

ESTABLISHING OKINAWAN HERITAGE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In spite of Okinawan language endangerment, heritage language education for Okinawan has still to be established as a planned and purposeful endeavour. The present paper discusses the prerequisites and objectives of Okinawan Heritage Language (OHL) education.¹ It examines language attitudes towards Okinawan, discusses possibilities and constraints underlying its curriculum design, and suggests research which is necessary for successfully establishing OHL education. The following results are presented. Language attitudes reveal broad support for establishing Okinawan heritage language education. A curriculum for OHL must consider the constraints arising from the present language situation, as well as language attitudes towards Okinawan. Research necessary for the establishment of OHL can largely draw from existing approaches to foreign language education. The paper argues that establishment of OHL education should start with research and the creation of emancipative ideas on what Okinawan ought to be in the future – in particular which societal functions it ought to fulfil. A curriculum for OHL could be established by following the user profiles and levels of linguistic proficiency of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

¹ This paper specifically treats the language of Okinawa Island only. Other languages of the Ryukyuan language family such as the languages of Amami, Miyako, Yaeyama and Yonaguni are not considered here. The present paper draws on research conducted in 2005 in Okinawa. Research was supported by a Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science fellowship which is gratefully acknowledged here. I am also indebted to Miyara Shinsho, who kindly hosted the research project, to Florian Axt for processing the survey data, as well as to Tessa Carroll, Imai Jun, Sugita Yuko and Yoshioka Kaoru for reading and discussing an earlier version of the paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite often being imagined to be linguistically homogenous, an image that has been promoted by Japanese language planners, Japan is in fact a multilingual state (Lee 1996; Oguma 1998; Osa 1998; Ramsey 2004; Yasuda 1999, 2000). This image of Japan influences linguistic reality, because the effects of a nation's own image are real. Nine of Japan's eleven indigenous languages are either endangered or extinct.² While the topic of language endangerment in the Japanese context has increasingly often been addressed in recent years (for example, Karimata *et al.* 2002; Long 2002, 2003; Maher and Yashiro 1995; Murasaki 2001a, 2001b; Satō 2002; Tsuchioka and Uemura 2003; Uemura 2003), concern about language endangerment has not yet extended to language education. What Stacy Churchill (1986: 4) wrote, more than 20 years ago, is still valid today: "Linguistic and cultural minorities have recently emerged as a central concern for educational policy in almost all OECD countries, with the sole exception of Japan." While languages other than Japanese (*nihongo*) have not yet been considered worthy of attention on the level of national educational policies, grassroots movements have emerged since Churchill's statement.

Consider Okinawa, where the *Uchināguchi Fukyū Kyōgikai* [Society of Okinawan Language Revitalization, henceforth SOLaR] was established in October 2000. In its inaugural meeting, SOLaR set itself the ultimate objective of establishing local language classes at elementary and junior high schools. Miyara Shinsho, the present general secretary of SOLaR, declared at this meeting:³ 'Without intervention, people speaking the dialects will vanish. Particularly at this time when interest in the culture and entertaining arts of Okinawa is growing, these varieties need to be incorporated into school education, and we hope that young people too will start to show an affection for Okinawan' (*Yomiuri Shinbun* 21 October 2000). With the aim of establishing heritage language education, the society developed an orthography of Okinawan (*Okinawa Taimusu* 29 August 2001; Serafim 2005) under the direction of Miyara, a linguistics professor at the University of the Ryukyus, and volunteers were trained

² These languages are, from northeast to southwest, Kurile Ainu, Shakalin Ainu, Hokkaido Ainu, Ogasawara (Bonin) Creole English, Amami Ryukyuan, Okinawan Ryukyuan, Miyako Ryukyuan, Yaeyama Ryukyuan and Yonaguni Ryukyuan. Not endangered are Japanese and Japanese sign language.

³ All translations from Japanese are provided by the author. Japanese quotations rendered in English given within the running text are enclosed in single (rather than the regular double) quotation marks.

as local language teachers (*Ryūkyū Shinpō* 22 September 2003; field notes 19 March 2006). Such efforts notwithstanding, the introduction of local language classes has not been accomplished so far.

Heritage language education is essential if the Okinawan language is to survive. The interruption of natural intergenerational language transmission, such as occurred in Okinawa in the 1940s and 50s due to the imposition of Standard Japanese (Heinrich 2004; Motonaga 1994), implies that language maintenance and revitalization hinges crucially on heritage language teaching. The child-bearing generation in Okinawa no longer speaks the local language; hence, they cannot pass it on to the following generation. If no organized action is taken, the entire Ryukyu archipelago, of which Okinawa is part, will become monolingual in a predictable period of time (Karimata 2001: 181). The future for the Okinawan language is rather straightforward, since, strictly speaking, it is not the language which dies, but its speakers. In view of present Okinawan life expectancy standing at 81 years on average, the number of people born before 1950, that is, the number of local language speakers, will diminish from the present 250,000 people to half that number in 2015, and then rapidly decline towards zero in the following two decades.

Despite such a bleak outlook for the future of Okinawan, little consideration has been given in Japanese linguistics or language pedagogy to heritage language education. Japanese language pedagogy remains focused on Japan's main language of wider communication, *nihongo* [Japanese], in an attempt to develop it into an internationally used language (see Carroll in this volume). In this way, JFL is meeting a growing demand for Japanese language education worldwide, but, at the same time, demand for all the other languages of Japan is being neglected. While the Japanese linguistic yearbook *Kokugo Nenkan* [National Language Yearbook] has listed over 200 books and over 1,000 papers published in the field of JFL over the last ten years, not a single publication listed addresses the issue of teaching Japan's endangered languages. Here again, language ideology is at work. In this case, the research agenda of language education in the Japanese context reproduces Meiji ideology about the existence of a homogenous Japanese nation which can be defined via a national language.

In order to consider the prerequisites for and constraints on the establishment of OHL, let us turn first to existing language attitudes and language choices in Okinawa, before looking at research issues which need to be addressed. Based on these insights, some general considerations for the development of an OHL curriculum will be made.

2. OKINAWAN LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND PRESENT LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Throughout the modern period, minority languages have existed in an environment hostile to them, because modern state institutions are dominated by an imposed national language or language of wider communication. The modernist project of treating all nationals as abstract beings devoid of ethnicity, sex, education, and other aspects of identity leads to the hegemonic imposition of the norms of dominant groups on everybody, and, in effect, to the marginalization of everybody not belonging to this specific group (Bourdieu 1991). Therefore, language revitalization is ultimately embedded in social, economic and political struggles and in attempts to undo the unequal distribution of power underlying modern language regimes. Okinawa is no exception.

Today, the overwhelming numbers of Okinawans perceive themselves to be Japanese, but the perception of being different from mainland (*hondo*) Japanese is equally widespread. This is reflected in the self-designation *uchinānchū* (Okinawan), defined in opposition to *yamatunchū* (person from the mainland) as the principal Other (Siddle 2003: 133). Collective identity in Okinawa is thus local and Japanese at the same time, and only a tiny minority in Okinawa perceives this to be contradictory. The inhabitants see themselves as hyphenated Okinawan-Japanese and they are increasingly proud of this self-identity (Allen 2002: 235). Okinawan identity can thus not simply be pitted against Japanese identity and the same applies for the Okinawan and Japanese languages. The situation in Okinawa is more complex.

2.1. LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN OKINAWA

Okinawan is a language with a rich and long standing tradition. The Ryukyuan language family is believed to have split from Japanese at some point no later than the sixth century CE (Hattori 1954; Serafim 2003). Its most prestigious variety is that of Shuri, the former capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom on Okinawa Island (see Kerr 1958; Smits 1999; Kreiner 2001 on Okinawan history). Although there was diglossia in the Ryukyu Kingdom, in that Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Japanese, was used for writing, the Shuri variety had occasionally also been used for writing. The linguistic situation of the Ryukyu archipelago drastically changed in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when, following Japan's forceful annexation of the Ryukyu Kingdom in 1872, Japanese was spread first in the public domain after 1880 and in the private domain after 1940 (Itani 2006; Kondō 2006). In the course of Japanese

language spread, Okinawan-Japanese contact varieties called *uchinā yamatoguchi* (Okinawan Japanese) emerged. Starting as early as the 1960s, attempts at the revitalization of Okinawan heritage culture and language began to be made (Hara 2005).

Language activists striving to revitalize the local language need to surmount several obstacles. Symmetrical social bilingualism, in which both languages fulfil the same roles, is bound to be provisional. It will lead to the replacement of one of the two languages, if diglossia, that is, a functional differentiation between the two languages, is not developed (Fishman 1985). In the case of Okinawa, this implies that the heritage language, first of all, has to fulfil some societal functions which Standard Japanese does not. The most obvious function of local languages is that of providing membership in the local community and drawing a boundary against everybody else. While Okinawan without doubt serves exactly this function today, the problem is that this only holds true for the older generation. For the middle and the young generation, it is in no way contradictory to claim an Okinawan identity without speaking Okinawan.

Varying Okinawan language proficiency in the local community is a complex issue for language activists. Due to the interruption of natural intergenerational language transmission, language proficiency varies greatly among the generations, with the old generation being most fluent, the middle generation predominantly having passive skills only, and the young generation only understanding selected expressions. Language shift results in language attrition, that is, structural and functional simplification (Sasse 1992: 63–64). What is more, language attrition often prevents less proficient speakers from using the language at all. Proficient users, on the other hand, are critical of functional and structural simplification, which they perceive to be wrong language use or language decay. Consider two concrete examples. Stating that the language of most Okinawans born after 1945 is in disorder, the local newspaper *Okinawa Taimusu* emphasizes the need to pass on correct dialects (*tadashii hōgen*) of Okinawan (*Okinawa Taimusu* 4 May 2000). Arakaki's (2002: 4) account reflects the ensuing dilemma that less proficient speakers have when endeavouring to use the local language: "I was unable to communicate with my paternal grandmother. Even if I tried to speak Luchuan [here the Shuri variety of Okinawan P.H.] to her, as I did not know the honorifics, I was not allowed to speak." In view of this situation, it is a delicate task for language activists to balance the objective of imbuing the heritage language with prestige, while at the same time encouraging speakers with little proficiency to use it.

Minority language activists, whether consciously or not, aim at recreating social identities. These identities need to be more favourable than those which emerged as an effect of the marginalization of minorities in the modernization process. In other words, language revitalization cannot be discussed merely within the limited confines of a language's instrumental or integrative functions. Ultimately, the revitalization of Okinawan is indicative of and linked to Okinawan emancipation efforts from mainland Japan. Williams (1991: 3) identifies increased political autonomy and economic autarchy as the two most important prerequisites for successful language revival based on emancipation efforts. In a similar vein, May (2001: 315) states that "the arguments of minority groups for the retention of their ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities are most often not characterized by a retreat into traditionalism or cultural essentialism but, rather, by a more autonomous construction of group identity and political deliberation." Attempts at language revitalization in Okinawa are thus part of re-imagining Okinawan in a globalized and post-modern world. Language revitalization, Fishman (1991: 6) writes, is an attempt to make "the post-modern present." It challenges the modernist views on ideologically mediated national coherence expressed by the imposition of a shared language, culture, history and ethnicity. It essentially questions whether nation-states should continue to be imagined as national communities, enforcing homogeneity by suppressing diversity within the nation-state, or whether they should not rather be imagined in such a way that they recognize and value existing variety within the confines of the state. Local languages are an important tool in repositioning minorities within nation states more favourably – losing them constitutes a decisive setback (Heinrich 2005; May 2001; Tsitsipis 2003).

Since Okinawan language revival is embedded in a renegotiation of the terms according to which Okinawa is part of the Japanese nation state, language revitalization will obviously not find enthusiastic support from the state to which the current situation is advantageous.⁴ This implies that

⁴ Consider the experiences of a member of the local education board on Kume Island, near Okinawa, who states his experiences of trying to have the local language included in the local school curriculum (Allen 2002: 124): "The biggest problem we face is that of the Ministry of Education. It looks to standardize its curriculum without any recognition of regional or cultural difference. So the kids down here learn about Kansai, Kanto and Kinki Japanese history, but nothing at all about local culture and history. This is more than a shame, it's a travesty. I mean, the reason that the kids have to learn this stuff is so that they are able to compete with other students at the same level so that they can get into university, so that in turn they can get jobs. The result is that they are seriously disadvantaged coming from Okinawa, and coming from the *ritō*

Okinawan language revival has to be driven by grassroots movements until it has gained enough momentum to secure state support. In order to assess support for language revival in the local community, the study of language attitudes towards the linguistic varieties used in Okinawa is crucial. We will turn to this issue next.

2.2. LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

A central point in Okinawan language revitalization is the question of which Okinawan variety ought to be the subject of heritage language education. Okinawan has several distinctive regional and social varieties, some of which are more prestigious than others. Although Okinawan has no standard variety, there are still notable prestige differences between its varieties. The varieties of Shuri, in particular the social variety of the former samurai class, ranks highest. It is followed by the language varieties of the greater Naha region, the remaining varieties of south and central Okinawa (*chūnan-bu*), and then by the local varieties of *yanbaru* [Northern Okinawa]. In view of this situation, SOLaR proposes that everybody should be encouraged to speak their respective local variety but that writing should be based on the Shuri variety (*Okinawa Taimusu* 12 October 2000). Among all the language varieties spoken on Okinawa, hybrid language forms enjoy the least prestige.⁵

Hybrid language is particularly often used by younger speakers no longer proficient in the local language. It varies considerably between local communities and generations. When respondents were asked how they addressed their spouses, children, parents, grandparents, neighbours and colleagues in a questionnaire survey in 2005, the overall figure for hybrid language amounted to 23 percent for the older generation (older than 60), 39 percent for the middle generation (between 30 and 60), but 49 percent for the younger generation (younger than 30). Thus, the younger the informants the more hybrid language is used (The middle generation, in contrast, has the highest rates for Standard Japanese and the older generation for the local language).⁶

[outer islands] is even worse in many respects, because they don't even have access to the most rudimentary facilities for education."

⁵ Hybrid language use can include entire words such as *chimū* or *chimui* in place of Japanese *kawaisō* [pitiful], word stems such as in *hingiru* [escape, run away] formed from Okinawan *hingiyun* and Japanese *nigeru*, or inflective morphology such *karusan* [light] from Okinawan *gassan* and Japanese *karui*.

⁶ Research was conducted in July 2005. 800 questionnaires were distributed randomly by the present author, 185 of which were sent back (23 percent). These constitute the basis for the present analysis.

For language revival, the potential of the language variety to be revitalized is more crucial than its present role in the local community (Kymlicka 1995: 100–101). In Okinawa, present language choices and language attitudes are not congruent. Divergence between language ideology, language use and legal provisions on language can generally be seen as a harbinger of change (Coulmas 2005b). Okinawans today have a much more positive outlook on their local language than their language choices, constrained by the effects of language shift, reflect. In particular, young Okinawans, usually Japanese monolinguals, display a strong sense of yearning (*akogare*) for the local language (*Okinawa Taimusu* 12 October 2000). A survey conducted by the local newspaper *Ryūkyū Shinpō* in 2001 revealed that 89 percent of the respondents stated feeling affection (*aichaku*) for Okinawan and that 82 percent of the children questioned claimed that they would like to speak the language (*Asahi Shinbun* 12 May 2002). In my questionnaire survey conducted in Okinawa in summer 2005, I asked informants whether they thought that (1) Okinawan should be taught at school; whether they (2) would like to study Okinawan themselves; and whether they (3) thought that the state had a responsibility to safeguard the Okinawan language. The results obtained reveal strong support for the local language: among the 179 valid answers to (1), 149 (83 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the idea of establishing Okinawan at school. In relation to (2), when I asked informants to rank English, Standard Japanese, Okinawan and other languages they would like to study, 60 (32 percent) out of 164 valid answers named Okinawan as their first choice and a further 57 (21 percent) referred to Okinawan as their second choice; English was the most popular choice. As for (3), 127 informants (73 percent) out of 175 valid answers thought that the state had a responsibility to safeguard the local language. These figures thus reveal that the aims of the SOLaR are backed by solid support from the local community.

Language revitalization implies that problems emerging from within the local community need to be overcome. One of the most widely noticed problems which undermine language revitalization from within is language purism. Since language shift is always accompanied by language attrition, maintaining the norms of highly proficient speakers often leads to the silencing of everyone else (Coulmas 2005a: 167; Hill 1993: 89; King 2001: 97). What is more, purism may lead to regarding the activities and effects of language revitalization as inauthentic, and the language and culture it reproduces as degenerate (Thieberger 2002: 317). Furthermore, many people will inevitably tend to regard the issue of language revitalization as superfluous and ill-

fated. Okinawan heritage language education has to challenge such scepticism and has to build on the enthusiasm of its teachers and its students.

To summarize, language attitudes towards the local language are considerably positive, in particular for the young generation. Furthermore, the questionnaire survey revealed that there is a solid demand for OHL. The current situation is however such that no support from the state for such programmes can be expected at the present which means that establishing OHL needs to be driven by grassroots movements. There are several obstacles which need to be overcome for a successful establishment of local language education. The most important are avoiding language purism, developing societal function of the local language for the younger generations, and providing a linkage between the language and its associated culture which is responsive to and attractive for the young generation. All of these issues require more detailed insights than we presently have. Establishing OHL, in other words, requires specific research on Okinawan heritage language education. This issue will be discussed next.

3. RESEARCH ON OHL

Frankly speaking, research on language revitalization is not a prominent issue in linguistics, including endangered language studies. Students of endangered languages often study the language detached from its speakers and care more about their research results than about the speech community from which they obtained their data (Spolsky 1978: 332). In view of such practices, Hale (2001: 76) cautions his readers that anyone involved in field research inescapably assumes a responsibility for the speech community in question, since it may be affected by the research results obtained. Skutnabb-Kangas (1986: 164) therefore argues convincingly that research into local languages is best carried out by members of the local community in question.

Arakaki (2002: 1) reports on the concrete difficulties of using existing research results to study the local language: "Although there are many excellent studies about [the] Shuri dialect, it is difficult to find a study which focuses on the descriptions necessary for the practical usage of the language. In addition to this point, the contexts in which the utterances have emerged have been neglected, in spite of their importance. Consequently, people who desire to learn Luchuan [Ryukyuan, i. e. Okinawan in this case P. H.] immediately face compound difficulties. That is to say, it is exceedingly difficult to speak Luchuan in contextually oriented con-

versations." Arakaki's comment highlights a lack of insights into (1) heritage language pedagogy and (2) sociolinguistic studies on language use and language attitudes.⁷

3.1. HERITAGE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

For general research into heritage language education, the research paradigm of foreign language education provides a reliable starting point. Lynch (2006: 3) points out that pivotal questions in both foreign language education and heritage language education should be: "(1) What do second language learners acquire?, (2) How do learners acquire a second language?; (3) What differences are there in the way in which individual learners acquire a second language?" As a starting point, these three questions certainly provide a research agenda broad enough to launch research into heritage language education in the Okinawan context. A further task to be added for OHL is research into language pedagogy and curriculum development. Selecting and sequencing features of Okinawan grammar, lexicon and discourse types to be acquired at specific stages requires scholarly insights into pupils' meta-linguistic knowledge and the speed with which Japanese monolinguals can acquire the Japanese sister language Okinawan. Since the meta-linguistic knowledge of pupils is largely defined by the *kokugo* [national language] curriculum, the heritage language education curriculum should be interconnected with it. In addition, consideration needs to be given to which issues should receive more or less attention in heritage language education, for example, reading and written composition versus conversational skills.

3.2. SOCIOLINGUISTIC RESEARCH

There is, moreover, little research into the fields of sociolinguistics and language ideology in Okinawa. This is partly due to the fact that the language varieties of Okinawan are often treated as greater dialects (*dai-hōgen*) of the national language (*kokugo*), rather than as languages in their own right; hence the reduced research agenda (see above). Since language shift (including reversing language shift) is the outcome of changing

⁷ Since language revitalization is also an emancipative movement, research of language revitalization in the framework of social movement studies and here, in particular, the matching between political opportunity structures and the mobilization strategies of the various movements supportive of language revitalization would also be desirable. Such discussion is, however, beyond the scope of the present paper.

language attitudes, language revitalization must first and foremost be directed at changing these language attitudes and the language ideologies underlying them (Mühlhäusler 2002; Burnaby 1997: 295). Contact between the language varieties spoken in Okinawa, hybrid language varieties and language attrition are further fields that have not yet been studied in detail. Furthermore, social network analysis is an important approach to gain insights into the beneficiary conditions for language maintenance in specific local communities.

Language revitalization requires a promotion of the status of the language variety in question within the local community, as well as the recognition of such status from outside. Such status is, however, never obtained without struggle (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 180). Language revival in general requires the identification of negative language ideology about the language in question so that these views can be deconstructed. Discourses of empowerment through the local language need to be developed in reaction to these views. Fettes (1997: 308) points out that such discourse can draw from powerful concepts “of freedom, of justice, of human rights, of anti-racism, of community, of sustainability, and so on.”

In the absence of important insights into heritage language pedagogy and sociolinguistic language use in the Okinawan context, ideas for curriculum design can only be rudimentary at present. Let us nevertheless consider some directions that an OHL curriculum might take. Heritage language curriculum design should best be seen as a process to which new insights emerging from research such as the areas briefly outlined above should contribute.

4. TOWARDS A CURRICULUM OF OHL

According to Hinton (2001: 7), five basic types of language revitalization programmes can be found throughout the world: (1) school programmes for children, (2) programmes outside school for children, (3) programmes for adults, (4) documentation programmes and (5) home-based education programmes. Scholars in the field of language acquisition and learning are in general agreement that early childhood, that is, the period from 18 months to 6 years of age, is the period best suited for language acquisition (Francis and Reyhner 2002). Specialists in language revival furthermore draw attention to the success of language immersion programmes (Grenoble and Whaley 2006: 51). Language attitudes in Okinawa reveal, however, some hesitation about such early exposure of children to the local language. When I asked informants in which situations the local

language would be appropriate, 49 percent thought that it would be appropriate in school, but only 39 percent thought it appropriate in kindergarten. These figures reveal concern about a negative influence on the mastery of Standard Japanese arising from knowledge of the heritage language. A thorough acquisition of Standard Japanese without any possible interference from the local language appears to be preferred by many respondents.

4.1. COOL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Schooling and education can hardly be cool. Some issues and programmes however are cooler than others and heritage language education can certainly draw on existing positive attitudes towards Okinawan language and culture. Among an increasing number of Japanese, in particular young people, Ryukyuan traditions, language and artefacts are cool (*kakkoi*). In addition to cool as the ever-changing outlook on artefacts and cultures by young urban people, Cool, with a capital C, has been developed as a category in cultural studies. I argue that consideration of this principle is important for securing learners' interest in and enthusiasm for heritage language education.

Pountain and Robins (2000: 23) characterize the principle of Cool in the following way: "Cool is a rebellious attitude, an expression of a belief that the mainstream mores of your society have no legitimacy and do not apply to you. It's a self-contained and individualistic attitude, although it places high value on friendship within a tightly defined peer group." They convincingly argue that Cool is increasingly often governing attitudes and outlooks on ethnicity among young people. Maher (2005) reminds us that the modernist construction of collective identity, that is, identity being imposed on individuals to remain there unalterable and forever, is uncool. Uncool, furthermore, is the view that being part of a cultural and linguistic minority entails a burden of a collective past characterized largely by remembering past suffering and oppression. Okinawan language, culture and collective memory can certainly be constructed in a way that they represent an obligation for Okinawan students. The point is, however, that obligation and duty are uncool. Allen's (2002) depiction of the preparation of a local language rally on Kume Island is an example how uncool, and therefore counterproductive, local language education for children can be. When children who were studying the local language showed insufficient enthusiasm about memorizing speech incomprehensible to them, they were addressed by a local authority on education in the following way (Allen 2002: 94): "Learn your parts. Remember your lines: Practice your dances. It's just like home-

work. Not fun, but necessary. Do you understand?" Cool, by contrast, takes pride in difference, and this can be exploited by heritage language education, but it is important to note that mainstream stereotypes and expectations are uncool, irrespective of whether these stereotypes and expectations are mainland Japanese or Okinawan.

There is an important lesson for language revitalization to be learned from cultural studies centred on the principle of Cool. Uncool imposition of heritage language education, in other words, learning as an obligation, and its linkage to a dark and oppressed Okinawan past, will fail to produce enthusiasm for the local language among the young generation. Okinawa has much more to offer to students than imposing or reinforcing a sense of duty to remember local suffering and oppression. Cool education takes pride in difference, modifies ethnic identity for aesthetic purposes and takes a "culinary" delight in repositioning oneself *vis-à-vis* dominating social mores. Cool as an operating system creates cool desktop expressions of identity. Cool language education for the young generation should explore both, the principle of Cool, i. e. an attitude of pride in difference and the cool icons and manifestations created thereby. For the young generation, cool stuff about Okinawa includes, to name but a few things, Okinawa hip hop and pop music, Chatan bars, clubs and the nearby sea wall, Sakurazaka hill in Naha, local *min'yō* [folksong] music bars, hybrid language, the local FC Ryukyu soccer club, the outlying islands (*ritō*), beach and barbeque parties and countless other things. Including these topics in heritage language education will address the image that the young generation has of Okinawa and, what is more, an Okinawa in which they take pride – Cool pride. In a situation where it is extremely difficult to mobilize people for one specific purpose, in this case language revitalization, Cool can serve as an important idea to ignite interest for a process of reconsidering Okinawan identity formation from the side of language revitalization.

Pitting the heritage language against national or global languages in order to symbolically create a sense of equality between the heritage language and, for example, Standard Japanese or English, is detrimental, because it pretends that the dominating and the dominated language are on a par, in spite of the fact that this is clearly not the case (Fettes 1997: 302). In order to be successful, heritage language education must empower its learners by taking pride in their language and culture *because* (and not *dispite*) of the dominance of Japanese and English as a means for empowerment. Heritage language education can be contrasted with the (uncool) national language and English language education imposed on young pupils as a duty to ensure their economic wellbeing.

4.2. BRIDGING GAPS BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Heritage language speakers are the most valuable resource for language revitalization projects, and their attitudes towards the local language need to be taken into consideration. Few exceptions aside, only the older generation is proficient in Okinawan today. Since this is at the same time the generation in which natural language transmission was interrupted in the 1940s and 50s (Heinrich 2004), many of these speakers continue, often unconsciously, to have prejudices against the local language. Ensuring that these prejudices are not passed on to pupils is an important issue in heritage language education. Since language ideologies are hard to displace, the curriculum should have enough space for language learners to form for themselves a positive outlook on the local language. The curriculum of OHL should therefore also include topics such as an introduction to Japan's indigenous languages and multilingual heritage, language rights, the nexus of language and identity, Okinawan intellectual traditions and resistance to the hegemonic imposition of state-defined culture and language, indigenous arts/entertainment and their position in the contemporary context, as well as an introduction to linguistic or anthropological field work in Okinawa.

Contrary to foreign language education, students in a heritage language programme already have very specific ideas and knowledge about the culture linked to the target language. Heritage language education can build on existing ideas. Mismatches between students' expectations and language programme content, on the other hand, will result in reduced motivation. In this context, Hill (1993: 89) has noted that the "heavy emphasis on 'traditional culture' characteristic of many language maintenance programmes may enhance pride in this culture, but may fail in language maintenance. This occurs if the programme exposes young people mainly to registers of the language that they can't really use because it [sic] is inappropriate for their age group (such exposure may also yield extreme concern on the part of the elders that ritual knowledge is being discussed inappropriately, by unqualified people in profane contexts), or to kinds of knowledge, like the traditional use of plant materials, that have little relationship to contemporary life and are unlikely to be retained beyond the classroom." In other words, the content and issues addressed in language classes ought to draw on and develop students' knowledge and attitudes. Such language education might then provide an incentive for later studies of traditional culture and practices among some of the students. Within the heritage language programme, however, classroom activities should be provided in which students'

world knowledge and cultural expectations serve as a support to the lessons.

Language education ought to provide students with an occasion to gain a deeper understanding of their culture and, perhaps even more crucially, of culture in general terms. Since heritage language education targets pupils' identity formation to a large extent, pupils should furthermore be included as much as possible in the selection of teaching materials. As studying Okinawan is, at present, not a tool of economic advancement, but a means of strengthening local pride and embracing cultural diversity, heritage language teaching must differ from the teaching practices of other languages in Okinawa. And, in fact, it already does. When I asked local language teacher Inamine Chie (19 July 2006, interview) where she placed most emphasis in her teaching, the reply was short but clear: 'Heart, it's the heart' (*hāto, hāto desu yo*). Contrary to English-language education, heritage language education can ill afford unmotivated students. After all, motivation and not economic advancement is the main plus point of local language learning. The greatest asset of any heritage language programme should be the enthusiasm and interest on the part of the students. To ensure this, students need to be given fundamental roles which should, in return, assure that heritage language education stays cool.

4.3. DEFINING LEARNING GOALS

Realistic learning goals are central to any curriculum. Like any other language education programme, teaching heritage languages will produce speakers with widely divergent language proficiencies. Heritage language education should therefore include the idea that some students will acquire only a limited proficiency. Just as in any other subject, heritage language learning requires structured, concentrated and long-term learning and teaching efforts. Ideas such as that the language is dormant within the children (Inamine, 19 July 2006, interview), or that knowledge of the language is innate by grace of being Ryukyuan (Nakahama, 29 September 2005, interview), and that heritage language education therefore merely has to provide an impetus in order to awaken "dormant" linguistic knowledge, are unrealistic. Learning Okinawan is an endeavour as time-consuming and demanding for Okinawan students as it is for their mainland Japanese counterparts. Heritage language teachers have to accept the fact that the overwhelming majority of Okinawan pupils are monolingual. Hence, heritage language education is a kind of "foreign language education" for

the pupils – the foreign language in this case being a heritage language they never acquired. Nevertheless, since Okinawan is genealogically related to Japanese and shares large parts of its lexicon, morphology and syntax, much faster progress can be expected in Okinawan language education than, say, in English, German or French language education in Japan.

Since Okinawan heritage language education is foreign language education in a Japanese sister language, it can draw from the European experience of promoting foreign (sister) language learning and, in particular, of teaching minority languages there. As a starting point, the six reference levels as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) could be used as a helpful grid into which linguistic features to be taught at the various stages could be assigned (Council for Cultural Co-Operation 2001; see also Galan this volume). The basic three reference levels are further specified with regard to proficiency.

Tab. 1: Reference levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Beginner A: | A1 Breakthrough, A2 Waystage |
| Independent user B: | B1 Threshold, B2 Vantage |
| Proficient user C: | C1 Effective Operational proficiency, C2 Mastery |

Since these profiles are accepted as standards for assessing language proficiency and designing language curricula across several European languages, they also provide a helpful framework for language activists engaged in establishing Okinawan heritage language education. A clear and widely accepted categorization of proficiency and curriculum would facilitate recognition of Okinawan heritage language education *vis-à-vis* its critics and, what is more, provide the possibility of interrupting and resuming the study of the heritage language at any time and of offering intensive classes at any given level.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on what has been discussed here, the field and the agenda of Okinawan heritage language education can be summarized schematically as below. Needless to say, the table is not exhaustive but merely a heuristic simplification.

Tab. 2: Outline of the field of OHL

| | Ideology / ends | Research | Curriculum design |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Starting point | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research • deconstructing Meiji ideology • principle of Cool | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frameworks of foreign language pedagogy and sociolinguistics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEFRL • <i>kokugo</i> curriculum |
| Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating and spreading ideas on how Okinawa can be imagined more positively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empirical research on Okinawan heritage language education and language use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assigning Okinawan features into CEFRL grid • Considering <i>kokugo</i> curriculum |
| Actors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language activists • local movements • journalists • politicians | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local scholars and students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local scholars on language pedagogy • language teachers • language activists • language learners |

As can be seen from this table, language revival can be tackled from various ends and by various actors. All the activities can fall back on existing frameworks or discourses as a starting point. The field, as outlined above, is in no way as clear-cut and static as it might appear from the table. For instance, activities aimed at creating emancipative ideology, in other words, imagining and positioning Okinawa in a more positive way than has been the case throughout the modern period, affect research on heritage language education and attempts at curriculum design. Research and curriculum design, on the other hand, also provide an important impetus to imagine Okinawa in a more positive way. The most important point to learn from the above abstraction is, however, that *any activity which can be placed within this field provides an important contribution to revitalizing Okinawan*. In other words, none of the activities are futile, and attempts at heritage language revitalization have beneficial effects which go beyond the issue of language revival. Activities aimed at establishing Okinawan heritage language education are a contribution to creating an Okinawa worth living in and worth living for. This is why research on heritage language education should best be pursued by those affected. If the present paper can draw more interest to this field, it will have achieved its purpose.

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