

"The next clue is to the post office's *manya*": Decolonizing ideologies in the Southern Ryukyus with the help of a stamp rally.

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Abstract:

150 years of monolingual Japanese language ideology has culminated in all six indigenous languages of the Ryukyuan archipelago being expected to vanish in the following 30 years (Anderson 2019). This has awakened a movement of language revitalization, but one of limited success that is still struggling to decolonize, including dealing with the low-status view of the languages and their concepts (Brenzinger 2006) in the minds of their keepers who have all been educated to speak the language and share the ideology of the Japanese (Hammie 2021). The problem is compounded by language accommodation to the Japanese limiting their ability to grasp the more activist behavior critical for the survival of the language such as calling their words a language and not a dialect of Japanese (Guay 2023). In this perilous situation the would-be linguist must both document the language descriptively and ethnolinguistically, as well as embrace the roll of activist and attempt to help the population to decolonize, but one cannot force people to push for their rights.

This presentation will focus on the Yaeyaman archipelago in Okinawa Prefecture 60 kilometers west of Taiwan where the language is critically endangered. All 16 remaining varieties of this language contain a pronounced house-bounded system of describing spatial frames of reference, also known as orientation systems (Levinson 2003) that until now has escaped discovery or publication by many linguists due to overreliance on elicitation and a focus on descriptive features of the language. This system along with other local concepts such as seasonal expressions are falling out of use even among those rusty and new speakers in the revitalization movement, who are unable to grasp the value of these systems due to colonization of the mind (Fanon and Philcox 2004).

To combat this and to inspire more activism among the population, I received funding from the Japanese government to conduct stamp rally events primarily aimed at families with children where all the clues are given using the house-bounded orientation expressions. This presentation will define the current state of language efflorescence through descriptions of the events, public reaction, and survey results given to those in the revitalization movement and the about 200 other members of the public who participated in the stamp rallies. I show how events focused on unique ethnolinguistic features of a language can help the community decolonize and offer researchers another tool to engage in activism for their speakers.

Keywords: Decolonization, Language Efflorescence, Language Accommodation Theory, Orientation Systems, Identity Construction

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