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Ikema Miyako (Japan) – Language Snapshot

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Language Name:	Ikema Miyako
Language Family:	Japonic → Ryukyuan → Southern Ryukyuan → Miyako
ISO 639-3 Code:	mvi
Glottolog Code:	miya1259
Population:	Less than 2,000
Location:	24.930462, 125.244197 (Ikema Island)
Vitality rating:	EGIDS 6b-9 (Endangered)

Summary

Ikema is an endangered Miyako Ryukyuan language spoken in the Miyako Islands, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan. The estimated number of Ikema speakers in 2007-2008 was around 2,000. As is the case with all the Ryukyuan languages, Ikema is mainly spoken by elderly members of the community. The younger generations are no longer learning Ikema as a first language, and it is very likely that it will disappear in a few decades. Some of the typologically unusual features of Ikema include word-initial geminates and voiceless nasal geminates. A wide range of resources are available on Ikema, including audio recordings and grammatical descriptions. The authors are involved in the phonetic and phonological documentation of Ikema spoken on Ikema Island and Nishihara district on the main Miyako Island.

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概要

池間宮古語は消滅が危惧される琉球宮古語の方言のひとつであり、沖縄県の宮古島諸島で話される。2007-2008年の話者数は2,000人程であったと推定されている。他の琉球語と同じく、方言を話すのは主に年配の方々である。若い世代は池間宮古語を第一言語として学んでいないため、この方言はここ30年ほどの間に消滅してしまう可能性が高い。類型的にみて珍しい池間方言の特徴としては、語頭促音や無声鼻子音の促音などがあげられる。録音音声、文法についての文献などが利用可能である。筆者らは宮古島諸島池間島と本島西原地区で話される池間方言の音声・音韻の調査分析と記録に携わっているものである。

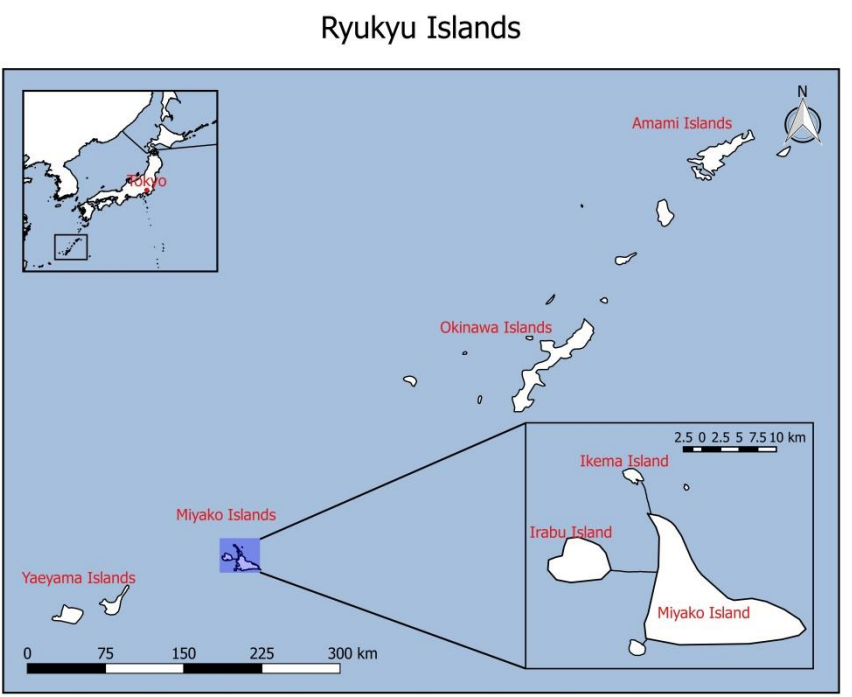

Figure 1. Map of Japan showing the Ryukyu Islands (Amami, Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama).

1. Overview

The Ryukyuan languages belong to the Japonic family and are mainly spoken in the southern islands of Okinawa and Kagoshima prefectures in Japan. Amami, Okinawa, Miyako, Yaeyama, and Yonaguni Ryukyuan can be classified as distinct languages (Karimata 2015). All the Ryukyuan languages are designated by UNESCO as endangered (Moseley 2010).[1] The Ikema dialect of Miyako Ryukyuan is mainly spoken on Ikema Island, Sarahama on Irabu Island, and Nishihara on the main Miyako Island (Figure 1).[2]

The Ryukyu Islands were governed by local clans until they were unified in 1429 as the Ryukyu Kingdom, with its capital at Shuri on Okinawa Island. During the 450 years of the Kingdom, Shuri was regarded as the cultural centre, however, the Shuri dialect did not serve as a common language across the Kingdom, and Ryukyuan languages remained mutually unintelligible. In 1609, the Amami Islands in the northern Ryukyus were invaded by the Satsuma clan (current Kagoshima prefecture, Japan) of the Tokugawa shogunate. The remaining Ryukyu Islands became Okinawa prefecture within Japan in 1879 (the beginning of the Meiji period), since which time moves to abolish Ryukyuan languages grew, up to and throughout the US occupation period (1945-1972).[3] After reintegration into Japan in 1972, intra-country travel became unrestricted and intensified, resulting in the categorisation of Ryukyuan languages as dialects of Japanese (Karimata 1998). However, many linguists nowadays use the term *Ryukyuan*. Current speakers of Ikema are all bilingual in Japanese, and most under 60 did not learn Ikema or any other variety as their first language (rare exceptions are those raised close to their grandparents). Recently, a number of revival movements have been launched to familiarise younger generations with the local cultures and languages, including promotion through speech contests in local communities.

Ikema Miyako Ryukyuan was originally spoken only on Ikema Island, but a small part of the population was forced to migrate to other neighbouring islands during the 18th and 19th centuries. Ikema Island used to be prosperous thanks to the bonito fishing industry. Fishing has now declined and dried bonito factories have closed down as the younger generations have moved away. At its peak in the 1960s, the Island had four times more population than

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[1] http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap.html (accessed 2020-09-29)

[2] The language is called ikimautsu (/ikimautsI/, see below for /I/) in Ikema. We adopted commonly employed Japanese transliterations of the names of dialects and places.

[3] Our interviewees described being punished at school for speaking ‘dirty dialects’ (data collection, Taketomi Island, 2011, Ikema Island, 2018).

now (2,460 inhabitants in 1960 versus 567 inhabitants in 2019).[4] Together with individuals in two other areas, the estimated number of Ikema speakers in 2007-2008 was around 2,000 (Hayashi 2010).

The dialects of Ikema spoken on different islands differ from each other in some basic lexical items, and their stages of intergenerational transmission and preservation of rituals. In terms of speaker numbers, Sarahama is the largest, followed by Nishihara and Ikema. The rate of intergenerational transmission also reflects these demographics: there are more younger generation speakers in Sarahama than in Nishihara, which in turn has more than Ikema. The three groups of speakers self-identify as a single ethnic group, referring to themselves as *Ikema minzoku* 'Ikema tribe'. As with all the Ryukyuan languages, most speakers of Ikema are now above 60 years of age (55 years reported in Nakayama & Ono 2013). Nevertheless, their children may have at least passive knowledge of the language. Yamada et al. (2020) reported that speakers in their 50s understand Ikema Miyako just as fluent elderly speakers do.

There are several festivals organised every year on the Miyako Islands. Religious rituals take place year-around in Nishihara; for these, the participants use Ikema (Hirai 2009, 2013). In all three Ikema-speaking areas a three-day *Myaakuzutsu* festival takes place during the harvesting season.[5] Although Ikema speakers are separated into three different areas, the language has an important role for ethnic or cultural identity of all members of the Ikema group.

2. Key features of Ikema Miyako

Ikema Miyako has a number of cross-linguistically rare features, in particular, word-initial geminate consonants. In Japanese dialects, consonant length is phonemic for word-medial voiceless obstruents (e.g., /gaka/ 'painter' vs. /gakka/ 'subject'). However, in Ikema, voiceless and voiced geminate obstruents occur word-initially and word-medially (/tta/ 'tongue', /ffa/ 'child', /zzu/ 'fish', /badda/ 'side', /avva/ 'oil'). Hayashi (2010) gives the consonant inventory of Ikema as: /p b t d k g f v s z h ts m n̥ n r w j/. Note that /p/ has become /h/ in many Ikema (regional and generational) varieties, and voiceless nasal /n̥/ is used in geminates (e.g., /n̥na/ 'rope'); the latter is a unique feature

[4] http://miyakojima-kids.net/S-kodomomap.html, and https://www.pref.okinawa.jp/site/kikaku/chiikirito/ritoshinko/documents/number1.pdf (both accessed 2020-09-28)

[5] A film of Myaakuzutsu in Nishihara can be found at https://youtu.be/N7QN1HOE11E (accessed 2021-01-31).

of Ikema. There are four vowels /I i a u/, where /I/[6] has been variously described as a *central*, *apical*, or *fricative* vowel. Interestingly, /I/ alternates with consonant gemination in morphological alternations involving some case particles (e.g., /dusI/ 'friend' → /duss-a/ 'friend-TOP'; /tuzI/ 'wife' → /tuzz-a/ 'wife-TOP'; cf. /basu/ 'bus' → /basu-u/ 'bus-TOP'; after Hayashi 2007). Like other Japonic languages, Ikema is mora-counting and pitch-accented; basic word order is SOV (with argument elipsis), and grammatical particles are suffixed to lexical items.

3. Available resources

Ikema appears in descriptions of Miyako Ryukyuan by Hirayama (1983) and Uchima (1984). Kibe (2012/2019) led a linguistic survey of Miyako Ryukyuan at the National Institute of Japanese Language (NINJAL) in 2011. Comparative descriptions and word lists across several locations, including Ikema and Nishihara, were reported (Kibe 2012/2019). Hayashi (2007, 2010, 2013) discussed Ikema grammatical structure, and Igarashi et al. (2011, 2012) presented an instrumental analysis of the pitch-accent system. Some aspects of the acoustic characteristics of consonants were reported in Ford (2016), Matsuura (2012/2019), Fujimoto & Shinohara (2017), and Shinohara & Fujimoto (2018). An articulatory study using real-time Magnetic Resonance Imaging was carried out with Nishihara speakers (Fujimoto & Shinohara 2015, 2018; Fujimoto et al. in press). Some useful resources and webpages on Ikema and other Ryukyuan languages include:

1. *Digital Museum for Endangered Languages and Cultures The Ryukyu Archipelago: Nishihara, Miyako Islands,*[7] which documents the Ikema dialect spoken in Nishihara and its culture (Kyoto University; webpages are in Japanese and English). The Japanese version includes weblinks to various social networking services about Ikema and other endangered Ryukyuan languages;
2. Research items and resources on Ryukyuan language and culture studies (in Japanese) at the *Institute of Okinawan Studies*, accessible via Hosei University repository;[8]

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[6] We use the capital letter /I/ for this vowel since none of the existing symbols represents its acoustic and articulatory characteristics (see Fujimoto & Shinohara 2018).

[7] http://kikigengo.jp/nishihara/doku.php?id=en:about:start (accessed 2020-09-24)

[8] https://hosei.repo.nii.ac.jp/ (accessed 2020-09-18)

3. *Sounds of Ryukyuan*, including some Miyako dialects, available in the Ryukyuan audio database at Ryukyu University;[9]
4. *The Database of Endangered Languages of Japan*, containing basic vocabulary and wordlists of Ikema and other dialects (NINJAL; webpages are in Japanese and English).[10]

4. Current research

The authors are working on the phonetic documentation of Ikema. In 2018, we collected aerodynamic and electroglottography data on singleton and geminate consonants. To better understand how Ikema speakers make voicing and length distinctions, we are investigating a wide range of acoustic cues such as duration, intensity, fundamental frequency, and formant transitions. There are also ongoing projects on the documentation of Ikema by Yukinori Takubo and colleagues (e.g., Takubo to appear). Further cross-dialectal comparisons among Sarahama, Nishihara, and Ikema Islands will also help elucidate the unique features of Ikema Miyako.

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[9] http://ryukyu-lang.lib.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/ (closed on 2020-09-03, announced to reopen in October; accessed 2020-09-18)

[10] https://kikigengo.ninjal.ac.jp/en/index.html (accessed 2020-10-13)

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