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## ***Hōgen ronsō*: the great Ryukyuan languages debate of 1940**

**Abstract:** This paper analyzes a language ideological debate in which the status and utility of the Ryukyuan languages were discussed. One fraction supported the continuous oppression of the Ryukyuan languages as an inevitable means for Standard Japanese language spread in the Ryukyus. Their critics called for calmer judgment, pointing out the cultural value of the Ryukyuan languages. In the course of the debate, opposing visions of future linguistic orders in the Ryukyus emerged. It was the vision of those calling for Ryukyuan language oppression which turned into reality. The reason for such sociolinguistic change is rooted in power inequalities between the Japanese mainland and the Ryukyu Islands. Today, all Ryukyuan languages are set to become extinct by 2050 if no counter-action is taken. The language ideological notions connected to the Ryukyuan languages in the course of Japan's social and linguistic modernization and the reproduction of these arguments by one fraction of the debate constitute the obstacles that all those seeking Ryukyuan language revitalization must surmount. They may find useful points of departure for doing so in the arguments of the critics. However, the debate is also of interest for students of linguistics and the social sciences, since their disciplines do not emerge as “neutral” in the course of debate. Rather, they constitute central pillars in the modernist quest for homogeneity and monolingualism in a linguistically diverse state.

**Keywords:** Ryukyuan languages, language ideology, language endangerment, language policy, power inequality

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## 1940 年における琉球諸語をめぐる方言論争

パトリック・ハインリヒ

本稿は琉球諸語の地位とユーティリティをめぐる言語イデオロギー論争の分析である。この論争では、琉球諸島における標準語励行運動を推進する標準語派が琉球諸語を不必要とし、琉球諸語の撲滅を目指していた。このようなイデオロギーを批判する人々は落ち着いた判断を求め、琉球諸語の文化的価値も強調したのであった。この論争では結局、琉球諸語の撲滅を支持した派閥の思想が実現され、その結果、琉球諸語は消滅の危機に瀕した言語になった。このような社会言語学的な変化は、琉球諸島と日本本土との力の不均衡によって起因するものである。もはや琉球諸語は対策を講じない限り2050年までに完全に消滅危機にある言語として挙げられている。日本の社会および言語の近代化の過程で、琉球諸語と結び付いた言語イデオロギー的な概念は、いまや琉球諸語の復興を目指す人々にとって克服しなければならないハードルである。しかし、かつて論争で標準化を批判した閥派が述べた意見からも有用な手掛かりが得られる可能性もある。また、この論争は、言語学や社会学の専門家にとっても興味深い資料であると思われる。なぜなら、これらの学科も、論争では「中立的」な立場をとっていないのである。むしろ、これらの学科は、言語的に多様な国家では、近代主義に探求される単一性と単一言語主義のための中柱を構成している。

## 1 Introduction

The Ryukyuan languages have long been recognized as languages in their own right, as in the 2009 seminal *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* by UNESCO (Moseley 2009). There are six distinct Japonic languages of the Ryukyu Islands. These languages comprise more than 750 local dialects, many of which are not mutually intelligible. These languages, however, have been considered, in Japan, as “greater dialects” (*dai-hōgen*) of the “national language” (*kokugo*), that is, of Japanese. That the Ryukyuan languages are merely “dialects of Japanese” has, without doubt, contributed to their historical replacement through Standard Japanese.

The “derivative” view of the Ryukyuan group of languages as linguistic epiphenomena of Japanese has often been criticized (see, e.g., Ifa 1916; Kinjō 1944). However, never was such criticism more pronounced than in the so-called “dialect debate” (*hōgen ronsō*) of 1940. Tanigawa (1970) reprints many of the contributions to this debate, while Clarke (1997) discusses the debate in

its larger historical setting, and Heinrich (2004) discusses language policy in the Ryukyus at the time.

The present paper focuses on conflicting language ideologies manifesting in this debate. Language ideology is pivotal for an understanding of language endangerment in modern contexts because modernist ideology stresses homogeneity and monolingualism in linguistically diverse and multilingual settings. In doing so, such language ideology is the predominant cause behind language endangerment in modernized language ecologies (Wendel and Heinrich 2012: 155–157). Given the view that all Ryukyuan languages are predicted to become extinct by the mid-century if no counter-action is taken (Anderson 2009), a close study of language ideology is crucial to policy makers, educators, and language activists alike. Following an earlier formulation (Heinrich 2012: 18), the study of language ideology is here understood as investigating “the origin and effect of beliefs about language structure and use, as well as the ways in which those beliefs are promoted and spread beyond the social groups whose interests they serve.”

This paper shows how the distribution of power crucially shapes dominant ideas about language and language choices. Toward this end, the context, meta-language, language ideology, and envisioned language orders of key contributions of the language debate are studied.

## 2 Context of the debate

The debate on the Ryukyuan languages originated in a visit by the Japan Folk Craft Society (*Nihon mingei kyōkai*) in early January 1940 following an invitation by Okinawa Prefecture. During a discussion forum on tourism, society chairman Yanagi Muneyoshi criticized the measures implemented for spreading Standard Japanese to be exaggerated (Steele 1995: 43–44). From these comments evolved a discourse which lasted more than a year. There was more at stake than matters related to standard language education in this debate. Smits (1999: 154) mentions issues pertaining to “Japanese culture, ethnicity, nationhood, and the role of local cultures within the broader collectivity.” In other words, language educational issues served as a battleground for discussion of national unity, the relation of Ryukyuan and mainland Japanese culture, and the effects of national unity in the Ryukyus.

In the following, 18 publications will be analyzed with regard to language ideological notions expressed therein. The selected texts are central to the debate as becomes clear from the cross-references between them. The texts are

by eight different authors, some of whom were born in the Ryukyus while others were natives of mainland Japan, which raises questions of the authors' proficiency in any of the Ryukyuan languages. All contributors were well-known public figures at the time. Particularly scholars like Yanagita Kunio and Yanagi Muneyoshi as well as literary critic Sugiyama Heisuke were remarkably prominent. Ifa Fuyū and Higashionna Kanjun on the other hand were well-known figures in Okinawa Prefecture. Both are recognized today as “founding fathers” of Okinawa Studies. Before turning to the debate, let us first give a brief introduction of the contributors discussed here.

Yoshida Shien (1910–1989) headed the Prefectural Department of Education of Okinawa Prefecture (*Okinawa-ken gakumu-bu*). He was born in Shuri on Okinawa and studied at Tokyo University, where he specialized in English language education. Yoshida had to move to the mainland since no universities existed in Okinawa Prefecture at that time. Immediately after graduation, he took up a position in the Okinawan prefectural government. After 1945, he continued his bureaucratic career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo, heading the section concerned with Okinawan affairs there.

Sugiyama Heisuke (1895–1946) was born in Osaka and studied at Keiō University in Tokyo. He left university in 1913 without a degree. He published an autobiographical novel titled *Ichi nihonjin* (‘One Japanese’) at his own expense in the same year. Failing to establish himself as a novelist, he became a literary critic, publishing widely in leading newspapers and journals under various pen names. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Sugiyama visited various battlefields and wrote articles supportive of the Japanese military. He was widely criticized for his nationalistic leanings after the war. He died shortly afterwards in 1946.

Ifa Fuyū (1876–1947) was the first Ryukyuan university trained linguist. Born and raised in Naha on Okinawa Island, he learned Japanese only as a second language in elementary school. Ifa continued his education in Kyoto failing the high school exam three times. After finally graduating from high school, he enrolled at Tokyo University and studied linguistics between 1903 and 1906 under the guidance of Ueda Kazutoshi (1867–1937). By the time he graduated from university, Ifa was 30 years old. He returned to Okinawa lecturing at a local college while simultaneously working as director of the Prefectural Library. In 1924 he returned to Tokyo where he spent the rest of his life studying Ryukyuan literature and compiling a dictionary of Okinawan Ryukyuan.

Higashionna Kanjun (1882–1963) was born six years after Ifa and became the second essential figure behind the establishment of Okinawa Studies. Higashionna was born in Naha and went on to study history at Tokyo Univer-

sity where he graduated in 1905, one year earlier than Iha. After graduation, Higashionna worked at several middle and high schools while also serving as a consultant to the Ministry of Education. In 1949 Higashionna became a professor at Takushoku University in Tokyo and devoted his attention to the pre-modern history of the Ryukyu Islands. He is acknowledged as Ryukyu's first academically trained historian today.

Yanagi Muneyoshi (1889–1961) was the central figure in the dialect debate. Therefore, all of his five contributions to the debate will be analyzed here. Yanagi was born in Tokyo and studied at Tokyo University where he graduated from the Faculty of Letters in 1911. During his student years he made the acquaintance of Shō Shō (1888–1923), grandson of the last Ryukyuan King Shō Tai (1843–1901), and he consequently became interested in Ryukyuan culture and art. It was however the study of Korean ceramics which led him to conclude that contemporary European conceptions about art centered too strongly on artist genius, ignoring thereby the collective artistic skill of a nation. These considerations led him to coin the term *mingei* ('folk craft') as distinct from *bijutsu* ('fine arts') in 1926. In 1934 he established the Japan Folk Craft Society through which he aimed at collecting and surveying folk craft throughout Japan. The Folk Craft Society stressed localism and accused the central government of damaging local culture through its attempts to shape a uniform society.

Tanaka Toshio (1914–1953) was the youngest of the authors analyzed here. He closed the debate by a joint publication with Sugiyama Heisuke. Born in Yamagata Prefecture, Tanaka joined the Folk Craft Society in 1937 in order to advance his studies of Japanese textiles. Tanaka visited the Ryukyus many times, spending on the whole more than one year there. He published extensively about his research results in various journals. In 1939 he became the editor of the society journal *Gekkan Mingei* ('Monthly Folk Art'). Tanaka was therefore responsible for the publication of two issues devoted to Ryukyuan culture and language in March and November/December 1940.

The most prominent of the participants to the debate was, without doubt, Yanagita Kunio (1875–1862). Yanagita was a journalist, poet, government bureaucrat, and scholar. He is remembered today as the legendary founder of Japanese folklore studies. Born in Hyogo Prefecture, he studied law at Tokyo University where he graduated in 1900. After graduation, he served as a bureaucrat in various ministries, travelling and writing extensively at the same time. After 1930 he devoted his entire attention to the development and expansion of Japanese folklore studies.

Tōjō Misao (1884–1966) was born in Tokyo. He studied at Tokyo University where he specialized in Japanese literature. As research assistant to Ueda Kazutoshi, Tōjō after graduation concentrated on the study of Japanese dialects

while working as a part-time employee at the National Language Research Council (*Kokugo chōsa i'inkai*). After working as a teacher for several years at various high schools, he became professor at Gakushūin University in 1932. Tōjō conducted several dialectological research projects devoting most of his attention to dialect classification. After the establishment of the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (*Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyūjo*) in 1948, he served the institute as councilor and influenced the beginnings of dialect geography and “language life studies” (*genjo seikatsu*) there.

The period of time in which the debate took place was characterized by zealous activities of the Movement to Enforce the Standard Language (*Hyōjungo reikō undō*) in cooperation with the Prefectural Department of Education (Heinrich 2004). Attempts were made to promote use of Standard Japanese at all occasions across the Ryukyus, accompanied by various measures of stigmatizing and oppressing the use of Ryukyuan languages (Itani 2006; Kondō 2006). When government officials proposed further campaigns and efforts to spread Standard Japanese in order to promote tourism in Okinawa during a joint meeting with members of the Folk Craft Society, Yanagi objected, pointing out that the local Ryukyuan languages were already overtly oppressed. Upon these remarks a fervent debate evolved. The dispute was reported in all three local newspapers – *Ryūkyū Shinpō*, *Okinawa Shinbun*, and *Okinawa Mainichi Shinbun* – the following day. As an effect thereof, the Department of Education thought it necessary to defend itself and published an article two days later. The debate had started.

### 3 Terminology on Ryukyuan and Standard Japanese

In looking at the terminology used when referring to the Ryukyuan languages and to Standard Japanese, a distinction will be made between the two factions of the debate, that is to say, between those advocating the spread of Standard Japanese by all means and those raising doubts about the appropriateness of Ryukyuan language oppression. The first faction is called “supporters” here. It consisted of Yoshida and Sugiyama. The second faction is called “critics.” It included Higashionna, Ifa, Tanaka, Tōjō, Yanagi, and Yanagita.

Let us consider the supporters first. Sugiyama referred to Ryukyuan as *Ryūkyū hōgen* (‘Ryukyū dialect’) or *Ryūkyū no kotoba* (‘Ryukyuan local speech’). Sugiyama sometimes also used *tahōgen* (‘local dialects’) when writing about dialects, defining them as *tokushu na genjo* (‘a peculiar language’). We cannot

infer from his terminology whether he perceived the Ryukyuan languages as languages in their own rights or as dialects of Japanese. From his definition of dialect as a particular language (Sugiyama 1940b), it becomes clear however that he regarded the Ryukyuan varieties as a marked form and a deviation from Standard Japanese. Yoshida Shien (1940a, 1940b) and the contributions published by the Prefectural Department of Education (OKGB 1940a, 1940b, 1940c), which he had also penned, referred to Ryukyuan as *Ryūkyū hōgen* or simply *hōgen*, ‘dialect’. At times the term *Okinawago* (‘Okinawa language’) is also used. While Ryukyu is the pre-modern name of the kingdom and later of the domain under jurisdiction of Kagoshima Prefecture, Okinawa refers to the prefecture and thus to modernity and the Japanese nation-state. In the contributions by Yoshida and the Department of Education, the designation of the object language varied and the vague boundaries between dialect and language were manifested in the altering designation as either dialect or language.

Variation in the designation of Ryukyuan can also be observed in the contributions by the critics of the standard language spread policy. Yanagi Mune-yoshi (1940a, 1940b, 1940c, 1940d, 1940e) referred to Ryukyuan as *ryūgo* ‘Ryu[kyu] language’, *Okinawago* ‘Okinawa language’, *Okinawa no kotoba* ‘Okinawan local speech’, or *Okinawaguchi*, also ‘Okinawa language’, *guchi* meaning ‘language’ in Okinawan. Like his critics, Yanagi varied in his designation of Ryukyuan varieties. He defined Ryukyuan several times as *chihōgo* ‘regional language’, which he opposed to Standard Japanese as *chūōgo* ‘central language’ and *kōyōgo* ‘official language’. At the same time, however, he referred to Ryukyuan as *dogo* ‘regional dialect’ in other parts of his contributions. The term *dogo* had been coined by Kobayashi Hideo (1903–1978) in 1928 in order to conceptualize an equivalent to the German *Mundart*, that is to say, it denoted a regional dialect (Heinrich 2002: 76). Despite this seemingly contradictory designation of Ryukyuan as a dialect, the view of Ryukyuan as a language seems to be prevailing since Yanagi (1940a) pointed out that both *hyōjungo* ‘standard language’ as well as *Okinawago* ‘Okinawa language’ should be regarded as national languages. Such an unambiguous statement, in combination with the fact that Yanagi refrained from using the term *hōgen* ‘dialect’ throughout his contributions, suggests that he used the technical term *dogo* ‘regional dialect’ without proper knowledge of its denotation. The fact that *dogo* is coined by the two Chinese characters “earth/soil” and “language” might have been the source for Yanagi’s seemingly confused treatment of Ryukyuan as dialect and language at the same time.

Folklore scholar Yanagita Kunio (1940), too, appears to prefer regarding Ryukyuan as a language in its own right, referring to it as *Ryūkyūguchi* ‘Ryukyu language’ which he opposed to *Yamatoguchi* (‘Yamato language’, i.e., the lan-

guage of mainland Japan). His use of *Ryūkyūguchi* seems to reflect the Ryukyuan self-designation *Uchinaaguchi*, except for Okinawa (*Uchinaa*) being replaced with Ryukyu. An interpretation that Yanagita considered Ryukyuan varieties not to be Japanese is further substantiated by the fact that he referred to Japanese and Ryukyuan as two languages later in his contribution. Yanagita was actually the only one to speak of different varieties of Ryukyuan, which he calls *kotoba* ‘local speech’. He reminded his readers that Ryukyuan and Japanese used to be regarded as “different national languages” (*betsu no kokugo*) before the common genealogy of Ryukyuan and Japanese had been proved (see Chamberlain 1895). Similarly, historian Higashionna Kanjun (1940) appeared to view Ryukyuan as a language in its own right, referring to it as *Okinawago* ‘Okinawa language’ as opposed to *kokugo* (‘national language’, i.e., Japanese). However, he also used the term *hōgen* ‘dialect’, thus meeting the dominant terminological and conceptual conventions of treating Ryukyuan as a dialect of Japanese.

The contributors mentioned so far had no linguistic training. Let us turn to those who studied languages and linguistics next. Ifa’s (1940) choice of terminology reflects his uncertainty whether Ryukyuan should be treated as a dialect or a language. Although he referred to the Ryukyuan varieties either as *Ryūkyūgo* or *Okinawago*, he also called it *hōgen* ‘dialect’. Given the assumption that Ifa knew enough about the relationship between national languages and standard languages on one hand and dialects on the other, we must interpret his diverging terminology here as a manifestation that referring to Ryukyuan as *gengo* ‘language’ was not without problems at the time. Having learned Japanese as a foreign language at the age of eleven, Ifa was well aware that no Ryukyuan variety was mutually intelligible with any Japanese variety. Whereas we repeatedly find the Chinese character *-go* ‘language’ in compounds such as *Okinawago*, *Ryūkyūgo*, *chihōgo* ‘regional language’ or *dogo* ‘regional dialect’ throughout the texts analyzed here, Yanagi was the only one to refer to Ryukyuan straightforwardly as “language” (*gengo*).

Tōjō Misao (1940), finally, had been pivotal in the classification of dialects and the conceptualization of the relationship between national language (*kokugo*) and its dialects within “national linguistics” (*kokugogaku*). Not surprisingly, therefore, Tōjō provided his readers first with a *tour de horizon* about the various terms available for designation of Ryukyuan: *Nantō hōgen* ‘dialects of the Southern Islands’, *Nantōgo* ‘languages of the Southern Islands’, *Ryūkyū hōgen* ‘Ryūkyū dialect’, *Ryūkyūgo* ‘Ryukyuan’, and *Okinawago* ‘Okinawa language’. He considered *Nantō hōgen* ‘dialect of the Southern Islands’ most appropriate since it included the dialects spoken in Amami, which is part of Kagoshima Prefecture. Furthermore, use of the term *Nantō hōgen* paid tribute to the fact

that Ryukyuan was what he called a “greater dialect” (*dai-hōgen*) of the national language. In his groundbreaking *Dai-nihon gengo chizu* ‘Dialect Map of Greater Japan’, Tōjō (1927) had famously distinguished between two greater dialects, namely the Japanese and the Ryukyuan branches of the “national language.” In so doing, Tōjō provided for a definition of dialect which crucially hinged on the borders of the nation-state. Clearly then, Tōjō must have been aware that the classification of languages and dialects included political considerations.

To summarize, terminology as manifested in the debate was rather fluid. However, a general tendency becomes clear: The critics of the standard language spread policy were more prepared to treat Ryukyuan as a language. Yanagi in this debate stood at one end of the continuum and Tōjō at the other. This shows that metalanguage, too, relates to sociohistorical contexts.

## 4 Conflicting views on language utility

Of those defending the current policy, Sugiyama was most overt in expressing ideological notions of language. The contribution by the Department of Education and Yoshida on the other hand are characterized by little language ideological comment, due to a preoccupation with defending the current educational policy. These contributions reveal an instrumental view of language: that language was a means of expression and a tool for achieving certain nonlinguistic goals such as economic development or political and social mobilization (Yoshida 1940a, 1940b; OKGB 1940a). These remarks are all we get from the five contributions of the Department of Education or Yoshida. Sugiyama on the other hand expressed his ideological views on language in quite more detail, starting with the position that not all language varieties were equal. According to Sugiyama (1940a), it was a service to speakers of inconvenient languages or language varieties if they were relieved of the burden of having to use them. Regional varieties are to Sugiyama (1940b) a “peculiar language” (*tokushu na gengo*), painful to read and to listen to. He also thought that dialects should be restricted to comic effects in literature and drama. Consistent with this standpoint was his belief that influences of dialects on the standard language were a threat to the latter’s purity. According to Sugiyama the standard language should be kept pure, which to him meant free of influences from dialects.

The comments of those criticizing the standard language spread policy also include ideology on language, speaker, and culture. Higashionna (1940) offered a standpoint similar to that of Yoshida and the Department of Education in

holding that the convenience between language varieties differed. However, Higashionna added that pride for language varieties of little convenience could be fostered. This belief was also expressed by Ifa (1940), who emphasized that one should not interfere in language matters since this would have bad psychological effects on speakers of the language or variety concerned. Ifa also held that languages had different values. This seems to be the underlying basis for his view that regional varieties could not be spread in the same way as the standard language. Tōjō (1940), more reservedly, stressed that every language variety had a cultural value. He assessed all language varieties as cultural treasures.

Yanagi, finally, offered a whole range of ideological comments on what language ought to be. With regard to Standard Japanese, he highlighted the function of interregional communication. The existence of such an interregional variety, he wrote, was fortunate and advantageous for the Japanese nation. As a result, there arose a duty for all Japanese nationals to study and master Standard Japanese (Yanagi 1940d). While Yanagi (1940a) stressed the functional aspects of a standard language, he praised the cultural values of local languages: they were passed on between generations of speakers, therefore encapsulating the spirit of their speakers and expressing local culture. Local languages therefore ought to be held in high esteem by their speakers. He thought that speaking a regional language was a joyful activity, while having it suppressed was a curse (Yanagi 1940b). People's abilities, Yanagi (1940a) pointed out, were not limited to speaking only one language. In the same way as Higashionna and Ifa, Yanagi (1940b) emphasized that taking pride in a language or language variety could be either fostered or discouraged. Yanagi furthermore distinguished between spoken and written language, recognizing the impact of writing on the cultural value attached to a language. Such insight led him to encourage Ryukyuan speakers to use their language for writing literature (Yanagi 1940b).

## 5 Conflicting views on culture and speaker

Purportedly, Okinawa Prefecture had a “language problem” that called for urgent solution for the sake of the citizens. Yoshida argued that a dialect nobody understood outside the prefecture could not be further sustained (1940b). According to the Department of Education (OKGB 1940a), Ryukyuan dialects were a source of retrogression and an impediment to expression. In contrast to such assessment of Ryukyuan languages, Standard Japanese was

perceived to cultivate progressive attitudes. It served as a source of advancement and as a means to expressing ideas in courteous manner. Standard Japanese, so the Department of Education, was as a resource for the development of Okinawa Prefecture. School education had become more efficient due to the spread of the standard language, it was argued, and increasing proficiency had made citizens more cheerful and self-confident. The Movement to Enforce the Standard Language was portrayed as a spiritual movement backed by 2,600 years of history, i.e., all the way back to legendary Japanese emperor Jinmu. In addition, the view was expressed, though not further elaborated, that the enforcement of Standard Japanese in Okinawa Prefecture was also an important issue for the Meiji state.

Sugiyama (1940a, 1940b, 1940c) pointed out that Okinawa was a wretched island, that the people there must be liberated from the old language, and that continued use of “such language” (*anna kotoba*) would certainly present a handicap for their future life. Insufficient command of the standard language and mixing standard language with dialect would also unmistakably be perceived as a weakness. He believed that such use of language was impure. Sugiyama saw Okinawa to have a serious language problem and stressed that the conversations of the common people were worse even than the “gibberish” (*chinpun kanpun*) of people in Akita Prefecture and Aomori Prefecture. In conclusion, he stated that attempts at preserving the dialects were ill advised and would cause damage to their speakers.

The critics, particularly Yanagi, were more elaborate when expressing associations and equations connected with Standard Japanese and Ryukyuan languages. Higashionna (1940) left no doubt that the great progress the culture of Japan had made since the Meiji restoration was due to the creation and spread of Standard Japanese. He also conceded, albeit without giving details, that the language of Okinawa had some inconvenient points. At the same time, however, he emphasized that it represented precious material to scholarship. Yanagita (1940) wrote that learning the national language was a heavy burden for the pupils of Okinawa Prefecture. Although he shared the assessment that there existed a language problem, Yanagita emphasized that the current language policy was troubling the people of the prefecture. Tōjō (1940) expressed similar views, indicating that he could not imagine that the loss of the dialects of the Southern Islands could be a happy experience for their speakers. He furthermore bemoaned the ongoing loss of the Ryukyuan dialects since they had not yet been sufficiently studied.

Yanagi, as the pivotal figure criticizing dominant language ideological views, had much to say on Standard Japanese and Ryukyuan. His appeal that the language of Okinawa should be respected as a national language is both

starting point and center of his considerations. His assessment of the language of Okinawa is fed by his conceptualization of the nation-state consisting of various regions. If the region is weakened, Yanagi (1940a) stated, so is the nation-state. Among all Japanese regions, Okinawa could boast the culture of greatest worth for there was no other part of Japan with such rich cultural assets. A Japan without regional languages, he explained, would be dull. Yanagi was driven by the conviction that lack of insight into the culture and the language of Okinawa was responsible for negative views on the part of mainland Japanese (Yanagi 1940b). He perceived it to be necessary to stop talking about Okinawan economic poverty and to start stressing its cultural richness. He argued that a perception of a great Okinawa had to be fostered. He advocated a reconsideration of the regional culture, asking Okinawan readers to join his efforts. Yanagi referred to Okinawa Prefecture as a Japan undamaged by modernity. Therefore, he disagreed with the view that the faster one adapted to the customs and language of mainland Japan the better it was for the people of Okinawa. The contrary was true, he argued. The language of Okinawa was of great worth and writing literary works in the local language would contribute to the glory of the prefecture and thereby of Japan (Yanagi 1940b). Since both Standard Japanese and the language of Okinawa should be respected in the same way, it ought to be a “joyful duty” to the people of Okinawa Prefecture to study the standard language, but they also ought to be praised for speaking a regional language in addition. Yanagi (1940a) believed that speaking only the language of Tokyo, as he did, ought to be considered a handicap. Yanagi’s views were less enthusiastic and liberal with regard to what he termed the “so-called standard language” (*iwayuru hyōjungo*), which he saw in urgent need of purification (1940a). This led him to propagate the establishment of a “correct standard language” (*tadashii hyōjungo*). He thought that particularly the incorporation of Western loanwords was undermining the purity of the standard language and attempts ought to be made to replace them by Japanese words. The language of Okinawa, Yanagi argued, could be of great value in this endeavor.

## 6 Envisioning language orders

Let us now proceed to discuss conflicting ideas about the future linguistic order in Okinawa Prefecture. The participants in the debate again form the usual two groups. The supporters encouraged a monolingual language order which left no room for Ryukyuan languages. The Prefectural Department of Education

categorically ruled out the possibility that use of the standard language could be encouraged while paying respect to the dialects at the same time (OKGB 1940a). Yoshida (1940b) stated that dialects nobody understood outside the prefecture could not be maintained, and Sugiyama (1940a) expressed the view that the policy of the prefecture of spreading Standard Japanese while oppressing the Ryukyuan dialects was absolutely appropriate. People should be liberated from the “old language” (*furui kotoba*), he added. No justification was given for such views. Arguments were obviously deemed unnecessary. The critics repeatedly asked, in vain, for a rationalization of such a policy. Yanagi (1940a) went as far as ridiculing his opponents, asking if there was something barbarous in the language of Okinawa or something superior in Standard Japanese, or whether one was simply afraid that people would forget Standard Japanese if they did not speak it at home.

The critics advocated a tolerant stance toward Ryukyuan and supported a linguistic order where Ryukyuan languages could be used at home and in the neighborhood. Ifa (1940) pointed out that although nobody disagreed that Standard Japanese ought to be spread, this did not require the necessity of oppressing the dialects. Yanagita (1940), in the same way, proposed a reconsideration of the current practice of oppressing Ryukyuan. Tōjō (1940), too, disapproved of the view that the dialects ought to be prohibited in order that the standard language could be successfully spread. Yanagi, finally, offered yet another view. He advocated the idea of Okinawan being respected as a national language. Emphasizing that he was not against the spread of the standard language in principle, he opposed standard language spread which would be accompanied by a complete boycott of the language of Okinawa (Yanagi 1940d). According to Yanagi, the standard language ought to be used in official situations whereas local languages ought to be used in private settings. He also stated that respect for the local language and standard language spread could very well be achieved at the same time. In addition, Yanagi (1940a) proposed that a pure Japanese be developed as a correct standard language. That is to say, Yanagi shifted the focus of the debate on language problems away from the Ryukyuan context. It is Standard Japanese, he argued, which was in need of regulation.

In the course of the debate four different linguistic orders were envisioned, the first one of which is presented in Figure 1. According to this perception, as advocated by Yoshida, the prefectural administration and Sugiyama, the dialect of Okinawa Prefecture was singled out from other local dialects. It was perceived as a burden from which its speakers must be freed. Hence it should be replaced in all domains by the standard language.

Region	Mainland Japan				Okinawa Pref.
Public domain	Standard Japanese				
Private domain	regional dialect	regional dialect	regional dialect	regional dialect	Standard Japanese

**Figure 1:** Linguistic order according to Yoshida, the prefectural administration, and Sugiyama.

Figure 2 sketches the linguistic order that was promoted by Ifa and Yanagita. Both pointed out that the dialect of Okinawa should not be suppressed. It should not be singled out more than any other regional dialect.

Standard Japanese						
regional dialect	regional dialect	regional dialect	regional dialect	regional dialect	regional dialect	dialect of Okinawa

**Figure 2:** Linguistic order advocated by Ifa and Yanagita.

Tōjō expressed a similar view as Ifa and Yanagita, but assigned the Okinawa dialect a particular position among the Japanese dialects, as illustrated in Figure 3. Due to the vast differences between the mainland dialects and those spoken in the Ryukyu Islands, Tōjō had come up with the concept of “greater dialect” (*dai-hōgen*) in the late 1920s so that the Ryukyuan languages could be incorporated into the ideological frame of the national language, that is, become part of Japanese.

Standard Japanese					
Mainland greater dialects			Ryukyu greater dialects		
regional dialects	regional dialects	regional dialects	regional dialects	regional dialects	regional dialects

**Figure 3:** Linguistic order advocated by Tōjō.

Yanagi finally proposed a scheme according to which a correct standard language ought to be established mainly on the basis of the “so-called standard language” and the dialects of Okinawa Prefecture. He argued that other

regional dialects could also contribute to the creation of pure Japanese as correct standard language, albeit to a lesser extent. The pure Standard Japanese to be established should be restricted to official situations and pressures on the local languages ought to be relieved. Yanagi's scheme is depicted in Figure 4.

Correct standard language				
so-called standard language	dialects of Okinawa	regional dialects	regional dialects	regional dialects

**Figure 4:** Linguistic order advocated by Yanagi.

In many of the proposed linguistic orders which emerged in the course of the debate, a close connection to terminology and the concomitant associations linked to Standard Japanese and Ryukyuan can be noted. Of the four different linguistic orders emerging in the debate, the one proposed by Tōjō (Figure 3) became adopted by Japanese dialectology, which to this day continues to treat Ryukyuan as a Japanese greater dialect (see, e.g., Kibe 2011: 8). Real language use however eventually followed the scheme as outlined by Yoshida and Sugiyama (Figure 1). The reason why this particular vision came to influence the linguistic situation is grounded in power relations between the proponents of the different schemes.

## 7 Struggle over authority and interests in the debate

Any language ideological debate is inevitably more than a debate about language. It is so for two specific reasons: language ideology always includes non-linguistic elements and any debate always entails struggle for authority (Blommaert 1999). Different schemes on linguistic orders have their basis in different language ideological views. The scheme that emerged as vicarious was not the most apt or the most appropriate but simply the one backed by the most powerful social actors. Any challenge of language ideology reveals that ideology serves the specific interests of a powerful group. Existing language conventions and language choices therefore reflect distributions of power in a speech community.

Struggle for authority on linguistic issues started when Yanagi (1940c) raised the pivotal question whether the measures implemented for the spread

of the standard language were adequate. Yanagi was supported by Higashionna (1940), who stated that the prefectural authorities had failed to explain and justify their educational policy. Instead of rationalizing the existing policy in a positive way, it had only been pointed out what should be avoided, he lamented. Such exclusively negative justification of standard language spread policy led Yanagi (1940a) to wonder why the dialect should not be used at home since using dialect in informal situations was, as he insisted, rather normal elsewhere. To settle the issue, he proposed to hold a discussion meeting with Yoshida, which could be attended by local intellectuals and the interested public. Yanagi called the measures implemented illogic and considered them to be based on an inferiority complex on the part of Okinawa officials. As an effect of such attitudes, he stated, the standard language was enforced in a single-minded way. He attempted to point Sugiyama's attention to the fact that he was stigmatizing local culture and failed to recognize Ryukyuan culture as an important culture of Japan (Yanagi 1940c, 1940d). This particular point was perceived to form the basis of the arguments by the proponents of Ryukyuan language suppression, and led him to ask whether they would have the courage to implement a movement in order to enforce the standard language in other prefectures, too (Yanagi 1940a). Yanagita (1940) criticized that Okinawa Prefecture was made an object of experimentation in the field of standard language spread and recommended reconsideration of the present policy. He pointed out that prohibiting a language was "merciless," stressing that it was fortunate that some people had come out and voiced criticism against such measures.

As can be expected from a debate about a particular policy, those supporting it were predominantly on the defensive side. The Department of Education (OKGB 1940a) stated that the Folk Craft Society was stressing unimportant details and raised the question of what legitimized Yanagi to criticize the standard language spread policy. Since it had nothing to gain in a debate centered on the appropriateness of its own policy, the Department strove to put it to an end, stating that the matter had been sufficiently discussed. In so doing, the Department of Education (OKGB 1940b, 1940c) equated criticism of its policy with "noise" (*zatsuron*). The Folk Craft Movement was depicted as pursuing the unfeasible in asking to spread the standard language and to respect the dialect at the same time, and Yanagi was asked to stop spreading further misconceptions about the issue.

In the contributions by Yoshida, the linguistic authority and competence of the prefectural government was emphasized. Yoshida (1940b) wrote that the points made by the critics had already been considered and discussed, but that competent people within the prefectural government had decided against them. Linguists and the Folk Craft Society should, in his opinion, focus on their

duties, which he perceived to not include policy planning. Linguistics as well as folk craft scholars would tend to view issues merely from their narrow professional position, which was not adequate for the process of policy formation. He perceived the proposals by Yanagi to lack practical insight. Educators in the prefecture, Yoshida further expounded, were all in agreement that the whole discussion impeded the progress of educational matters in the prefecture and should be terminated immediately.

Repeated attempts were made to discredit Yanagi as an expert and also as a person. He was, unjustly, attacked for having changed his positions from a strict opponent of standard language spread to an opponent of the measures chosen for spreading the standard language (OKGB 1940b). His critics accused Yanagi to have shifted his position in order to continue the debate. On the basis of such characterization, Yanagi was depicted as an irresponsible troublemaker lacking the legitimacy to discuss important issues such as educational policies. The Department portrays him to be “insincere” (*keihaku*) and “sneaky” (*rōretsu*). Recall in this context that the debate started by a joint discussion forum to which the prefecture had invited Yanagi. Sugiyama (1940c) portrayed the articles by Yanagi as childish, shallow, and not worth mentioning. He denounced Yanagi’s comment about his own contributions, stating that Yanagi lacked the intelligence necessary to judge them. Furthermore, Sugiyama prided himself of having obtained a better understanding of the linguistic situation in the prefecture in three days than Yanagi during his repeated and prolonged stays there.

Among those writing in defense of the Ryukyuan languages, Higashionna, Yanagita, and particularly Yanagi also criticized their opponents. Iha and Tōjō, on the other hand, upheld a moderate matter-of-fact attitude throughout their contributions. Higashionna (1940), though very brief in his accusation, became quite hostile calling officialdom ignorant since it looked at Okinawa in the same way as it did at Korea or Taiwan. Although Yanagi stayed composed throughout much of his contributions, he lost his posture when replying to Yoshida’s claim that the “dialect tag” (*hōgen fuda*) to be worn around the neck by pupils in order to stigmatize them had only been used in two schools in Okinawa Prefecture. Aware of the fact that this statement was untrue (see Kondō 2006), he condemned such misinformation to a public which knew better, claiming it to be malign toward prefectural citizens (Yanagi 1940e).

Tōjō (1940) stated that prohibition of the dialect was not an advisable measure from a scholarly perspective. He therefore pressed prefectural authorities for calmer judgment. Tōjō’s statement that his remark merely reflects scholarly interest is unusual in the debate. Otherwise, a clear divide emerges with regard to the perspectives taken. The critics of the present policy defended the interest

of the people of Okinawa Prefecture, whereas the supporters represent mainland views and interests. Yanagi addressed Okinawan residents repeatedly, directly urging them to strive for the same ends as he and his collaborators did. In return, he promised to inform as many people as possible about the countless aspects of Ryukyuan culture and language worth taking pride in. Turning to the prefectural government, he asked whether it would not be the duty of the Department of Education to protect the local language and to take the lead in the attempt to establish a pure Japanese (Yanagi 1940b). Higashionna (1940), too, represented the interests of the local population, branding the view that the people of Okinawa would abound in joy when being praised for their proficiency in Standard Japanese to be mean-spirited since such perception hinged solely on a mainland perspective.

The Department of Education (OKGB 1940a), on the other hand, expressed joy about the fact that any mainland traveler could today ask for directions, even from old people in the countryside, and receive information in Standard Japanese. It furthermore took pride in the fact that letters expressing gratitude for their language policy reached them from employees dispatched from the mainland or from mainland soldiers stationed in Okinawa Prefecture. In later contributions, and apparently in reaction to Yanagi's call for local support of his views, the Department of Education (OKGB 1940b, 1940c) stressed its cooperation with the Movement to Enforce the Standard Language in Okinawa Prefecture, stating that this popular movement was meaningful for the prefecture as well as for the nation-state. While Sugiyama (1940b) did not explain whose interests he was advocating, his remarks that dialects give you a headache, are difficult to understand and painful to read, reflect perspectives of people not speaking these dialects. He also stated that among the ranks of intelligence, as for instance among journalists, an accent among Okinawans similar to that of Chinese had been noted, and not correcting this would unmistakably be perceived as a stigma (Sugiyama 1940a).

Students of ideology have repeatedly stressed that recognition of ideology *as ideology* is a precondition for emancipation from ideological oppression (Eagleton 1991: 55). Emancipation, however, hinges also on a successful shift of authority and on a readjustment of power relations. It is here that Yanagi and his supporters were unsuccessful. Power and authority stayed connected with mainland language, culture, and interests. The period in which the debate took place turned out to be an unfavorable point in time for attempts of redistributing power and cultural capital. As a matter of fact, the debate constitutes a clear case where power struggles about language were shifting toward the coercive end. With a joint publication of Sugiyama, the most vocal defender of language oppression, and Tanaka, chief editor of the journal *Gekkan Mingei*,

the debate came to end in April 1941 (Sugiyama and Tanaka 1941). Therein, the scholarly approach of the Folk Craft Society was denounced and a more “practical” approach to folk art studies propagated. The article stated that research henceforth should contribute to the production of cheap and reliable products of daily use in view of the shortages of daily goods. This last article added no new arguments to the debate and it is doubtful that the views expressed therein really reflect those of Tanaka. The final contribution to the dialect debate thus serves a reminder that the days in which open debates on policies were possible had come to an end in Japan at the time.

## 8 Conclusions

Debating the Ryukyuan languages in 1940 entailed ideas about modernity, progress, culture, nationhood, and regionalism. The debate demonstrates that language ideology is always ideology about language and about something else. It is the connection between language and social structure which renders ideas about language ideological in the debate. Standard Japanese is presented by the proponents of Ryukyuan language suppression as an emblem of national unity, modernity, progress, and development. Using Standard Japanese thus renders speakers Japanese, modern, and progressive. Ryukyuan served as a complementary element to this view, in that it was perceived to serve as an emblem of regionalism, a bygone age, and retrogression. Through the connection of language to such concepts, speakers of Ryukyuan languages were rendered provincial, old-fashioned, and retrograded. The critics tried to reverse such views, being well aware that these assessments were not natural or common sense and could therefore be framed differently. Yanagi explicitly called for a reassessment of the region, its population, culture, and language.

In failing to reverse the negative language ideological views, the Ryukyuan languages continued to be marginalized after World War II. Neither the experiences during the Battle of Okinawa, nor the prolonged detachment from mainland Japanese under US occupation until 1972 could overturn this trend (see Heinrich 2004). To maintain and revitalize the Ryukyuan languages will, however, require just that: a reversal of the marginalization process. Revisiting the arguments of the great language debate of 1940 may serve as a first step for attempts to provide the Ryukyuan languages with a more positive image than that which came to be attached to them in the course of Standard Japanese language spread.

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