Language Attitudes and Ideologies on Taketomi Island
Keywords: Linguistics, Okinawa, Taketomi, Japan, Language Ideology

Abstract

Over the past 150 years, Japan has transformed from a feudal country into a nation state. Part of this change has been done through the creation of a standardized form of Japanese that serves as the national language. The spread of this language coupled with intense socioeconomic pressures have resulted in the near-eradication of the Ryūkyūan languages, which are six languages spoken in Okinawa Prefecture in southern Japan. While there has been relatively substantial work done documenting these languages, there has been little research done on their social place in contemporary society. This paper examines language attitudes and ideologies surrounding the Taketomi dialect of the Yaeyaman language, which is spoken on Taketomi Island. The island is only 1.5 square miles with a population of 350; it lies far from the region's cultural center, Okinawa Island. Over the course of 2013, I completed six weeks of fieldwork on the island. While there, I distributed an attitudinal survey, conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with island residents, and engaged in participant-observation. I found that while most people cannot speak Taketomi dialect due to language transmission ending in the pre- and post-World War II period, island residents hold overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards their language. However, the language is not viewed as a productive linguistic system, but rather as a symbol of the island's cultural heritage that residents are dedicated to protecting.

Introduction

Japan is often thought of as an ethnically homogenous, monolingual nation (Heinrich, 2012). Barring foreigners and the indigenous Ainu, its inhabitants are frequently assumed to all be Japanese people who speak the Japanese language. However, like most nationalist ideologies, the truth is more complicated: there is remarkable linguistic variation within the country. This is particularly true in the Ryūkyū Islands, the archipelago that runs between Kyūshū, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, and Taiwan. The Ryūkyūs are home to the approximately six Ryūkyūan languages1. Related to but mutually unintelligible with Japanese, these languages are all currently considered "severely" or "definitely" endangered by UNESCO due to language shift (Hattori, 1954; Moseley, 2010). While most people in the Ryūkyūs do not speak these languages (Heinrich, 2005), they are ideologically important in many communities as a means of creating and reflecting a Ryūkyūan identity (Osumi, 2001; Heinrich, 2004). Taketomi Island is one of these communities. 1.5 square miles in area with a population of only 350 (Uesedo, 2013), the island is home to an eponymous dialect of the Yaeyaman

1 The official count is up for debate. Some scholars suggest five (Shibatani, 1990), others six (Heinrich, 2012). Somewhat of an outlier, the Ethnologue lists eleven (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2014).
language (one of the Ryūkyūan languages). Despite most community members' inability to speak more than ritualized Taketomi dialect, they value the language as an important aspect and index of a traditional culture that they view themselves as the caretakers of\(^2\).

![Figure 1: Map of the Ryūkyūs: Taketomi is located in the Yaeyama region](Map of Ryūkyū Islands)

**Background**

In order to understand why most people on Taketomi and in Okinawa cannot speak their heritage languages, it is important to look at Japan's history. Starting in the mid-1630s, the Tokugawa Shogunate, which governed Japan, banned almost all foreigners from entering the country and also restricted intranational mobility (Gottlieb, 2005). This lasted until the mid-1850s, when Japan was forced by the American government to re-enter the world of international politics. The nation was humiliated: another country had exerted power over it. In response, Japan was desperate to modernize in order to prove itself an imperial nation equal to those in the west. An important ingredient of a thriving nation state was a national language (Yeonsuk, 2010). However, during the 200 years of Japan's isolation, linguistic differences flourished along class and geographic lines (sometimes to the point of mutual unintelligibility) (Gottlieb, 2005). The government and the nation's literati spent the next fifty or so years creating a standardized form of the Japanese language that could be disseminated throughout the country in an effort to create an ideological shared community (Yeonsuk, 2010; Heinrich, 2012). Subsequently, deviations from this new standard were deemed dialects (Shibata, 1999)\(^3\).

\(^2\) All uncited information about Taketomi Island is based on ethnography I conducted that will be further explained in the "Methods" section.

\(^3\) This form of Japanese will be called Standard Japanese in the following pages.
Because of its indigenous languages, the Ryūkyūs were particularly affected by language standardization. The Ryūkyūs had been a semi-autonomous kingdom prior to their 1872 annexation by Japan. If one were multilingual, it was likely in multiple Ryūkyūan languages rather than Japanese (Hokama, 1982). On peripheral islands like Taketomi, very few people likely knew anything beyond their and neighboring islands' dialects. In the 1880s, the Japanese government instated mandatory elementary education, through which they spread Standard Japanese throughout Japan and the Ryūkyūs, which had become Okinawa Prefecture in 1879 (Heinrich, 2012). On Taketomi and many other islands, students were punished for speaking in their own languages (Heinrich, 2004). This positioned Japanese as "good" and Ryūkyūan languages as "bad."

Calling the Ryūkyūan languages dialects became one tactic of many aimed at demeaning the Ryūkyūan people in order to motivate them to culturally and economically assimilate into the budding Japanese nation state (Heinrich, 2004). In the early 1900s, the Ryūkyūan languages were even legally declared dialects, reinforcing their perceived inferiority (Heinrich, 2012). As dialects, these languages were thought to be reflective of Ryūkyūans' social status as a barbaric, in-the-past people (Christy, 1993). In accordance with Confucianism, Okinawa was seen as backwards because how peripheral it was relative to Japanese bastions of civilization, Kyoto and Tokyo. The onset of European-style colonialism added a temporal aspect to this ideology: the less "civilized" people were, the further "behind" they were on the linear path of progress (Morris-Suzuki, 1996; Shibatani, 1999). The Ryūkyūs were thought of as so far behind they came to be seen as home to untouched, "pure" Japanese culture (Ota, 1991). Their languages were seen as older and closer to Classical Japanese than Standard Japanese was (Shibatani, 1990). While these ideologies did grant some alternative social capital to Ryūkyūan culture and language, they also served to reinforce Ryūkyūans' status as second-class citizens. The Ryūkyūans and their languages were further degraded due to the poor economy of the region; those who lack economic power also lack linguistic power (Philips, 2004). These ideologies and poor economic conditions left the Ryūkyūans powerless and incentivized them to adapt to Japanese cultural, linguistic, and economic standards (Christy, 1993; Matsuda, 2008).

In response to their degraded social status, Okinawans fled to mainland Japan and Japanese colonies to earn money. It was not unusual for them to change their names or to try to stop speaking their languages as a means of passing as Japanese (Christy, 1993). On Taketomi, islanders escaped their island's subsistence farming lifestyle by moving to the then Japanese colony of Taiwan. While in Taiwan, they and other Okinawans largely lived in Okinawan ghettos where Japanese was the lingua franca (Matsuda, 2012). Children raised in Taiwan often didn't learn Taketomi dialect. After the war ended, there was a mass exodus back to Taketomi. While children raised on the island could often speak dialect, their new playmates could not. In this time period, Okinawa was governed by the American military. Using Japanese became a means of asserting Okinawa's Japanese identity and protesting its annexation, and there were renewed efforts to get Ryūkyūans speaking Japanese in the home (Heinrich, 2004). Language shift became largely complete when the children of the post-war period started their own families

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4 One cluster of Ryūkyūan islands, Amami-Ōshima, is part of Kagoshima Prefecture.
(Heinrich, 2005). The Ryūkyūan languages had become ideologically "bad," and there was little incentive to transmit them to future generations.

**Research Questions**

I set off to Taketomi Island in order to learn more about how today's residents view their island's indigenous language. Because language transmission stopped when the elderly were children, I wanted to learn if people on the island had any strong feelings or beliefs about the language despite their lack of linguistic competency. Previous research by Osumi (2001) and Matsuno (2004) suggested that, in the Ryūkyūan communities they studied, older people had negative attitudes towards indigenous language while younger people held positive views. I wanted to learn if people's views differed based on the demographics of gender, age, hometown, and Taketomi dialect fluency.

**Methods**

Over the course of 2013, I took two trips to Taketomi Island, one a month in length and the other two weeks. While there, I conducted interviews, distributed an attitudinal survey, attended community events, engaged in participant-observation, and studied texts, such as signs and museums, available on the island. Over the course these two visits, I conducted thirty interview sessions and spoke with thirty-two people within those. The majority of interviews were semi-structured, while three were a combination of semi-structured interviews and working through the survey with respondents. In some sessions, multiple people were present. Two people were recorded twice, and I lost parts of three interview recordings due to technical malfunctions. In total, I have just over twenty-two hours of recordings. I also received thirty-four survey responses. Not every survey was completed in its entirety, and while there is some overlap, the survey and interview participants are not exactly the same. Between surveys and interviews, I had forty-seven unique informants. In February 2014, there were 353 residents on the island; this would make the sample size approximately 13.3% of the population (Taketomi Town, 2014b). Prior to being interviewed and completing surveys, all respondents signed a consent form explaining the purpose of the study and indicating that they had been assured their anonymity.

In analyzing the interviews, I listened to the recordings, taking notes on pertinent statements that informants made. After listening to all of them, I coded and sorted these notes into various categories that I had deemed relevant based on their thematic prevalence. The survey was composed of five parts: demographics, dialect use, and three attitudinal sections concerning Taketomi dialect, Japanese and English, and identity. In the last three sections, respondents were asked how strongly they agreed with a series of statements. I assigned a numerical value from 1 to 5 for each possible level of agreement: “Completely Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” “Can’t Say Either Way,” “Somewhat Agree,” and “Completely Agree.” The higher the value, the more the respondent agreed. After entering the survey data into Excel, I uploaded it into R Studio to run statistical analyses (RStudio, 2012). I first found the mean value of all attitudinal questions. I then found the mean by gender, age, hometown, and speaking ability. Gender was divided into male and female. Because of a limited number of respondents under 30 year olds, I
divided respondents into 30 to 59 and 60 and older age brackets, roughly reflecting "parent" versus "grandparent" generations. For hometown, I divided the respondents into those who considered Taketomi their hometown and those who considered somewhere else their hometown. Finally, I sorted respondents into “High” and “Low” Taketomi dialect abilities based on self identification in the demographic section of the survey. For each demographic, I ran a Welch two-sample t-test to see if the difference in means was likely to be statistically significant. For questions in which at least one segmentation produced a p-value of .1 or lower, I ran step-up/step-down multiple regressions using Rbrul (Johnson, D.E. 2014; Johnson, D.E. 2009). “Age” and “Speaking Ability” acted as continuous variable, while I continued to use “Hometown” and “Gender” as binary variables. In order to be eligible for an interview, informants had to be at least seven years old, have lived on Taketomi for at least one year, have semi-permanent intentions of living on the island, and be a native speaker of a Japonic language. One respondent did not meet these criteria due to living on Ishigaki and commuting to Taketomi. However, his position on the island provided important insight. The same criteria were used for the survey, except respondents had to be at least thirteen years old.

Data

In-depth Interview Informants

Figure 3 displays basic demographic information about interview informants. Pseudonyms were assigned to each respondent by sorting the participants by age and then assigning them the top 34 most common surnames in Japan from 2009 in order (Unknown, 2009). This chart is designed in order for the reader to see the range of informants I interviewed.

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5 This requirement was designed to eliminate workers in the tourism industry who saw their stay in Taketomi as short-term. I wanted to limit survey responses that saw Taketomi as part of their long-term future, having more of a “stake” in the language game. Obviously, this creates different results than if such community members had been included.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sato</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Inoue</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>a little bit, vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzuki</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
<td>Kimura</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takahashi</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
<td>Hayashi</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>native speaker of a more mixed variety</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanaka</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Shimizu</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>native speaker of a more mixed variety</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watanabe</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>can understand just a little</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Yamazaki</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>used to speak, can no longer</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ito</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Mori</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamamoto</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>just some vocabulary; sings songs in dialect</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
<td>Abe</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nakamura</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Ikeda</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>near-fluent</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobayashi</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Hashimoto</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kato</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>just some vocabulary; uses in performing arts</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Yamashita</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoshida</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>can understand</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
<td>Ishikawa</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamada</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>can't speak</td>
<td>Mainland Japan (but of Taketomi blood)</td>
<td>Nakajima</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi (but born/raised in Taiwan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasaki</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>pretty much nothing</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Maeda</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamaguchi</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Mainland Japan</td>
<td>Fujita</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saito</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Non-Taketomi Okinawa</td>
<td>Ogawa</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matsumoto</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>just some vocabulary</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
<td>Goto</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>fluent</td>
<td>Taketomi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Informants
Attitudinal Survey Responses

Because of the limited amount of space allowed, I will only be presenting a limited sample of the data I collected, focusing on attitudinal information. No excluded data contradicts the following conclusions. Survey respondents ranged in age from 13 to 93, with a median age of 63 and an average age of 54. Three people did not reveal their age. 20 respondents were female, while 12 were male (two respondents' genders were unclear). 18 respondents listed Taketomi as their hometown, while 14 listed places outside of Taketomi as theirs. 2 respondents did not list their hometown. 18 people claimed to speak at least a little Taketomi dialect, while 14 claimed to speak none. If a respondent failed to answer a demographic question, they were not included in segmented t-tests for their missing demographic. Due to requirements of the statistical software, any respondent missing even one demographic was not included in multiple regressions. All multiple regressions had 26 data points.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n=</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean Female</th>
<th>Mean Male</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Mean Taketomi</th>
<th>Mean Not Taketomi</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Ages 30 ~ 59</th>
<th>Ages 60+</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is value in studying Taketomi dialect.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taketomi dialect is useful.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's important to protect Taketomi dialect.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taketomi is useful for festivals.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taketomi dialect is more traditional than Standard Japanese.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel pride when I speak/sing in Taketomi dialect.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would nice if I could speak Taketomi dialect better.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.1*</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4a: T-tests attitudes about Taketomi dialect
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n=</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mean Female</th>
<th>Mean Male</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Mean Taketomi</th>
<th>Mean Not Taketomi</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Ages 30 ~ 59</th>
<th>Ages 60+</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taketomi dialect is difficult.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>.06*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taketomi dialect is important.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to study Taketomi dialect.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Taketomi dialect is lost, Taketomi will be in trouble.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.0006***</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.0006***</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.01***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4b: T-tests for attitudes about Taketomi dialect

* = .05 < p <= .1 ** = .01 < p < .05 *** = p <= .01
1 = completely disagree
2 = somewhat disagree
3 = can’t say either way
4 = somewhat agree
5 = completely agree
It would be nice if I could speak Taketomi dialect better. No fixed predictors No fixed predictors

Taketomi dialect is difficult. Speaking Ability (.045) Speaking Ability (.045)

If Taketomi dialect is lost, Taketomi will be in trouble. Hometown (.000212) Hometown (.000212)

Figure 5: Multiple regression for Taketomi dialect attitudes

Figures 4a and 4b show the results of the Welch two-sample t-tests, while Figure 5 shows the results of multiple regression on questions in which at least one t-test had a p-value of less than .1.

Discussion

The Last 50 Years

Based on qualitative interviews, I was able to gain a better understanding of the context that my data is born from. In the past fifty years, it has become no longer shameful to be Okinawan. In the post-WWII period, the region rebuilt itself in response to the Japanese tourist gaze, becoming an exotic, but not too exotic, island paradise (Figal, 2008). Okinawa began emphasizing what those from mainland Japan believed to constitute "Ryūkyūanness" (Kühne, 2012). Now, the region is a popular tourist destination. For the first time since being annexed by Japan, there is economic value and social pride associated with being Okinawan. This has resulted in renewed goodwill towards the Ryūkyūan languages: revitalization movements, events honoring the languages, and study groups have sprung up around the region (Hara, 2005).

Taketomi has also rebuilt itself in the tourist image. Its famed for its traditional townscape: houses are built with red brick roofs, wooden frames, and dried coral fences. The town's charter requires residents to maintain this style (Taketomijima Kenshō). This townscape is highly manufactured; because Taketomi was poor in the past, most of its houses one hundred years ago were much less extravagant than those on display today. While the charter is not legally binding, there is intense social pressure to help preserve the town's unique atmosphere, which is a huge tourist draw. Last year, about 457,000 tourists visited the island; a more than 400% increase over twenty-five years ago and a 17.5% increase over the previous year (Taketomi Town, 2014a). There are seventeen lodgings, nine restaurants, and over 1,000 rental bikes on the island (Uesedo, 2013). Most stores on the island market themselves to tourists rather than islanders.
To both tourists and islanders, the townscape is one of many examples of Taketomi's focus on tradition. People on the island see their way of life as older than that of people in cities, citing the importance of community and group-oriented living rather focusing on the individual. This is thought to manifest itself in the way islanders come together to put on 12 to 13 festivals every year (A. Mizuno, personal communication, 19 May 2014). Other aspects of life on the island that people see as "traditional" include its performing arts, centuries-old weaving technique, and its indigenous religion and gods. Because Taketomi is so peripheral, it and its culture are seen as especially old and authentic in accordance with the aforementioned Confucian principles (see Morris-Suzuki, 1996). Because identity is often measured on an axis of sameness and difference (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), this belief in cultural preservation as different becomes a marker of identity for the island's residents. Tourists come to Taketomi searching for this sense of authenticity in their quest for "pure" Japan and Okinawa.

Current Status of Language

In order to understand the dialect's presence on the island, it is important to understand who uses it where and when. Many of the island's elderly, particularly the 80-plus crowd, can speak it. Those in their 60s through late 70s have variable speaking and understanding abilities depending on whether their family went to Taiwan; those whose families didn't can often speak it. People in their 40s through 60s can sometimes understand, but almost never, speak it; if their parents or grandparents were able to use it, they might have some comprehension skills. Those under 40 can almost never speak nor understand more than select vocabulary words. There are said to be no living monolingual speakers of Taketomi dialect. Because of increasing migration to Taketomi, there are also a number of people with no genealogical ties to the island; almost none of them can use dialect. While most people on the island cannot speak in Taketomi dialect, remnants of the language are present in the Japanese dialect of the area. Certain vocabulary words have been retained. For example, the Ryūkyūan word jōtō is often used in place of its Japanese equivalent genki in response to "How are you doing?" (which is asked in Japanese). People can be seen saying hello to one another with a hearty kuyanara, Taketomi dialect's all-purpose greeting.

Because so few people understand it, conversational Taketomi is limited to few domains. It can be used for chatting among elderly friends and family. It is also used productively in prayers and aisatsu ("greetings"). Kantsukasa, the priestesses of Taketomi's indigenous religion, use Taketomi dialect when praying to the gods during
festivals. *Aisatsu* is a broad term: it refers to both casual “hellos” and longer speeches given at the beginning of meetings and events. There are those on Taketomi that use dialect for more casual *aisatsu*. It is also expected that certain cultural dignitaries on the island give *aisatsu* that begin festivals or meetings in dialect. While *aisatsu* and prayer are both productive uses of language, they are also highly ritualized and straddle the line between innovative and formalized use of language. There are set phrases and expectations that come with *aisatsu* and prayer that are more regimented than day-to-day language.

Fixed, commodified forms of Taketomi dialect are used regularly for festivals. Many of Taketomi’s numerous festivals have performing arts associated with them. Its most famous festival, Tanadoui, is composed of two days of plays, songs, and dances from dusk till dawn. Most of these take place in dialect; actors spend two months every year memorizing their parts with the help of recordings and strict elderly community members. Prop and movement names are frequently in dialect. Commodified Taketomi language also makes an appearance during *hōgen taikai*, an annual event during which school children make presentations, act, and sing in dialect. Students write scripts in Japanese and then have local dialect speakers translate them into dialect. While this event was founded thirty-seven years ago in order to help children learn dialect, students end up only memorizing their parts rather than learning usable dialect. My middle-aged informants who had participated in the early years of the event no longer remember what they learned for it. Because most people only have access to commodified forms of the language, it has become associated with these domains. Even the use by *kantsukasa* and in longer *aisatsu* is not part of day-to-day life; Taketomi dialect has become the language of ceremony and ritual for many islanders.

**Language Attitudes**

In order to look at language attitudes, I must examine the results of the survey. As can be seen in Figures 4a and 4b, attitudes towards Taketomi dialect appear to be overwhelmingly positive. Across all demographics, respondents at least somewhat agree that dialect is important, that is should be protected, and that they would like learn more. This is not to say that demographics didn’t vary in their level of agreement. For "It would nice if I could speak Taketomi dialect better," there is potential for a trend based on hometown (p=.1). However, multiple regression in Figure 5 demonstrates that there are in fact no fixed predictors; the real mean does not vary by demographic. For "If Taketomi dialect is lost, Taketomi will be in trouble," p≤.01 for hometown, age, and speaking. Looking at Figure 4, hometown is the best predictor of somebody’s response; if somebody is from Taketomi, they feel more strongly about this statement. This is likely because it is their culture. While those I interviewed and surveyed whose hometowns were not Taketomi usually agreed that the dialect was an important part of the culture, they did not express the same vehemence that native islanders expressed.

In two questions, respondents indicated potential negative feelings towards some aspects of the dialect. In Figure 4a, for "Taketomi dialect is useful," there was slight disagreement across the board, while there were positive attitudes towards "Taketomi

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*S Sometimes transliterated Tanetori, Tanedori, Taneduri among other variations.*
dialect is useful for festivals." The dialect is the language of ceremony; to many residents, it has a purpose in those domains but not others. For "Taketomi dialect is difficult," there was agreement on all fronts, although with varying levels of such. While not quite statistically significant, p=.08 based on age and p=.06 for speaking ability. Multiple regression, as seen in Figure 4, revealed that there was actually a predicting variable: speaking ability. Those who could speak dialect indicated some agreement with the statement that it was difficult, while those couldn't expressed more. This is likely do to speakers having learned dialect as children: they never had to exert effort to obtain it. However, local ideology appears to have influenced their perceptions of what is likely their native language: because people around them find it hard, they are likely to have come to think of it as difficult. When being interviewed, Fujita, 88, routinely said, "Dialect is hard," even though she is a native speaker. When asked if she thought Japanese was hard, she seemed confused by the question and responded that of course it wasn't. The view that Taketomi dialect is both difficult and not useful helps explain why, despite positive attitudes, very few people who are not native speakers have taken the time to learn it in a usable fashion.

Figure 4a shows that, across demographics, respondents agreed that, "Taketomi dialect is more traditional than Standard Japanese." In interviews, Fujita, 88, referred to dialect as from “the distant past” and said that and it had been passed on for a long time. Kobayashi, a 42 year old man from mainland Japan who had dedicated much time to studying Okinawan culture, had heard that there was Japanese like that of Heian era (794 – 1192 CE) left in Taketomi dialect. Shimizu referred to dialect as an “old language,” Goto, 93, told me that she uses “the ancient Taketomi language” with her friends. Suzuki, 13, referred to it as “the language from a long time ago that the elderly use.” This perceived oldness become salient in examples like the one that Ikeda, 70, gave me. [p] in Old Japanese became [f] and then [h] in modern Japanese. This [p] is still present in Taketomi dialect, while [f] is still present in Okinawan. Many on Taketomi are aware of this due to easily comparable words piyashi, fiyashi, and hiyashi, a type of pepper. This also becomes fodder for the belief that, the further out a geographic space is from cultural centers, the further behind in time it is. Taketomi Island is so peripheral that it has even older language than Okinawa Island does. While extent of agreement does vary for some statements based on demographics, the overall results presented suggest that Taketomi dialect is a valued part of the community. Whether or not one speaks it does not matter in most circumstances; people who only have access to it in ritualized spaces still find it important.

Language Ideologies

The attitude that Taketomi dialect is somehow older than Standard Japanese is provides a valuable insight and jumping off point into how islanders ideologically conceive of the dialect. As the previous quotes indicate, informants often saw Taketomi dialect as close to older forms of Japanese. While my research did not concern comparative analysis of the how conservative Taketomi dialect is versus modern Japanese, I did notice that people did not seem to take into account that Taketomi dialect is also not exactly the same as Classical Japanese. Some people do acknowledge that the language used in Tanadoui is different than modern spoken Taketomi dialect, but the
dialect as a whole is often seen as a relic that has been passed down for generations, not an evolving linguistic system. People's lack of linguistic proficiency likely contributes to this: because they are not productively using Taketomi dialect, they do not have to negotiate the reality of using it versus treating it as a static artifact.

Because Taketomi dialect is seen as an artifact, it becomes grouped in with the other cultural commodities of the island. Inoue, 63, said that language is part of the island's culture alongside weaving, performing arts, and the townscape; she said that without all of those ingredients, the island would no longer be Taketomi. Numerous respondents referred to dialect as “the island’s treasure” or “the precious dialect.” This is corroborated by agreement in Figures 4a and 4b to the statements “Taketomi dialect is important,” “It’s important to protect Taketomi dialect,” and “If Taketomi dialect is lost, Taketomi Island will be in trouble.” There is an urgency associated with the presence of dialect.

Its presence on the island is important because of its role as an authenticator, or a practice or process through which something becomes perceived as "authentic" (Bucholtz, 2003). Authenticity is not an innate, inherent trait; it is created (Cohen, 1988; Bucholtz, 2003). Taketomi is an island that prides itself on authenticity; its entire economy is built upon the notion that, by going to Taketomi, one can experience "real" Ryūkyūan life. Dialect becomes an index of this. Taketomi Island is so authentic, it is home to a language older than Standard Japanese. Language also authenticates the island's performing arts and festivals. Most island residents and tourists cannot understand what is being said and sung during festivals; the communicative power of language is moot. Instead, the continued use of dialect becomes a means of saying "this is a real old festival, not a fake one." To tourists, listening to dialect allows them to lose themselves in a fantasy of a long-lost way of life. To islanders, native or non-, the festivals have to be done in dialect because that's the way they've always been; that's how they remain authentic.

Language is also a way for Taketomi people to assert and project a local, island-based identity. Despite supposedly being mutually intelligible with other dialects of Yaeyaman, numerous informants told me Taketomi's dialect was only understandable by people of the island. Ikeda, 70, said there are small changes but they are ultimately the same language. Saito, 56 from Ishigaki, said that while his parent’s dialect was different from that of Taketomi, it was still mutually intelligible. However, Yamamoto, 40, said his mother cannot understand Taketomi dialect because she is from Ishigaki. Yamazaki, 67, said that all the dialects are different and that Taketomi’s can only be understood by Taketomi people. Fujita, 88, said the two are completely different. An oft-quoted proverb on the island is:

"Muni bakkitā shima bakki
Shima bakkitā uya bakkirun"
If you forget your language, you'll forget your home island
If you forget your home island, you'll even forget your parents
(Nanzansha, 2011)7

7 A note on this citation - this saying does not originate from the connected website; rather, I was able to confirm/translate it via there.
Even those who can’t speak the language are often familiar with this quip. In the first line, language and island are intimately linked. If one's lost their language, they've lost their island; language is an inherent part of one's local identity. Even if one cannot use the language productively, commodified forms like performing arts and the speeches of hōgen taikai become a means of asserting a Taketomi identity. As seen in Figure 4a, people feel pride when using it in these domains. In using their dialect, islanders can assert their local uniqueness.

**Conclusion**

Through my research, I found that the people on Taketomi value their dialect as part of their island's traditional culture, which they are dedicated to maintaining. While the language was nearly eradicated due to negative attitudes and socioeconomic pressures, ideologies have shifted as a Taketomi identity has become valued. This identity is built on the notion of preserving local culture. Language is part of this culture: Taketomi dialect is seen as a relic upon which the island's heritage was built. Festivals and performing arts all originated in the island's language. In this way, language also acts an authenticator; islanders need dialect in order to believe that they are maintaining the "real" traditional Taketomi. These beliefs explain why, despite having limited linguistic proficiency, residents have overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards the dialect. To islanders, it is not the functional linguistic system that is important, but what the language symbolizes as a marker of tradition. This is why, even if the future generations won't be able to speak the language, it is likely that it will be at least somewhat maintained as an artifact at ceremonies and celebrations. To the people on Taketomi, part of maintaining their beloved traditional culture is the upkeep of their language.

**Next Steps**

Looking forward, various regions and islands of Okinawa would benefit from comparative language ideology studies. While much research has been done on Okinawan Island and there has been a fair bit of documentation work done on various Ryūkyūan languages and dialects, there is a lot more to be learned about their social place in communities around the prefecture. This study would have benefitted from more complete responses to surveys and increased diversity of informants; I was largely limited by my informants' personal networks, which were female-heavy. While this study is imperfect, it provides a window in the linguistic situation in an understudied part of the world.
Works Cited


