NOT WRITING AS A KEY FACTOR IN LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT:
THE CASE OF THE RYUKYU ISLANDS

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Abstract: Language shift differs from case to case. Yet, specific types of language shift can be identified. Language shift in the Ryukyu Islands is caused by the socioeconomic changes resulting from the transition from the dynastic realms of the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Tokugawa Shogunate to the modern Meiji state. We call the scenario of shift after the transition from a dynastic realm to a modern state 'type III' language shift here. In type III, one language adopts specific new functions, which undermine the utility of other local or ethnic languages. The dominance of one language over others hinges, amongst other things, on the extent to which a written tradition existed or not. In the Ryukyu Kingdom, Chinese and Japanese were employed as the main languages of writing. The lack of a writing tradition paved the way for the Ryukyuan languages to be declared dialects of the written language, that is, of Japanese. Such assessment of Ryukyuan language status was first put forth by mainland bureaucrats and later rationalized by Japanese national linguistics. Such a proceeding is an example of what Heinz Kloss calls near-dialectization. In order to undo the effects thereof, language activists are turning to writing in order to lay claim to their view that the endangered Ryukyuan *Abstand* languages be recognized as languages.

Key words: Ryukyuan languages, language shift theory, writing, language adaptation, language revitalization

INTRODUCTION

The Ryukyuan languages have rarely been written in their history. While this did not pose any socio-political consequences for many centuries, the lack of Ryukyuan writing served as a rationale for modernity to declare Ryukyuan languages 'dialects' of Japanese. A consequence of this was the interruption of Ryukyuan language adaptation, and the opening up of a gap between the Ryukyuan languages and Ryukyuan life in modernity. This was seen as further evidence that the Ryukyuan languages are, indeed, 'dialects', and hence not fit for writing. The Ryukyuan languages were not written under US occupation either, despite some early considerations to establish Ryukyuan medium school education then. In view of the present-day endangerment of the Ryukyuan languages, writing is increasingly considered to be crucial for language documentation, language transmission outside the family, and the restoration of verbal hygiene. While this may be clear to Ryukyuan language activists, many Ryukyuan linguists stick to the modernist 'leave your language alone' stance. This position is not without problems. To start with, language endangerment in the Ryukyus is the result of active and purposeful intervention into Ryukyuan language ecology. Furthermore, creating ecologies, in which the Ryukyuan languages can survive, requires adjustments. In other words, it requires intervention. Developing the practice of writing is a crucial component in the creation of language ecologies where both Ryukyuan languages and Japanese can coexist. Let us start our considerations by first considering

types of language shift, in order to identify and better comprehend the case of the Ryukyus.

LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN THE TRANSITION FROM DYNASTIC REALMS TO NATION STATES

Despite remaining knowledge gaps in the genesis, spread and development of the Ryukyuan languages, the basic scenario of their rise and endangerment is clear. Large-scale migration of an agronomy practicing population from Kyushu to the Ryukyus around the 10th to 12th century introduced the Japonic languages spoken in Kyushu at the time to the Ryukyus. Old Japanese later displaced these Japonic languages in Kyushu, while they developed into the Ryukyuan languages in the Ryukyus. We have no traces of the languages spoken in the Ryukyu Islands before that (see Pellard 2013 for details). The Japanese invasion into the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1872 in turn led to the dissolving of the Ryukyu Kingdom and to its incorporation into the Meiji state (Kerr 1958: 365-378). A rather complex development involving monolingual language ideology, language stigmatization campaigns, discrimination suffered first at the hand of mainland Japanese, and then at the hands of US occupiers, resulted in a process of language shift, which reached the domain of the family in the 1950s (see Heinrich 2012: 146-149). As an effect, all Ryukyuan languages are either severely or critically endangered today (Moseley 2009).

The language shift we are concerned with in this paper is the effect of the transformations of the dynamic realms of the Ryukyu Kingdom and the Tokugawa Shogunate into the modern Meiji state. Narrowing down the discussion on language endangerment to specific types of socio-political change is a meaningful way to better define language shift, the study of which has been criticized for often being too vague (Spolsky 2008: 152). Indeed, our methods of studying language shift have by and large remained the same since Fishman (1966) and his associates started to study language choices in the Barrio almost half a century ago. Ever since then, the key term to studying language shift and reversing language shift has been that of the 'domain'. While domain constitutes a powerful tool for the study of language choices, its application has prevented further theorization of language shift. As a result, we still lack detailed insights into the general, that is, non-specific mechanism of language shift (Mühlhäusler 1996: 19).

In seeking to add more precision to the concept of 'language shift', a distinction between the two large waves of language shift is a helpful first step. The first wave of language shift is an effect of the transitions from hunter-gatherer societies to agrarian societies. This process started 12,000 years ago and continues until today (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 1-2). In this kind of language shift, the invading language usually moves in from east or west while the hunter-gather populations and their languages are driven by force into geographical pockets (Nichols 1992: 18-20), or are assimilated, or killed. The second wave began with the transformation of dynastic realms, i.e. divinely ordained hierarchical polities, into modern nation states. This process started with the French Revolution and continues until today (Salminen 2007: 209). Thus, at present, we are experiencing the effect of two large waves of language shift which are eroding language diversity across the world. Yet, the socio-economic settings in which they take place differ fundamentally.

Altogether four types of socio-economic organization need to be distinguished for general considerations of language shift: hunter-gatherer communities, agrarian societies, dynamic

realms, and modern societies. Put simply, transition between these four socio-economic types often gives rise to language shift, resulting in three basic types of language shift: (I) from hunter-gathers to agrarian society, (II) from agrarian society to dynastic realms, and (III) from dynastic realm to nation states. Besides (1) the socio-economic organization of the communities in which language shift takes place, these shifts also differ with regard to (2) the role of ideology behind social change, (3) the ways in which dominant languages grow, and (4) the envisaged language regime.

Table 1: Basic types of language shift

	community	ideology	growth	regime
Type I	bands	more population	organic	community language
Type II	segregated	more territory	merge	diglossia
Type III	invented	more loyalty	unify	national language

In the present paper, we need to concern ourselves only with language shift of type III, that is, the transition from dynamic realm to modern nation states (see Wendel and Heinrich 2012 for a discussion of all types). In type III, a national language replaces regional languages because language is employed to constitute imagined communities, which serve the ideology of creating loyalty to the state.

It is important to note for shift type III that dynastic realms do not constitute societies in the strict sense, because a 'sense of belonging' is not equally shared among all inhabitants. Hence, language is not employed in order to foster a sense of belonging to a given society (see e.g. Kamusella 2009 for a detailed discussion). Furthermore, frontiers, rather than borders, limit dynastic realms. In comparison to modern states, this renders the transitions between dynastic realms and their inhabitants more fluid, gradual, and opaque. In contrast, modern states serve as the main agent for organizing, regulating, reproducing, and thus constituting society in consistent and uniform ways, creating, in so doing, the idea of the nation. As an effect, national communities become imagined as homogenous and uniform, from border to border, irrespective of center or periphery, and this ideological arrangement becomes normalized in the minds of modernists to the extent that it is taken to be natural (Blommaert and Verschueren 1991). The conflict between the subjective antiquity of the nation in ideology and the objective novelty of the nation in history is hidden through modernist ideology and the institutions supporting and reproducing this idea. The idea of national language is such an institution, and the discipline of national linguistics yet another one (Harris 1980). For both, writing constitutes an important epistemological basis.

Benedict Anderson (1991) has famously described the rise of the nation state and the role of language played therein. According to him, writing plays a particular crucial role in constituting the large imagined communities, i.e. the nations, who populate the modern world today. However, what Anderson did not consider was that national languages did not lay ready for the definition of nations (Silverstein 2000). Rather, powerful written vernacular languages were declared to be national languages, and the standard languages representing the national languages came to 'roof over' (*überdachen*) all other languages and language varieties within a linguistic continuum spoken within the boundaries of the nation state (Trudgill 2004). Understanding what writing and the idea of national language does to language ecologies is crucial, because taking national languages as a given results in ideological and institutional support for the dominant language. The point to remember

from these brief theoretical considerations of language shift is twofold. Firstly, national languages are vernacular languages, which developed at some point in time a practice of writing, and it is this which allowed for their development into modern national languages. Secondly, taken the ideology of national language at face value results in a denigration of other vernacular languages spoken in modern states. This, in short, is what happens in language shift III, and this is what is happening in the Ryukyus today.

WRITING IN THE RYUKYUS

In sociolinguistic terminology, the Ryukyuan languages comprise a group of unroofed *Abstand* languages ('languages by distance'). Unroofed implies, that no standard variety 'unifying' any of the Ryukyuan languages exists. The Ryukyuan languages constitute a dialect continuum with a prominent divide between northern (Amami, Kunigami, Okinawa) and southern (Miyako, Yaeyama, Yonaguni) Ryukyuan languages (see Shimoji and Pellard 2010). The number of dialects within these *Abstand* languages is impressive. 750 dialects are presently known to exist, 650 of them are part of the Northern Ryukyuan branch, indicating that the spread of Japonic and the genesis of Ryukyuan varieties in the southern part of the Ryukyuan Archipelago is more recent than in the north. In addition, social varieties are prominent in many regional varieties of Ryukyuan, and gendered speech is firmly encoded in Ryukyuan grammar as well. The lack of some sort of standard for any of the Ryukyuan languages points to fact that Ryukyuan languages were rarely written.

The history of writing in the Ryukyus can be broadly divided into five periods: (1) the period of the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429-1872) when Chinese and Japanese served as the main languages of writing; (2) the modern period until 1945 when Japanese came to serve as the unequivocal language for writing; (3) the early US occupation period (1945-1972) when attempts, albeit quite brief ones, where made to establish Ryukyuan writing systems; (4) a return to the prewar practices from 1950 onwards which lasted until 2000; (5) the present time where new efforts are made write Ryukyuan in order to document and revitalize the local languages. In the following section, the first four periods will be briefly dealt with, before we turn our main attention to current efforts of writing Ryukyuan, and the problems encountered thereby.

WRITING IN THE RYUKYU KINGDOM

The Ryukyu Kingdom was under the cultural and political influence of Japan and China for many centuries. For more than 250 years, the Ryukyu Kingdom was even, in actuality, a vassal state of both China and Japan at the same time. The name of the archipelago itself bears witness of such contact. 'Ryukyu' was a name coined in 7th century China, while 'Okinawa' was first used in Japan of the 8th century. Japanese and Chinese were also both used for writing in the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Consider Chinese writing first. It is not exactly known when Chinese writing started in the Ryukyus. It is however documented that Emperor Hongwu of the Ming Dynasty sent 32 Fujian families to the Ryukyus in 1392. Settling on Okinawa Island, these families became influential persons in Ryukyuan society, where they spread Chinese culture and knowledge among the Ryukyuan elite. Many Ryukyuans studied Chinese in the Ryukyus

as well as in China. The beginning of Chinese language education for the Ryukyuan elite is also not exactly known. We know, however, that Ryukyuan officials had to study the Chinese language and culture as part of their formation, and that Ryukyuan students of Chinese were considered model students in the Fujian Province (Kádár 2011). As an effect of Chinese proficiency among the literate elite and the settlement of Chinese families in Okinawa, a large number of Chinese texts were written in the Ryukyu Kingdom. The most important documents in Chinese are beyond doubt the kingdom's records of foreign relations. The *Rekidai Hōan* ('Precious Documents of Successive Generations') is entirely written in Chinese. It covers the time between 1424 and 1867.

Consider Japanese next. Following his return from a study tour in the Kamakura period Japan, Ryukyuan scholar Senkan introduced written Japanese to the Ryukyu Islands in 1265. Japanese was subsequently also used for writing in the Ryukyu Kingdom. It was employed for diplomatic correspondence with the Japanese authorities. Initially, Japanese monks prepared such correspondences on request of the Ryukyuan King. The documents were written in Japanese Style Chinese (*wayō kanbun*) and not in *kanbun*, that is, Classical Chinese. This must be considered a break of the protocol. In doing so, the Ryukyuan Kings distanced themselves from China and underlined an alliance with Japan. The Japanese, in turn, drafted their documents for the Ryukyuan Court entirely in *katakana*, again a break with the protocol. This choice of style suggests that Japanese authorities recognized the Ryukyuans neither as Japanese, nor as a Chinese vassal state (Nelson 2006: 370-371). However, despite the fact that the Japanese Satsuma Domain, which colonized the Ryukyus from 1609 until 1872, issued an order of banning the 'Japanization' of the Ryukyus in 1617, writing and reading Japanese literature (*wabun*) continued to be taught among the aristocracy in temple schools and in training academies until 1872.

Since writing in the Ryukyu Kingdom was restricted to a small elite on Okinawa Island, written Ryukyuan was confined to the local variety of the locality where this elite resided, that is, to the ancient capital of Shuri. Most notable among these written texts is without doubt the *Omoro Sōshi* ('Compilation of Thoughts'), a collection of 22 volumes comprising 1,532 poems and 'religious songs' (*omoro*), which had been compiled between 1531 and 1623. The *omoro* has several subgenres, which are related to daily life and include topics such as shipbuilding, navigation, and prayer. It is written in a *kana-kanji* writing system, just as Japanese is. Other manifestations of Ryukyuan writing include epigraphs and notes written into Chinese language textbooks. Despite the fact that it is not too difficult to adapt the Japanese writing system to the Shuri variety of Okinawan, a writing system and orthography for Shuri Okinawan was never developed. The reason therefore is simple. There existed no necessity to develop an Okinawan orthography because Chinese and Japanese were predominantly used for writing. The absence of a popular and institutionalized practice of writing in Ryukyuan languages would however proof crucial after the Japanese annexation in 1872, and again after the end of WWII.

WRITING IN THE MEIJI STATE

Writing Japanese had remained restricted to circles of the literate elite until the so-called 'Disposal of the Ryukyuan Kingdom' (*Ryūkyū shobun*). It was only after the end of the 'no-policy-period' (*kyūkan onzon*, 1872-1879), which followed the first years after the Japanese annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom, that orders were given to spread written and

spoken Japanese among the entire population. The aim of such policy was to render the inhabitants of the Ryukyu Islands Japanese nationals along the lines of nationalist ideology. Towards this end, Okinawan-Japanese bilingual textbooks were compiled and compulsory school education was mandated (Okinawa Kyōiku I'inkai 1965-1977, vol. 2: 20).

Needless to say, perhaps, claiming the territory of the Ryukyu Kingdom to be part of the Meiji state, spreading Japanese among the inhabitants of the Ryukyu Archipelago, and providing them with a Japanese identity required some kind of justification. As in the case of other nation states, the assertion that the language, culture and ethnicity of minorities incorporated into the nation constituted subsets or variants of the dominant part of the nation played a crucial role in the Japanese nation building process. In the Ryukyus, mainland Japanese officials in charge of incorporating the Ryukyu Kingdom into the Meiji state highlighted historical, cultural and linguistic similarities between the Ryukyus and mainland Japan (Oguma 1998: 28-29). The first modern linguist ever to conduct research on the Ryukyuan languages, Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), drew different conclusions though. Chamberlain ([1895] 1999) saw the relationship between the Japanese and the Ryukyuan languages as similar to that between Spanish and French, and defined the Ryukyuan languages to be sister languages of Japanese. Faced with the same linguistic information, scholars of Japanese national linguistics (*kokugogaku*) would however choose to back modernist nation imagining ideology. This is not really surprising, given the fact that this discipline had been founded with the explicit aim of institutionalizing national language as a shared bond between all Japanese nationals (Yasuda 2000: 152-153). Be that as it may, the ultimate rationale for spreading Japanese in the Ryukyus was that the Ryukyuan languages were Japanese dialects, and that language spread and Ryukyuan language suppression were measures of Japanese language standardization. This view has only rather recently come under criticism (see e.g. Miyara 2010, Mashiko 2012).

It is well-known that powerful ideology affects reality. In the 50 years between 1880 and 1930, the Japanese language was spread so thoroughly, that Ryukyuan linguist Ifa Fuyū (1975: 458) reported in 1930 that Japanese was now understood across the entire Ryukyu Archipelago. However, the introduction of Japanese also led to effects of 'fragmentation' (Tsitsipis 2003) of the Ryukyuan languages. In other words, linguistic coherence between Ryukyuan language, life and culture was swept away because Japanese was now unreservedly used in administration, news reporting, modern literature, and school education. As an effect of Japanese being the default choice for writing, Ryukyuan writing systems and orthographies were not developed in modernity either (Ogawa 2011). What is more, the Ryukyuan languages were not modernized, and this in turn cemented their status as Japanese dialects. In sociolinguistic terminology, the practice of writing exclusively in Japanese led to effects of 'marginalization'. That is to say, the subordinate status of the Ryukyuan languages in comparison to Japanese, an effect of the fragmentation processes, became reproduced on all levels of linguistic description. Japanese made its entry into the Ryukyuan phonetic system, morphemes were replaced, relexification took place, Japanese speakers were accommodated by shifting to Japanese across all domains, and so on. Marginalization then resulted in effects of 'sublimation'. That is to say, the Ryukyuan languages were decontextualized from their unmarked functions. Whereas Ryukyuan could be used in all sociolinguistic domains until 1879, these domains became increasingly restricted. In other words, the Ryukyuan languages ceased to serve as the unmarked language in an ever-growing number of domains. The languages became

restricted to marginal fields such as a folklore and music, to particular terms such as self-designation or kinship terms, leading to more effects of fragmentation and marginalization (see Heinrich 2005 for a detailed discussion). All in all, the situation in the Ryukyu Islands confirms Blommaert's (2010: 134) observation that rather than languages *per se*, it is "their deployment over specific genres and registers – for instance, their use as a language of instruction in schools or of political debate in the public arena" which is often repressed as an effect of language policies. Note that this process was set in motion because Japanese served as the sole language of writing in the Ryukyus.

WRITING IN THE EARLY OCCUPATION PERIOD

The separation from of the Ryukyus Islands from the Japanese mainland after the Battle of Okinawa presented an occasion for a possible reversal of the language practices summarized above. Indeed, in the early occupation years, the status of the Ryukyuan languages was debated and its restoration in all domains considered. When the US Military Government established the Okinawa Advisory Council (*Okinawa shijun-kai*) in August 1945, which in turn established the Okinawa Department of Culture and Education (*Okinawa bunkyō-bu*) in January 1946, the responsibilities of the department were specified by US authorities to include (cited from Fisch 1988: 277) "educational affairs insofar as they concern actual operations of schools, including planning of curriculum, preparation of texts, appointment and removal of principals and teachers and other personnel, inspection of schools, allocation of personnel, maintenance of records, and general administrative detail." Note, that the above directive did not specify the language of school instruction. Rather, this issue was left for the Okinawan Department of Culture and Education to decide, which established a working group responsible for examining the feasibility of developing Ryukyuan curricula and textbooks.

The working group was called Textbook Compilation Staff (*Kyōkasho henshū-buin*). While it took up its work, school education was relaunched in April 1946 in an *ad hoc* fashion. No conclusions about the role of the Ryukyuan languages henceforth had been reached at this point. Under pressure to come up with a scheme how the Ryukyuan languages could be developed in a way to serve as a medium of school education, the Textbook Compilation Staff expressed doubts over the benefits of using Ryukyuan languages in school education. The lack of a unified and unifying variety of any Ryukyuan language eventually took to the effect that no writing system or orthography was developed (Nakamatsu 1996: 62-63). The entire idea of basing formal education on Ryukyuan was ultimately abandoned and the fragmented state of Ryukyuan was accepted as a quality intrinsic to these languages, rather than being seen as an effect of the politically motivated pre-war restrictions of language use. Hence, an important chance to revitalize the Ryukyuan languages was missed. With other pressing issues at hand at the time, reinstating the practice of writing exclusively in Japanese was an effortless solution to the conflict at hand for a population then entirely bilingual in Ryukyuan and Japanese.

WRITING IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

At a conference of school directors in 1950, it was decided that school education in the occupied Ryukyu Islands should follow exactly the pattern of mainland Japan (Motonaga 1994: 185-188). From 1951 onwards, Japanese textbooks were imported to the Ryukyus.

Thus, after a short period of uncertainty, the language educational practices established before 1945 were continued. The only difference was that Japanese language education was no longer called *kokugo* ('national language') but *yomigata* ('reading lessons').

As before 1945, the promotion of (Standard) Japanese in the Ryukyus came to serve as an important means to foster a Japanese identity for the Ryukyuan population. This time, it was meant to lay claims for Ryukyuans being part of the Japanese nation. This claim was meant to serve as an argument to end oppressive US occupation and to improve societal and economic wellbeing in the Ryukyus. The Okinawa Teachers' Association (*Okinawa kyōshokuin-kai*) was key in pushing this agenda ahead. It played the central role in the reversion movement (*fukki undō*), promoting besides Japanese language, also the display of the Japanese national flag and the recitation of the Japanese national anthem (Oguma 1998: 564). In the same way as before 1945, efforts of promoting Japanese resulted in the suppression of the Ryukyuan languages from around 1950 onwards. Ryukyuan and Japanese bilingualism was believed to be responsible for poor achievements in school (Narita 2001: 245), and the punitive 'dialect tag', to be worn by pupils speaking Ryukyuan languages in class, was seeing a revival (Karimata 2001: 38).

Needless to say, writing Ryukyuan was not widely practiced in such circumstances. Writing Ryukyuan was by and large restricted to dictionary authors and songwriters then (Ogawa 2011). However, the importance of such written documents grew ever more important because language shift in the family during the 1950s resulted in having an increasingly large part of the population being no longer proficient in Ryukyuan languages. At the same time, disappointment over the terms and results of Ryukyuan reunification with Japan led to a re-evaluation of all things Ryukyuan. Such reconsideration also included language and culture.

RECENT WRITING FOR LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION AND REVITALIZATION

The tide has started to turn again on the Ryukyuan languages, notably so, in particular, from 2000 onwards (see Hara 2005). One landmark event with regard to efforts of maintaining and revitalizing the Ryukyuan languages is the founding of the Society for Okinawan Language Revitalization (*Uchinaaguchi fukyū kyōgikai*) in 2000 (UFKK 2010). Another is a publication by Higa Kiyoshi (2006), in which he discusses political and historical issues concerning Okinawa, in Okinawan. In so doing, Higa proved those wrong believing that Okinawan was unfit to discussing contemporary and learned issues. What makes his work extraordinary is that his meta-pragmatics is implicit. In other words, he does not claim Okinawan to be up to this task, he shows it is.

The success of Higa's exceptional book notwithstanding, reducing Ryukyuan languages to writing is not an easy endeavor. There are number of problems which need to be addressed. These issues involve such basic decisions as the choice of a writing system. According to Ogawa (2011), the leading scholar on Ryukyuan writing, the preferred writing system for Ryukyuan languages is that of *kana* mixed with *kanji*. However, this choice results in a number of problems ranging from difficulties to read *kanji* in Ryukyuan languages, over conventions for inflectional *kana*, to *kanji* choices for Ryukyuan lexemes. Most crucially however, *kana* syllables have been devised for writing Japanese. Given the fact that

roughly 30 morae are not shared between Ryukyuan languages and Japanese, makes the use of *kana* for writing Ryukyuan often a difficult task.

Higa's rather recent book and some newly established Ryukyuan language blogs such as the 'dialect diary' (Yugurihaikarah 2012) notwithstanding, most writing in Ryukyuan has been done by lexicographers. By now various dictionaries have been published, each of them using their own *kana* orthographies. One exception is the landmark *Okinawago jiten* ('Okinawan Dictionary') published by the National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics (Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo 1963), which uses only IPA. The effect is that the dictionary is widely praised in Ryukyuan linguistics, but is not so popular outside such specialized readership. Other dictionaries use *kana* orthographies, which employ a great number of contradicting and confusing conventions (see Ogawa 2011 for a detailed discussion).

There are by now almost 50 dictionaries published or being prepared for publication (see Lawrence 2013 for an overview). They all comprise one and the same problem. Readers need to be proficient in the language in order to know how to pronounce the entries listed therein. Given the view that the number of proficient speakers (and readers) is in decline, and that revitalization efforts result in an increasing number of readers not proficient in the language, more transparent orthographies are therefore desirable. In endangered language studies, such transparent orthographies are called 'shallow'. In an seminal manual for language documentation, Seifart (2006: 283) writes the following on this issue: "Shallow orthography, i.e. orthographies that represent linguistics forms in a way that is close to their actual pronunciation in each context, are considerably easier to learn for a beginner reader (and writer), including second language learners." So far, so good. The difficulty lies in the fact that developing shallow *kana* orthographies for Ryukyuan languages is quite tricky. The dialects of the Miyako language but also those of the Amami language must be considered to present the biggest challenges in this respect; the former due to the high number of consonant clusters, and the latter due to the high number of vowels.

Consider the difficulties of an easier example with which the present author happens to be more familiar. The Yonaguni language demands the development of some diacritics, because it makes phonemic distinctions between voiceless /h/ and voiced epiglottal fricatives /ʕ/, as in /ha:/ (tooth) versus /ʕa:/ (chestnut); between non-aspirated /k/ and aspirated voiceless velar plosives /kʰ/ as in /kuruN/ ('to kill') and /kʰuruN/ ('to make, produce'); between non-aspirated /t/ and aspirated voiceless alveolar plosives /tʰ/ such as in /ti:/ ('mouth') and /tʰi:/ ('hand'). Furthermore, pharyngealized voiceless bilabial plosive /pˤ/ in words such as /ananpˤu/ ('hole') or a pharyngealized voiceless palatal fricative /çˤ/ in words such as in /çˤima/ ('island', 'community') demand orthographic specification if these words are to be pronounced correctly by non-speakers of the Yonaguni language. That is, they demand specification if Yonaguni is to be written with a shallow orthography. Shallow orthographies seem to be unavoidable for language documentation and revitalization, as sociolinguistic research has already revealed an infiltration of the Standard Japanese phonemic and phonetic system into theYonaguni language (Nagata 2001). Such infiltration is part of what we identified as marginalization above. Note also that the response to such Yonaguni language attrition is that Yonaguni speakers prefer to speak Japanese when being adressed in such language. This language choice is again part of a larger language loss circle, in which attritioners are deprived of the possibility to speak and improve their

proficiency in the endangered language (see Heinrich 2011a for a detailled discussion).

Given the rare instances of writing and reading Ryukyuan languages, knowledge and awareness on issues such as the infiltration of the dominant language system into that of the endangered languages is not widely spread. Consider the scarcity of writing Ryukyuan languages. In a comprehensive survey into the linguistic landscape of Yonaguni in 2008, the present author found a total of 832 Japanese language signs. There were also 13 signs in English, but only 6 in the Yonaguni language. 70 signs were Japanese and English, but only 2 Japanese and Yonaguni. This situation is not particular to Yonaguni. A survey into the linguistic landscape of Naha Airport (Heinrich 2010) found only extremely little evidence of writing Ryukyuan languages there, despite the fact that the airport is under prefectural control. More concretely, there were decorative ceramic tiles outside the airport, which at times included some Okinawan words, there was a split curtain featuring a glossary of Okinawan basic vocabulary in an abandoned UFO-Catcher in a game center, and there were two signs, both of which read 'welcome'. Ryukyuan writing in the public sphere is rare, and so is the awareness that the absence of writing Ryukyuan languages is a major factor in its endangerment, or that practicing Ryukyuan writing could serve as an important tool towards their revitalization.

CONCLUSIONS: THE ROLE OF WRITING IN (REVERSING) TYPE III LANGUAGE SHIFT

Benard Spolsky (2009: 1) states the obvious in writing that a dialect "becomes a language when it becomes recognized as such." We have seen in the case of the Ryukyuan languages that the development of a popular writing practice is an important part on the road to gaining recognition and institutional support granted to (recognized) languages. Of course, none of this is new. More than four decades ago, Heinz Kloss (1967) pointed out at the prominent role that writing plays in this respect. He stressed that writing, the existence of separate orthographies, literatures, histories etc. of a language variety lends these varieties the characteristic of 'autonomy'. In case that one or more *Abstand* languages shared the same written language with a sister *Abstand* language, these languages are prone to undergo what Kloss (1967: 34) calls 'near-dialectalization'. Rendered graphically, Kloss' political and sociolinguistic classification of language status types results thus in a double dichotomy.
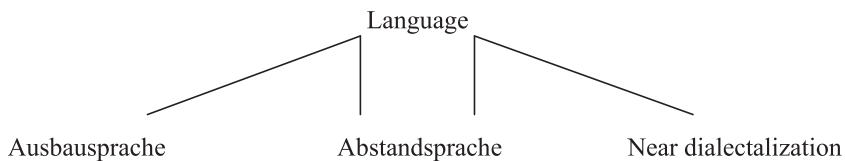
Figure 1: Types of languages according to Kloss

Due to the prestige attached to written language, non-written *Abstand* languages, within a linguistic continuum, tend to become conceptualized as dialects of the literary sister language, as was the case for the Ryukyuan languages in the modern period.

Recall that in type III language shift, loyalty to the state by an imagined community of strangers is sought by imposing one language as a national language among all nationals.

This serves as a bond unifying such a community but it also undermines the utility of other languages spoken within the state. This is exactly what is happening in the case of the Ryukyus. Since our ideas about language are shaped by modernist ideology, and because the social sciences, too, are informed by such ideology (Giddens 1990: 40), such ideology needs to be challenged if endangered languages are to be revitalized. It is simply not possible to revitalize languages and restore linguistic diversity within an ideological frame of linguistic homogeneity (Heinrich 2011b). It is equally clear that linguistic scholarship informed by modernist ideology will be of little help in the quest to maintain and revitalize languages, which have undergone type III language shift. The hallmark of such ideology and the credo of such an orientation to linguistic scholarship is to 'leave your language alone'. Thus, such scholarship takes modernist ideology at face value and ignores the fact that national language regimes, in which minority and other dominated language are marginalized, is all but natural. Such marginalization is the outcome of the intervention of powerful actors into language ecologies, and it is such intervention, which led to language endangerment in type III language shift. And while language activists have started to attack modernist language ideology (see e.g. Fija in an interview by Heinrich, Fija and Heinrich 2007), large parts of endangered language studies remain firmly based in modernist ideology (see e.g. Sanada and Uehara 2007 for the case of the Ryukyus, and Heinrich 2011c for a discussion of such ideological stance).

What, then, can be learned from the case of the Ryukyus in general terms? I believe this: as long as linguistics remains to be prominently rooted in modernist language ideology and to pass the stamp of scholarship on modernist language ideology, language activists will have to largely play along the rules laid out by such language ideology. If writing makes language, they are well advised to develop and foster the practice of writing for languages having undergone near-dialectization. Criticizing them for being ideological, modernist, or essentialist is to miss an important point. We cannot dismiss endangered language activists for being modernist, if modernism is the sole frame in which endangered languages can be maintained and revitalized. In the same vein, branding linguistic research not buying into the 'leave your language alone' scheme as 'ideological' or 'political', as opposed to 'neutral' and 'scientific', confuses 'neutral' with 'supporting powerful actors and institutions'. More to the point, perhaps, such stance amounts to nothing else but a majority perspective on minorities. Such perspectives must be displaced if linguistic diversity is to be maintained. A popular understanding of this would constitute a crucial step towards overcoming the limitations imposed on minority languages in modern societies.

What then are the conclusions for the case of the Ryukyus? Without questioning the dominant and dominating ideology about the Ryukyuan languages, which led to their endangerment in the first place, the Ryukyuan languages cannot be maintained. Ideology, in turn, does not float in a vacuum, but is constantly being reproduced. Such reproduction must be stopped, or at least weakened, if the Ryukyuan languages are to be maintained, and this can only be done by using creating and disseminating new knowledge and attitudes pertaining to Ryukyuan languages, and by a redistribution of power as an effect of such novel knowledge. Writing Ryukyuan runs counter to the modernist ideas of what the Ryukyuan languages became in modernity. In this being so, writing in Ryukyuan languages is one step, albeit an important one, on the road to their recovery.

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