reports having found such circles at community centres in Shuri, Naha, Urasoe, Tomigusuku, Haeburu, Kochinda, Nishihara, Tamagusuku, Okinawa City, Ginowan, Chatan, Kadena and Ginoza, and notes that Chatan was the only location where children were receiving instruction in the local language. He comments that these circles "[cannot] be seen as language revival institutions in the strict sense." Nevertheless, these classes do have the potential to grow into language revival institutions, provided that they are targeted towards specific linguistic subgroups (see Anderson, this volume) as part of a holistic language shift reversal strategy that involves all generations and domains.

#### 4. The Arts

Ryukyuan languages are still used in traditional arts, but efforts to promote local languages in this domain are often tokenistic since the languages do not have an everyday communicative role in this context. One noticeable aspect of this use of the language is the emotive reactions it appears to induce in many people. One Okinawa Times article tells how *Uchinaaguchi* has been used in primary school plays, and notes how some of the elderly members of the audience become emotional and shed tears when they hear children communicating to them in their mother tongue (Okinawa Times, February 14, 2001).

*Uchinaaguchi* is also beginning to creep into the kind of modern stage acts that are attractive to young people. However, while its use is successful in expressing Ryukyuan identity, it seems to lack real purpose in relation to language shift reversal, apart from perhaps as a means to give the language a kind of cult appeal. Rapper Chibana Tatsumi (aged 21 in 2001) explained that he deliberately mixes *Uchinaaguchi* into the beginning of his raps only, so that young people and mainlanders are able

to understand the main content of his lyrics (Okinawa Times, April 11, 2001). This “watering down” of Ryukyuan language content is common in other art forms, too, such as the theatre and television dramas. Even though there appears to be an awareness that successful revitalisation attempts would require the involvement of young people, it is widely recognised that most young people generally cannot even understand Ryukyuan languages, let alone speak them, and the solution has often been to change scripts so that they contain a higher proportion of Japanese, making them easier for the younger generation to understand (Okinawa Times, April 18, 2001). Chibana’s comments for the newspaper appear to show that, while he senses the importance of *Uchinaaguchi* and would like it to be “saved”, he explicitly rejects the idea of reviving it as a living language for the everyday speech of all Okinawans and refuses to accept that his generation should bear any responsibility for language shift:

I’m not saying that we should all speak Ryukyuan, not in a coercive way like that. I just think it should be saved (*nokoshite-iku beki*) ... I think it’s cool if you can speak both [Japanese and *Uchinaaguchi*], but even if you understand the words, you’re not very convincing if you can’t pronounce them ... *Uchinaaguchi* is a language I don’t normally speak, so I wouldn’t want everyone to speak only in that language ... A lot of local dialects will probably get messed up, but there’s nothing you can do about that ... I want to make the younger generation realise how cool the language is, and I want to show adults how much young people want to be able to speak it. It’s the adults’ fault that the language wasn’t passed on to the next generation. (Okinawa Times, April 11, 2001).

The above quote is evidence that people may at least feel positive emotions and personal engagement in relation to Ryukyuan language use in the arts. These attitudes are a good starting point for a successful revitalisation campaign if they can be properly harnessed and if young people can be convinced not to apportion blame to older generations for having caused language shift to occur.

Although many artists use Ryukyuan languages in the tokenistic ways shown above, there is some level of awareness of the importance of restoring intergenerational transmission at home for purposes of language revitalisation. One example is a woman from Itoman named Kuniyoshi Hiroko (aged 51 in 2001). Now retired, she used to work in a home for the elderly and as a result speaks a mixture of different dialects due to diverse influences – a variety Okinawans call *manchaakutuba*. She began performing picture story shows for audiences who were mostly upwards of seventy years of age. Her remarks on private domain use are below: