The Language of Miyako Oral Traditions

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Abstract   Although Ryukyuan languages with the exception of Okinawan are essentially unwritten, they are rich in oral traditions whose language displays unique characteristics compared to the spoken register. This applies also to the Miyako language, with its wealth of traditional texts transmitted orally, including songs, chants, narratives, proverbs, aphorisms and riddles, and the oldest phonographic written records dating to eighteenth century. Research of the linguistic aspects of such texts should be of great value, both as a specialized register in its own right and in terms of a contribution to the broad historical-comparative research of Japonic languages. The present chapter provides the profile of Miyako as a modern spoken Japonic language (§ 1), presents theoretical essentials concerning the Miyako oral literature as well as an outline of the history of its documentation and research (§ 2), addresses general characteristics of the literary language (§ 3) and discusses some of its conservative features (§ 4). It introduces the basics of what can be labeled 'Miyako philology' while arguing for the importance of pursuing this field.

Keywords   Oral literature. Miyako. Ryukyuan. Songs. Narratives.

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1   Miyako-Ryukyuan: The Profile of a Japonic Language

Miyako-Ryukyuan (Miyako) is one of minority Japonic languages spoken in the Okinawa prefecture in Japan. It comprises the area of the Miyako island group with its seven traditionally inhabited, small islands centered around the Miyako main island. Genetically, Miyako is a representative of the South Ryukyuan/Sakishima subgroup of the Ryukyuan group, together with the languages of Yaeyama and Yonaguni.

Like in the case of other Ryukyuan languages, there is no census data available concerning the demographics of the Miyako language. Rough estimates propose that at the moment the population counts c. 20,000 speakers, a definite majority of them being in their sixties or older (cf. Jarosz 2024). The language is therefore seriously endangered, with few speakers in the productive age. It has no official state-level recognition and no formally regulated presence in the administrative or public spaces, which, again, resembles the situation of all other minority Japonic languages.

The regional varieties, or topolects, of Miyako-Ryukyuan are in general mutually intelligible and share most of the essential characteristics (although there are some studies which counter this perspective, cf. Takubo 2021, 65). Nevertheless, they are perceived by the speakers as clearly distinct, mostly due to marked phonological, but also grammatical and lexical differences. The vitality of specific topolects, and therefore the prospect of their survival into next generations, is varied. Some topolects are considered more robust than others. The Irabu varieties (Sawada/Nagahama, Kuninaka) are recognized among the Miyako locals as those with relatively high proportions of female speakers, whereas Ikema with its subvariety of Sarahama are reported to have individual fluent second language speakers among young (below 30) males working in the fishing industry, where they interact with older fishermen who still primarily use Ikema in their workplace communication with one another (cf. an interview with a Sarahama speaker in Linguapax Asia 2019). On the other hand, there are varieties on the verge of extinction, with only several speakers at a very advanced age left in depopulated areas. The outlook is particularly bleak for remote insular topolects such as Minna, Ōgami and Kurima.

Typologically, Miyako matches in many respects the usual profile of a Japonic language, the key characteristics including: the SOV and modifier-head constituent order; dependent-marking; nominative-accusative alignment; agglutinative and mostly synthetic morphology; finite and non-finite verb morphology; systemic, morphological encoding of information structure values (topic and focus), chiefly on nominals; mora and pitch accent-based prosody.

Miyako is also noted for a number of features which are rather unique in the context of Japonic languages. Although, as mentioned,

all Japonic languages are predominantly synthetic, the synthetic tendencies in Miyako are above average due to its relatively extensive grammaticalization processes. This is observed in nominal morphology, in which vowel-initial case (accusative *-u*) and information structure markers (topic *-a*) are subject to a range of phonotactic principles which prevent the breach of the language-specific distributional rules (cf. Takubo 2021), as well as in aspect marking, in which the auxiliary verb from the original construction appears in a variant word form as a suffix hosted by the original lexical verb.

pstu-a => *psto*: person-TOP
midum-a => *midumma* woman-TOP
usɨ-u => *ussu* COW-ACC

progressive *ɕ-i: uz* do-CVB PROG.NPST > *ɕ-u:z* do-PROG.NPST
resultative *aʑʑ-i utsɨ* say-CVB RSL.NPST > *aʑʑu:tsɨ* say-RSL.NPST

In some instances, these synthesizing tendencies are coupled with an increased fusionality or lead to lexicalizations. Thus, the conventional 'good night' greeting, *nivvju:ratɕi*, is ultimately derived from an analytic honorific construction *nivvi uramatɕi = nivv-i ur-ama-tɕi* sleep-CVB PROG-HON-IMP. Similarly, a 'how do you do?' question *dzo:kara:mma* has a more analytic counterpart *dzo:-kar-i ur-ama-z-na* good-VRB-CVB be-HON-NPST-YNITR, with the former omitting the auxiliary verb 'to be' *uz* by attaching the honorific suffix *-ama* directly to the verbalized adjectival stem.

The original constructions underlying such honorific or aspectual expressions are attested and synchronically still recoverable. In contrast, there is no evidence that the underlying forms of the topic and accusative marking were ever permitted and actually used at any past stage of the language.

Another distinctive feature of Miyako is its relatively complex syllable structure and distribution patterns. While standard Japanese is known for its syllabic simplicity with a strong predominance of open syllables and a consistent avoidance of consonant clusters, and most other Japonic varieties follow this pattern, Miyako enjoys a richness of syllable types and a range of moraic consonants (usually nasals and fricatives) which can take any position in a syllable, including the nucleus. This results in frequent consonant clusters: *ftsɨ* 'mouth', *pstu* 'person', as well as entire vocabulary items consisting only of a syllabic consonant:[1] *vv* 'to sell', *mm* 'sweet potato', *zz* 'gruel'. The presence

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[1] The consonant in such items is necessarily long (geminated) to satisfy the minimality constraint – a rule that a phonological word needs to be at least two morae long, pervasive among Ryukyuan languages.

of geminated/lengthened variants of voiced consonants, including sonorants, is one more unusual characteristic for a Japonic language.

In contrast to these innovative structural properties, Miyako is also recognized as a language rich in conservative features, such as the retention of Proto-Japonic *p, preservation of the two Proto-Japonic valence markers *-(r)aje and *-(r)are (cf. Jarosz 2023, and also § 4.2.1. below), and perhaps most famously, a thick layer of archaic vocabulary of Proto-Japonic ancestry shared with pre-modern Japanese which has since been lost in standard/common Japanese as well as in most Japonic topolects. Examples include adjectival stems such as *apara* 'beautiful' (OJ *apare*),[2] *kupa* 'hard' (OJ *kəpa*); native numerals in the row of tens and above, e.g. *misu* '30', *jusu* '40', *isu* '50', *mumu* '100' (OJ *miso*, *jəso*, *iso*, *momo* respectively); first person pronoun *a*, found in a limited number of topolects such as Irabu-Nakachi, Tarama, and Kurima (OJ *a*, *are*); verbs such as *udʑɨm ~ vdʑɨm* 'to bury' (OJ *undumu*), *uguna:iz* 'to gather' (OJ *ungonaparu*).

Due to these unique developments as well as retention of archaic features, Miyako is perceived as a highly valuable language in terms of not just synchronic/typological studies of the Japonic family, but also diachronic/historical studies (cf. e.g. Nakama 1992). Scholars have appreciated the diachronic and synchronic importance of the language of Miyako since the early twentieth century and the inception of modern linguistic studies in Japan, followed by the discovery of Sakishima languages as valid objects of a linguistic scrutiny. The narrative of Miyako-Ryukyuan as providing crucial material for comparative studies, linguistic and cultural alike, was shared by the influential minds of the pre-war Japan: Kunio Yanagita, Fuyū Iha, as well as the Russians Nikolay Nevskiy and Evgeniy Polivanov (cf. Jarosz 2015). The importance of studying oral traditions of the Miyako islands, which was expected to reflect still more archaic layers of an already "archaic" language, was emphasized in particular by Nevskiy, whose initial main purpose of the fieldwork in Miyako was to study folk songs in Miyako (Jarosz 2015, 144), preferably as remembered by the oldest members of the community and as reflected in the archaic Miyako song language (Katō 2011, 137-40).

2 Miyako Oral Literature: Outline and Sources

Overall, pre-modern Ryukyuan languages can be considered unwritten. A notable exception is Okinawan, with a focus on Shuri-Okinawan, the language of the erstwhile Ryukyu Kingdom elites. Nevertheless, even the Okinawan corpus, which incorporates predominantly the

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2 OJ phonological values in essence follow Miyake (2013) and Vovin (2020).

ritual song collection *Omorosōshi* おもろさうし (*omoro* songbooks; compiled in sixteenth–seventeenth centuries), *kumiodori* (*kumiwudui*) plays 組踊 (ensemble dance) and *ryūka* poetry 琉歌 (Ryukyuan poems; eighteenth century onwards) has not led to an establishment of a stable orthography nor writing conventions which would be shared community-wise and readily reproducible at a large scale. The mass literacy introduced together with compulsory education following the annexation of the Kingdom to Japan (1872-79) has always concerned Japanese and Japanese only (cf. Ogawa 2015). Any attempts at writing Ryukyuan with Ryukyuan speakers set as target readership have been a result of local bottom-up efforts, often in the context of language documentation and/or revitalization, and it is only very recently that the local administration has undertaken initiatives to regulate the writing conventions for respective Ryukyuan languages, using the Japanese *kana* syllabaries as the default writing system, the result being a document with orthographic recommendations published in 2022 (Okinawa-ken Bunka Kankō Supōtsu-bu 2022).

The situation of Miyako is no exception. While being an essentially unwritten language, Miyako boasts a rich and diverse corpus of oral literature,[3] which has a prominent place in the history of Japan's folklore. Some of the song genres are considered to retain formal layers which are still more ancient than those reflected in the oldest preserved Japanse chronicles, the eight-century *Kojiki* 古事記 (Records of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀 (The Chronicles of Japan) (Uemura 1997, 318). Miyako is in particular known for its long epic songs called *ajagu* アヤグ or *a:gu* アーグ, whose content either relays the stories of famous legendary or historical figures, such as Yonaha Sedo Toyomi-oya 与那覇せど豊見親 (fourteenth century) and Nema Ikari 根間いかり (fifteenth century, both names japanized; Inamura 1962), or sings the plight of common people, mostly women. This genre is so representative of Miyako that the label has also come to be used to refer to Miyako folk songs in general (cf. Hokama, Shinzato 1972, 333).

Following a simplified version of classifications of the Miyako oral literature by Hokama and Shinzato (1972, 333-7) and Shinzato (2005, 12-28) as well as my own observations rooted mostly in the study of Nikolay Nevskiy's records (Jarosz 2015; 2022), one can divide the corpus into poetry and prose. Poetry is understood here as rhythmic texts which follow formal conventions such as versification and parallel phrases. Poetry is represented by the following subgenres: chants,

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3   In fact, even after the introduction of mass literacy in the Miyakos, e.g. in the Karimata village it was still prohibited to write down those genres of Miyako songs which contained religious/taboo content and were used in ritual contexts, such as *ni:ri* ニーリ (cf. Karimata 2011, 150, 155; Okuhama 2022, 182).

such as medical magic formulas or children's counting chants; religious songs, used in prayers and rituals, some of which are considered to be almost as old as the Japonic settlement in the Miyako islands,[4] with genres such as *pja:ɕi*, *tukurufum*, *fusa*, *ta:bi* and *ni:ri*; epic songs, which include the *a:gu* in the narrow sense as well as *kuitɕa/kuitɕa a:gu*, performed as group song and dance; and lyrical songs called *taugani/to:gani* (pronunciation dependent on the region), usually sung on festive occasions and sometimes improvised, whose equivalent in Tarama is called *ɕunkani*. Unlike Japanese *waka* 和歌 (native Japanese poems) (5-7-5-7-7) or Okinawan *ryūka* (8-8-8-6), the Miyako songs do not have a fixed metrum, although they have a strong tendency to use four- and five-mora-count verses (Inamura 1962).

Prose includes more or less fixed forms such as folk tales, proverbs, riddles, and worldview-expressing aphorisms, often pertaining to some sort of belief/superstition or reliant on some kind of metaphor.

Despite its status of an unwritten language, there are also some early modern records of Miyako which date back to eighteenth century. These are the eight epic songs included in the Ryukyu Kingdom chronicle *Yōsei Kyūki* 雍正旧記 (Chronicles of the Yōsei Era, 1727), which is part of a Miyako-related chronicle trilogy unofficially referred to as *Miyakojima Kyūki* 宮古島旧記 (Sunagawa 1983; Shinzato 2005, 368). The songs are recorded in what can be labeled *ryūkyūgana* 琉球仮名:[5] an orthography based on the Japanese *hiragana* script with the addition of semantic *kanji* sinograms, first used for the purpose of notation of Old Okinawan e.g. in the *Omorosōshi* (Serafim, Shinzato 2021) and in some early documents such as the kingdom's decrees collected in *Danake Monjo* 田名家文書 (Documents of the House Dana) (Hokama 1971, 33; Tartarini 2009, 44).

Due to the differences in phoneme inventory and phonotactics between Old Okinawan (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries) and pre-modern Japanese, resulting in underrepresentation of some Okinawan sounds/sound sequences and overrepresentation (heterography) of others, especially those related to close vowels and palatalization-related syncope (vowel loss), the accuracy of these orthographic conventions is limited. Difficulties in the decipherment of *ryūkyūgana* notations are compounded by their fossilization: the notations did not change over the centuries to reflect e.g. the progression of vowel

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[4] Shinzato (2005, 24) estimates that most of the few *ni:ri* songs passed down until this day were already in use at least since mid-fifteenth century.

[5] In reference to Japanese *rekishiteki kanazukai* 歴史的仮名遣い (historical *kana*-spelling), Hokama (1971, 33) calls this orthographic convention *Okinawa-no rekishiteki kanazukai* 沖縄の歴史的仮名遣い (Okinawan historical *kana*-spelling).

raising in Middle Okinawan (eighteenth-nineteenth centuries; cf. e.g. Hattori 1978-79; 1979b).

Ryūkyūgana is therefore difficult to process to a modern reader even when it is used in notation for Okinawan, for which it was devised. The difficulties are only compounded when *ryūkyūgana* is employed to transcribe another language, such as Miyako, which has a still different phoneme inventory and syllable structure (cf. § 1). As a consequence, the decipherment and interpretation of the songs recorded in *Yōsei Kyūki* is impossible without specialist knowledge of the song register of the Miyako language and the diachronic stages which may be reflected in these pre-modern texts.

Modern academic studies of Miyako oral traditions began in the late nineteenth century with *Miyakojima-no Uta* 宮古島之歌 (*Songs from the Miyako island*), a collection of 89 pieces (with additional 11 songs from Yaeyama) recorded by Risaburō Tajima, released in 1893 (Shinzato 2005, 368). Apart from the eight songs which are a reproduction of the *Yōsei Kyūki* records, the collection is a result of Tajima's own fieldwork. Again, the usability of the volume is, however, diminished by Tajima using the *ryūkyūgana* conventions. Although Tajima devised some diacritic markings to indicate Miyako-specific sounds (such as using the upper right circle < ° > to represent a moraic consonant) and appended phonographic readings to some of the sinograms used in the text, this is still insufficient to provide ready, unambiguous phonological interpretation of the transcripts. *Miyakojima-no Uta* also does not include any complete translations or interpretations of the songs, only providing glossing and commentaries at random intervals, with many of the songs left without any comments at all.

Thus, while being of a high documentational value, Tajima's *Miyakojima-no Uta* is not an academic result per se. It did, however, serve as a basis for a number of studies of Tajima's successors, most notably Fuyū Iha and Nikolay Nevskiy (Shinzato 2005, 369-70).

Nevskiy, who conducted his Miyako fieldwork in the 1920s, can be considered the father of modern Miyako literary studies. He was the first to transcribe the Miyako language material in a phonetic (IPA-based) notation, and he also provided detailed linguistic and content analysis of many of his recorded texts. Some of the songs and stories that he documented also have full Russian and/or Japanese translations appended. His records have been released or re-released in Nevskiy and Oka (1971), Nevskiy (1978, Japanese edition 1998; 1996), and are discussed in detail in Jarosz (2015; 2022).

Systematic research of Miyako songs coupled with insights into their historical and ethnographic background was also initiated in the 1920s by the native Miyako scholar Kōnin Kiyomura. Although Kiyomura's records are equipped with translations into Japanese and commentaries, their usability is yet again limited by the employment

of an obsolete *hiragana*-based notation system. Nevertheless, despite retaining some of the non-phonological conventions of the early modern *ryūkyūgana*, Kiyomura's notation is unquestionably better adjusted to representing the sounds of the Miyako language, and with some effort it can be deciphered based on the knowledge of modern spoken Miyako language (cf. Kiyomura 2008 [1927]). Such *kana*-based notations of Miyako literary material continued to prevail in the research conducted by other Miyako locals, such as Kempu Inamura (e.g. Inamura 1977).

Documentation and study of Miyako oral literature saw a genuine surge in the post-war period, predominantly through the efforts of Shuzen Hokama, Kōshō Shinzato and Eikichi Hateruma. Their collections of songs include phonetic as well as syllabic notations and complete Japanese translations. Hokama is also credited as the most active contributor to theoretical/classifying research of Miyako poetry. Cf. Shinzato (2005, 367-87) for a historical overview of research on the Miyako oral traditions as well as a detailed bibliography up to the year 2003.

Shirō Hattori, the eminent Japanese linguist and the demiurge of historical Japonic linguistics, wrote in reference to Hokama and Shinzato (1978):

> These traditional [Miyako] songs retain old vocabulary which parallels that of the *Omorosōshi*. It is important to record such pieces. This could become a source which rivals the *Omorosōshi*. (Hattori 1979a, 432)

In so doing, he recognized the intrinsic value of the linguistic material contained in the traditional Miyako songs. Almost half a century following this evaluation by Hattori, a systematic linguistic study of Miyako songs and other literary material is yet to be attempted, a fact which emphasizes the importance and urgency of such work. Obscurity of the song language at times even to the singers has been an obstacle which hampered the progress and accuracy of the research of the Miyako literary traditions (cf. Shinzato 2005, 374; 378).

With most of the documentation focus targeted at the Miyako songs/poetry, the documentation of prose as represented by narratives has lagged behind. Nevertheless, there is some material available, starting again from Nevskiy's research (cf. Nevskiy, Oka 1971; Jarosz 2015; 2020a). The pinnacle of folk tale documentation has to be a two-volume collection of 231 narratives from the Gusukube region on the Miyako main island (Fukuda et al. 1991), written in the hybrid *kanji-kana* script with complete Japanese translations appended.

Miyako also enjoys a relatively rich assortment of publications on proverbs. There are hundreds of items, accompanied by explanations and interpretations, in collections using a *ryūkyūgana*-based

orthography (Yoshimura 1974, a volume dedicated to the Hirara to-polect versions of proverbs) as well as phonetic notation (Arazato 2003, an excellent, linguistically and ethnographically detailed work, with each of the 115 proverbs provided in multiple regional variants; Nevskiy 1978; 1998, and a digest of Nevskiy's manuscript collection of proverbs in Jarosz 2015, 403-11).

3 Linguistic Characteristics of Miyako Oral Literature

Due to the conventionalized nature of oral literature as opposed to everyday spoken language, the texts representing the former are expected to be stylized and include features distinct from the latter. This applies also to the prose genres, despite their form in essence mimicking the usual spoken language. Folk tales employ markers signaling their beginning, such as *nkja:n-du* 'once upon a time' (lit. 'in the past was it', past-FOC), and ending, employing hearsay (such as *antsɨ-nu panasɨ-tsa* 'the story goes like that, they say', like.that-GEN story-HRS) or fixed phrases such as *mmja: usaka* 'the end!'. Riddles follow a mostly fixed structure of question and answer, using a marked word order distinct from that employed in the spoken language (Jarosz 2015, 411-24). Proverbs tend to use parallel phrases, synthetic or antithetic, which gives them a resemblance to poetry, and when they are represented by complex sentences, they are often conditional or sequential (Jarosz 2015, 403-11).

Expectedly, a much higher degree of formalization is encountered in the language of songs (henceforth song language). Apart from the already mentioned (§ 2) characteristics of versification and parallelisms, the Miyako song language represents a special register which affects all levels of language structure: phonology, grammar and vocabulary. In general, this register is more archaic, as it reflects the earlier stages of the language, with forms not encountered anymore in everyday spoken language. This is obviously rooted in the intergenerational oral transmission of pieces which may date hundreds of years back.

Many of the retained forms are longer – e.g. they may not reflect syncopes or apocopes, they may preserve earlier grammaticalization stages, or be overall more analytic – which prevented damaging the metric structure of the piece. At other times this conservativeness may have resulted from a concern toward lyrical faithfulness, approaching the form as the component at least as instrumental to the identity of the piece as the meaning, to the degree that such faithfulness to the form eventually obscured the meaning to the later generations of speakers. This is in particular true of songs with religious connotations, in which the form itself carried ritual and spiritual importance and any alterations risked bringing about the

wrath of gods (cf. Karimata 2011, 155). Such retentions are exemplified by the progressive aspectual forms of verbs in a ritual Karimata song from the genre *ta:bi*, titled *Jama-nu fuɕiradzɨ* (Okuhama 2022), which are more analytic and less grammaticalized than their synthetic spoken language counterparts (cf. § 1): *tate-jor-i* build-PROG-CVB, *tor-i-jor-i* take-CVB-PROG-CVB. Both forms also reveal non-raised Proto-Ryukyuan mid-vowels, another archaic feature of the song register (§ 4.1.). The initial glide /j/ of the progressive auxiliary, typically absent from the modern spoken forms (*uz* ~ *ui* ~ *ul*, with the exception of Tarama, where the initial has undergone fortition j > b: *bul*), is preserved in the song register, highlighting the status of the progressive forms as structures built from two free word forms rather than a host and an affix.

Nevertheless, not all distinct song language forms are archaisms compared to the spoken language. On the contrary, metric considerations permit the type of synthesis that is foreign to the spoken variant of Miyako, and namely a synthesis across morpheme boundaries pertaining to word forms representing incompatible lexical categories and without any motivation for lexicalization. Cf. the following examples from epic songs *Ni:ma-nu ɕu:*[6] (The Lord of Niima; Nevskiy 1978, 108) and *Pstujumja: a:gu* (Song of a daughter-in-law; Nevskiy 1978, 124).

3-1. Naha-minatu-gamj-u:-kur-a   uja-minatu-gamj-u-kur-a
       Naha-harbor-LIM-ACC-send-VOL father-harbor-LIM-ACC-send-VOL
       'I will see you off up to the Naha harbor, up to the main harbor.'

3-2. Ban-tɕu:mu-i   naru-tɕu:mu-i   tungara
       1SG-QUOT.think-IMP RFX-QUOT.think-IMP friend
       'Think that this is me, think that this is myself, friend.'

In 3-1., the compound nouns inflected for the combined limitative-accusative cases (*Naha-minatu-gamju:*, *uja-minatu-gamju:*) prosodically host the verb *ukura*, which is the head of the phrase. The initial vowel of *ukura* is deleted (apharesis), a process which would be unusual in the spoken language. Similarly in 3-2., the pronominal forms *ban* and *naru*, followed by the quotative marker *-ti*, blend with the head of the verb phrase, *umui*. Although the vowel /i/ of the quotative marker is apparently deleted as a result of crasis with the verb-initial /u/, the /u/ is lengthened to rhythmically compensate for the loss of a mora

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6 For the sake of consistency, all excerpts in Miyako from other sources have been retranscribed to match the IPA-based phonological transcription used by myself.

carried by the /i/ – an occurrence which confirms the treatment of *bantɕu:mui* and *narutɕu:mui* as single word forms.

The result of both 3-1. and 3-2. are combined nominal-verbal word forms which are essentially polysynthetic in their nature, unlike any tendencies observed in spoken Miyako.

Lexically, Miyako songs have a corpus of vocabulary which is only used in this lyrical register. This vocabulary need not be archaic, i.e. unambiguously represent items which had existed in a proto-language but have fallen out of use in modern spoken Miyako. The corpus includes possible loanwords, usually from Okinawan, such as *kumi* 'rice' or Tarama *tsɨbul* 'head', an indication of the prestige of Okinawan in the Ryukyu Kingdom area as the language of authority and art (cf. Gillan 2015), but also perhaps from Japanese (via Okinawan; Gillan 2015, 690-2), like the word *atama* 'head' encountered in songs from the Tarama island.

Expressions apparently reserved for the song register include pronouns such as reflexive Tarama *juf* and Karimata first person *jana* and *ja:ra*; common nouns such as *mata* 'treetop', Hirara *junimuz* 'sandy field', *umizbi:* 'father', or Shimajiri *pudamma* 'mother'; verbs like Tarama *sɨmil* 'to wash one's hands or face'; temporal expressions such as Hirara *junu:rja:* 'at the same time in the future; exactly a year after'; attributes such as *naja* 'famous, renown' and *sɨmu* 'nether, below, southern' (e.g. in reference to the Yaeyama islands), including prefixes like beautifying *ma-* 'real, true, genuine' and honorific *mi-*; poetic references to objects or locations such as *ma-dama muz* 'the Shuri castle' (the king's residence in the capital city), literally 'true-jewel hill'. *Madama muz* itself is likely a loan from the Old Okinawan *omoro* vocabulary (cf. Hokama, Okinawa Kogo Daijiten Henshū Iinkai 1995, 609), and so is the composite beautifying prefix *ma-* (cf. Serafim, Shinzato 2021, 133-5). For a larger list of song register-specific lexicon, cf. Jarosz (2022, 70).

A characteristic element of the song language register, shared with other Ryukyuan lyrical traditions (Gillan 2015, 693), are the repetitive rhythmic fillers called *hayashi*. They can be made up of nonsense syllables (e.g. *jo*, *ju*) or strings of syllables (e.g. *ju:i*, *ho:i*, *hi:ja:ro:gahi:*) inserted at the end of a verse or between verses with an apparent purpose of fixing the rhythmical structure of the piece. Some of the *hayashi* have actual recognizable meaning, and their repetitions serve as a kind of refrain, like *so:dan so: mina-to: pstujumja* 'let's have a talk, daughters-in-law' in aforementioned *Pstujumja: a:gu* (Nevskiy 1978, 122-4), or *ju:-nu pairu* 'may there be prosperity' in *Nagapsɨda* (Nevskiy 1978, 128).

4 Conservative Features

4.1 Phonology

A range of examples from the Miyako song language represent earlier stages of the language, displaying features that are known to be archaic through comparative data and/or the expected directionality of sound change, and which have been lost in the modern spoken language. Table 1 lists such examples together with explanations of the equivalent developments in the spoken register.

Table 1 Conservative phonological features of the Miyako song register

Conservative feature	Example items	Spoken register	Song register
bilabial approximant between two open vowels	'foxtail millet'	a:	awa
retention of short mid-vowels /e/ an /o/[*]	'to take'	turi (imperative)	tori (imperative)
	'time'	tukja:	toki
	'to build, to stood'	tati	tate
front close vowel /i/ or back close /u/ instead of the so-called fricative vowel /ɨ/ following the sibilants /s/, /ts/, /dz/	'fortification'	gusɨku	guɕiku
	'rope'	tsɨna	tɕuna
	'road'	mtsɨ	mitɕi
retention of strings Cir/Cur, where C represents any obstruent	'white'	ssu	ɕiru
	'to forget'	baɕɕi	basuri
	'child'	ffa	fura
	'pillow'	maffa	makura
diphthong non-coalescence	'Yaeyama'	ja:ma	jaima
retention of the string /ija/	'young girl, maiden'; 'prostitute' (modern spoken language only)	mja:rabi	mijarabi
retention of front close vowel /i/ after /m/	'road'	mtsɨ	mitɕi
	'tatami mat'	tatam	tatami
non-assimilation of front close vowel /i/ before coronal consonants	'where?'	ndza	idza, ida
	'life'	nnutsɨ ~ nutsɨ	inutsɨ

[*] All examples of non-raised mid-vowels come from the Karimata song representing the ritual *ta:bi* genre, *Jama-nu fuɕiradz*ɨ (Okuhama 2022).

Table 1 pertains almost exclusively to the vowel system or vowel-related reductions of syllable structure. This seems to confirm the hypothesis (§ 3) that the archaicity of linguistic features in the song language may often stem from rhythmical and acoustic concerns. The specifics include the retention of post-sibilant Proto-Japonic *i and *u; the retention of Proto-Ryukyuan mid-vowels *e and *o; pre- and post-nasal *i; strings from before the activation of the Sakishima Flap Assimilation Rule (Jarosz 2018), and strings including Proto-Japonic approximants *w and *j in medial, intervocalic positions. Some of these

changes are very old: centralization of post-sibilant *u (post-alveolar obstruent, to be exact) dates to Proto-Ryukyuan (Thorpe 1983), mid-vowel raising was ongoing at least since Proto-Ryukyuan (Thorpe 1983; Jarosz 2018; 2021), and Flap Assimilation was initiated in Proto-Sakishima. Several Miyako songs reflect thus proto-language stages from centuries before, underpinning the argument about the anciency of the Miyako songs and their language.

Table 1 reflects sound changes which apply to all regional varieties of Miyako-Ryukyuan. In contrast, Table 2 shows characteristics which are archaic only in respect to the more innovative topolects such as Hirara, Irabu/Nakachi, Kurima, and Shiokawa-Tarama. Hirara coalesces proto-language diphthongs *au and *ao to the long vowel /o:/, whereas the more conservative topolects such as Nakasuji-Tarama, Ikema and much of Irabu (Nagahama, Sawada and Kuninaka) retain the Proto-Miyako *au. In the song language, however, the diphthong /au/ is uniformly retained also in pieces of Hirara provenance. Retentions of this kind again might stem from acoustic and rhythmic causes – the dynamics of vocalization are different for falling diphthong nuclei as opposed to a single long vowel nuclei, and articulation-wise as well as auditory-wise, it is more challenging to indicate a short: long vowel contrast in singing than in the spoken register.

Table 2   Non-coalescence of *ao and *au in the Hirara song register

Meaning	Conservative modern topolects (e.g. Sawada, Ikema)	Hirara, song register	Hirara, spoken register
'blue'	au	au	o:
'fan'	audzɨ	audzɨ	o:gzɨ
'stick'	bau	bau	bo:
'gate'	dzau	dzau	dzo:
'good'	dzau	dzau	dzo:
'as if'	jau	jau	jo:
'what?'	nau	nau	no:
'pole, rod'	sau	sau	so:

4.2   Morphology

Archaic morphological features of the Miyako literary language mostly apply to morphology of verbs: their inflectional paradigm (§§ 4.2.1., 4.2.2.), syntactically motivated contrasts (§ 4.2.3.), clausal markers or word-formation patterns. As with phonological retentions shown in Table 2, it is frequently the case that while several of these features still exist residually in some conservative modern Miyako topolects, they have fallen out of use in most other topolects except for the literary language.

4.2.1   Proto-Sakishima Suffix *-o

As analyzed in Jarosz (2020b; 2024), Proto-Sakishima had two variant negative suffixes of the vowel verbs: the general Japonic *-e- < Proto-Japonic *əj-a-, *aj-a-, and the Sakishima-specific *-o- < Proto-Japonic *u-a-. Although the latter is rather broadly reflected in Yaeyama, including among others Shika, Taketomi, Kohama, and Hateruma, it is only scarcely attested in modern Miyako, with distribution limited to the southern outskirts of the Core Miyako area, such as Kurima, Gusukube, and Bora.

The song language from outside these *o-retentive regions, however, provides philological evidence that the *-o- negative used to be indeed more widespread and attested throughout all of the Miyako area. Examples include Tarama, with the form *mijudana* (*mi-judana* see-NCVB; spoken *mi:dana*) in the song *Kamnataduru-nu e:gu* (Nevskiy 1978, 134), and Shimajiri *mju:n* (*mj-u:n* EXP-NEG.NPST, spoken *mi:n*) in the song *Koigusuku*/*Kuiguɕiku* recorded by Tajima (Moromi et al. 2008, 226).

4.2.2   Both Proto-Sakishima Passive-Potential Markers

Jarosz (2023; 2024) demonstrates that Proto-Sakishima had two passive-potential markers inherited from Proto-Japonic. One was PJ *-(r)araj-, cf. Old Japanese *-(r)are-*, which initially was likely a specialized passive marker. The other was *-(r)aje-, cf. Old Japanese *-(r)aje-*, likewise an initially specialized inchoative and potential marker. Although individual modern South Ryukyuan topolects such as Kurima-Miyako, Tarama-Miyako and Hateruma-West Yaeyama have reflexes of both, in most Ryukyuan languages only one of the two is retained, and it serves there to encode all passive-potential-related functions.

In the Miyako topolects, the dominant attested type is the descendant of *-(r)aje-.[7] Oral literature, however, proves that also reflexes of *-(r)araj- > *-(r)ari* used to be more widespread in the language; a couple of generations earlier both markers may have been in a common use.

The following examples illustrate such a literary use of *-(r)araj- in present-day topolects which exclusively employ *-(r)aje- > *-(r)ai*. (4-1.) and (4-2.) represent the potential use of *-(r)ari* in a Hirara narrative *Akarjazzagama-nu panasɨ* (as found in Nevskiy 1992); (4-3.) shows the potential use of *-(r)ari* in a Sawada-Irabu proverb (also as

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7 This fact in itself is noteworthy, as most modern Japonic topolects, both Mainland and Ryukyuan, tend to retain only the reflex of *-(r)araj-. This includes Miyako's closest relative, the Macro-Yaeyama languages (Jarosz 2023).

recorded in Nevskiy 1992), and (4-4.) illustrates the passive use of
-*(r)ari* in a *taugani* song from Ikema (as recorded by Tajima, Moromi
et al. 2008, 251).

4-1. sɨni-middz-u   jarj-a:mai-gami-du   amɕi-rari-z
      death-water-ACC   COP-CNC-LIM-FOC   bathe-POT-CNCL.NPST
      'At least I could bathe them in the death water.' (Hirara)

4-2. ningin-nu   puri-munu-ja   tsɨgzɨnnutsɨ   mavv-ari-gumata-nu
      people-NOM   stupid-thing-ITM longetivy   protect-POT-ASM-GEN
      'Humans are so stupid! They could have preserved their longevity.' (Hirara)

4-3. tin-nkai-ja   pass-a   kakir-ari-n
      sky-ALL-TOP   bridge-TOP   cast-POT-NEG.NPST
      'You cannot cast a bridge over to the sky.' (Sawada-Irabu)

4-4. jai   kisa-uja-nn-a   ujagi-rari
      thin   kisa-lord-DAT-TOP   stop-PSV
      'We were interrupted by the thin lord Kisa…' (Ikema)

4.2.3   Distinction Between Conclusive and Attributive Forms

It is broadly reported (e.g. Hirayama 1983; Nakama 1992; Uemura 1997) that Miyako-Ryukyuan has lost the original Proto-Japonic distinction between the conclusive and attributive (adnominal) verb forms. In a few modern Miyako topolects such as Kurima, the syntactic distinction between these two positions is reflected morphologically in the vowel verb classes through the conclusive form, marked with -*z* (cf. *psɨtu-nu-du uri-z* person-NOM-FOC descend-CNCL.NPST 'a person descends') contrasting with the bare stem form used adnominally (*uri psɨtu* descend.NPST person 'a person who descends'). This distinction, however, is an apparent Miyako innovation which applies only to a minority of topolects in a limited number of verb classes (cf. Jarosz 2024), while there are virtually no traces[8] of the original Proto-Japonic attributive marker *-o contrasted with conclusive *-u (cf. Hattori 1976; Jarosz 2019).

The situation is once again different in the song language. In several instances of a predicate used adnominally, whether as a noun modifier or as a substantive, the predicate-final vowel reflects

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8   There are several exceptions, e.g. the irregular verb 'to do', which in Kurima has both *asɨ* (reflecting Proto-Japonic conclusive *su) and *asu* (reflecting Proto-Japonic attributive *so) attested in the attributive position (Jarosz 2024).

Proto-Sakishima < Proto-Japonic *o, which in general corresponds in modern Miyako to the close back vowel /u/ with the preceding consonant unchanged, as opposed to conclusive verb forms which, depending on the region and the verb subtype, may end in a final consonant, the vowel /i/ or a diphthong.

The attestations include predominantly vowel verbs found in songs from Tarama, as introduced in Table 3 together with their modern spoken equivalents which combine the conclusive and attributive functions and descend from the Proto-Japonic conclusive (Jarosz 2019).

Table 3 Attestations of a morphologically distinct attributive form in Tarama

Attestation	Song language phrase	Analysis	Modern spoken form
Sjo:gatsɨ-nu e:gu (Nevskiy 1978, 120)	sɨdi-ru sjaku	be.revived-ATR level 'until I am revived'	sɨdil
Sjo:gatsɨ-nu e:gu (Nevskiy 1978, 120)	mujui-ru(/mui-ru) sjaku	burn-ATR level 'until they burn'	muil
Sjo:gatsɨ-nu e:gu (Nevskiy 1978, 120)	mui-ta-ru-ga	bud-PST-ATR-NOM 'that which has budded'	muital
Sjo:gatsɨ-nu e:gu (Nevskiy 1978, 120)	hai-ta-jur-u-ga	grow-PST-PROG-ATR-NOM 'that which has grown'	haital
Bunagama-ga e:gu (Nevskiy 1978, 120)	mi-ru psɨtu	see-ATR person 'the person who sees'	mi:l psɨtu

The Tarama evidence is expanded by examples from other regions, such as Ikema. In an Ikema *taugani* recorded by Nevskiy (1978, 155), the form *umujuru* 'beloved' (*umu-jur-u* think-PROG-ATR) appears in relative clauses *umujuru bunarja* 'beloved woman', *umujuru kanaɕa* 'beloved dear one', and it contrasts with the expected conclusive form *umui-ui → umujui/umuju:*.

4.2.4 The Conditional Marker

Modern Miyako topolects display a variety of regional realizations of the conditional marker hosted by verbs in conditional or sequential (temporal) clauses. The attested forms include *-tika:*, *-tiga:*, *-tɕika:*, and *-kka:*, and based on their comparison, they are hypothesized to reflect the Proto-Miyako marker *-tikara(:) (Celik 2020, 220). The only known Miyako variety that retains the form identical to Proto-Miyako is Tarama, alongside the more innovative allomorph *-tika:* (Celik 2020, 220).

In the literary language, this most archaic proto-form is attested abundantly regardless of the region. As noted by Celik (2020, 224), *-tikara* already appears in the song *Yoshima-no oya hashi-age-no*

ayago 四島の親橋積上げのあやご (The Song of Piling Up the Bridge for the Lord of the Four Islands, Japanized title) recorded in the chronicle *Yōsei Kyūki* (§ 2). Some other examples, including the variant palatalized form *-tɕikara*, come from the epic song from Karimata, *Jusɨma-nu ɕu:* (The Lord of the Four Islands) (Nevskiy 1978, 142; 4-5.), and an untitled *taugani* song from Sawada-Irabu, recorded by Nevskiy in his lexicographic manuscripts (Nevskiy 1992; 4-6.)

4-5. an   ja-tɕikara un   ja-tɕikara Ju-sɨma-nu-ɕu:
   like.that COP-CND like.this COP-CND four-island-GEN-lord
   'If that is the case, if this is the case, you Lord of the Four Islands' (Karimata)

4-6. ni: oi-tja-m   ja-tigara
   root grow-PST-RLS COP-CND
   'After the roots have grown…' (Sawada)

4.2.5 Formation of Verbalized Adjectives

There are two general verbalization patterns of adjectival roots in Ryukyuan: the *-sa*-pattern, derived from the nominalized adjectival form (*-sa) followed by the stative verb *ari, and the *-ku*-pattern, derived from the adverbial form (*-ku) followed by *ari. The *-sa*-pattern is more pervasive, while the *-ku*-pattern seems limited to Miyako, Hateruma-West Yaeyama, and individual North Ryukyuan topolects in the Amami and Kikai islands (Uemura 1997, 349).

The only modern Miyako topolect which displays the *-sa*-pattern is Tarama. Considering that Tarama is an outlier island separated from the rest of the Miyako-speaking area by a 60-kilometer-long stretch of the sea, as well as its long history of contact with the speakers of Ishigaki-based Yaeyama languages (cf. Makino 1983), it would be reasonable to infer that the Tarama pattern was contact-induced (borrowed from Ishigaki), and Proto-Miyako never had any adjectival derivation strategy other than the *-ku*-pattern. The song language, however, again provides evidence that the *-sa*-pattern was in fact also in use in Miyako outside Tarama. The evidence comes from the already cited songs from the northern region of the Miyako main island, with the pertinent forms applying to the desiderative adjectival root *pusɨ* 'wanting, yearning': Karimata's *Jusɨma-nu ɕu:* (Nevskiy 1978, 142; 4-7.) and Shimajiri's *Kuigusɨku* (4-8., 4-9.), this time in the version recorded by Nevskiy.[9]

4-7. nau   pu-ɕa-du   ba-ga
      what   wanting-NMN-FOC   1SG-GEN
      Jaima-n   mja-taz-ga-ju
      Yaeyama-DAT come.HON-PST-WHITR-ITM
      'What did you want so that you came to my Yaeyama islands, what are you
      after?' (Karimata)

4-8. nau   pu-ɕa-ga   mmja:-tɕaz-ga
      what   wanting-NMN-WHFOC   come.HON-PST-WHITR
      'What did you want so that you came here, what are you after?' (Shimajiri)

4-9. vva   bata   daks-ɨ   bata   puɕ-an-du
      2SG   stomach   embrace-NPST   stomach   want-VRB.NPST-ITM
      'Your belly, the belly you hold, it is what I am after.' (Shimajiri)

(4-7.) and (4-8.) actually show a nominalized form *puɕa* functioning
as adjectival predicate in a construction with the honorific motion
verb *mmja:z*, altogether constituting a purposive meaning 'to come
wanting to' = 'to come in order to'. While not precisely a verbalized
form, by participating in a predicative expression *puɕa* appears to
reflect an intermediate stage in the development of the full-fledged
verbalized use of the -*sa*-pattern.[10] In contrast, (4-9.) shows a proto-
typical, tense-marked verbalized adjective *puɕan*.

This evidence allows to postulate that Proto-Miyako did in fact
have both -*sa*- and -*ku*-verbalizing strategies, much like modern
northern Amami and Kikai topolects, which are reported to syn-
chronically use both -*sa*- and -*ku*-patterns (Uemura 1997, 349, 453).

5   Conclusions

The present chapter argues that a language does not necessarily have
to be an established "literary" language to warrant philological re-
search. Despite their overall status of unwritten languages, there is
a need to revisit Ryukyuan languages as legitimate subjects of phil-
ological study. As illustrated throughout this chapter, the oldest pre-
served written records of Miyako date back to early eighteenth cen-
tury, which is a significantly long time span allowing for relevant
scrutiny into the synchrony and diachrony of the language. A sys-
tematic method needs to be, however, developed in order to accu-
rately decipher Miyako texts written in the *ryūkyūgana*, which apart

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10   This purposive construction 'to come wanting to' itself appears to be obsolete; no
reports of its existence in modern spoken language has been obtained as of yet.

from the epic songs in the *Yōsei Kyūki* include the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century documentation by Tajima, Kiyomura and several others (§ 5).

The language of Miyako oral literature merits in-depth study as a research topic in its own right, enabling a study of its stylistic conventions and registers with its specialized lexicon, figurative expressions, formal components such as the *hayashi*, and morphological as well as articulatory characteristics differing from the spoken register (§ 3).

At the same time, the language of the Miyako oral traditions displays numerous archaisms and archaic stylizations, the examples of which introduced in § 4 are a mere tip of the iceberg. A diachronic and comparative analysis of these data provides insights into the history of the language that would otherwise be impossible.

It may be superfluous to observe that the reverberations of such a study are not confined to the Miyako language alone. Even the small sampling of data presented in this chapter supplies strong evidence of the proposed developments of the Ryukyuan and/or Japonic language area (such as the presence of two passive-potential markers of different origins, § 4.2.1, or the erstwhile pervasiveness of the *o-negative marker which corroborates it not being an independent southern Miyako innovation, § 4.2.2), and helps establish facts for which the modern spoken language does not provide enough support (such as the preservation of conclusive and attributive forms of the PJ provenance, § 4.2.3, or the reconstruction of a *-sa*-pattern verbalizer in Proto-Miyako, § 4.2.5).

Some of the archaic features of the Miyako song language phonology reflect proto-language stages like Proto-Sakishima and Proto-Ryukyuan which precede Proto-Miyako by century-long margins (§ 4.1), emphasizing the articulatory conservativeness of the song language as well as the significantly ancient roots of the Miyako songs preserved to date. Also a comparative study of the oral literature-specific vocabulary (§ 3) can reveal new insights about the historical language contact (Miyako-Okinawan or Miyako-(Okinawan-)Japanese) or the reconstructible lexicon of various levels of proto-languages, assuming that the oral literature language preserves some vocabulary that has fallen out of use in the spoken register.

All in all, discoveries from a linguistic study of Miyako oral traditions are expected to affect the perspectives on not just Proto-Miyako, but also the ancestor languages: Proto-Sakishima, Proto-Ryukyuan, possibly even Proto-Kyushu-Ryukyuan and, ultimately, Proto-Japonic.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
ACC	accusative
ALL	allative
ASM	assumptive
ATR	attributive
CNC	concessive
CNCL	conclusive
CND	conditional
COP	copula
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
EXP	experiential
FOC	focus
GEN	genitive
HON	honorific
HRS	hearsay
IMP	imperative
ITM	interactional marker
LIM	limitative
NCVB	negative converb
NEG	negative
NMN	nominalizer
NOM	nominative
NPST	non-past
POT	potential
PROG	progressive
PST	past
PSV	passive
QUOT	quotative
RFX	reflexive
RLS	realis
RSL	resultative
SG	singular
TOP	topic
VOL	volitional
VRB	verbalizer
WHFOC	wh-focus
WHITR	wh-interrogative
YNITR	-no interrogative

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