

The Potential of “Potential Speakers”: Word-Prosodic Code-Switching in Kikai Ryukyuan.

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This study describes the results from a study on intergeneration language transmission in Kikai (a Northern Ryukyuan language spoken on Kikai Island, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan) based on the concept of “potential speakers” as defined by Yamada (2019) and the future study plan.

Yamada defines a potential speaker as someone who has the ability to listen and understand the language and can predictably become a full speaker if given a few years of instruction. Based on his survey Yamada demonstrates how potential speakers could quickly become proficient speakers. We thus repeated the survey based on utterance ability through accent on Kikai. The focus of the present study is on the ability of middle-aged speakers with regard to the production of word-prosodic patterns in Kikai.

Three generations, younger (-20s), middle-aged (30s–50s), and elderly (60s-), were examined to see which accent system they exhibit. We asked them (8 speakers in each generation, 24 speakers in total) to read aloud a word list containing 20 words based on Uwano (2013, 2016a, 2016b) displayed on slides, with no specific instructions. Secondly, they were given the same task but were instructed to read the same words but in their “traditional Kikai language (TK)”. The two different instructions turned out to elicit the two different accent patterns from the participants. The data were tested using a chi-square test to see whether the factors “generation” and “accent pattern” are independent, with the result that the accent pattern is dependent on the generation (Table 1 ($p= 9.396e-14$, $df=2$)). The residual analysis further revealed that the only generation that “switches” their accent patterns with the instruction is the middle-aged generation (Table 2($p= 3.633e-12$, $df=2$)), so they are what Yamada calls “potential speakers”.

For the future, we are planning to make the documentation website. As the features of this website, the community members of the Kikai island can post the text with annotation. To make this system, We use transformer model of Natural Language Processing. This future study aim to the community can do the language documentation and revitalization independently, not by the researchers.

Table 1. with no instructs

age/accent	TK	Non-TK
elder	**92 (7.7)	**68(-7.7)
middle-aged	**39(-3.1)	**121 (3.1)
younger	**32(-4.6)	**128 (4.6)

Table 2. with instructions

age/accent	TK	Non-TK
elder	**119 (6.8)	**41(-6.8)
middle-aged	78(-1.2)	82 (1.2)
younger	**55(-5.6)	**105 (5.6)

(in both table, the number in () means adjusted residuals)

References

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