

The state of dialect usage and transmission in Iheya

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From the point of view of descriptive linguistics, there's a long tradition of Ryukyuan languages research, but as others (Heinrich, Miyara, Shimoji, 2015) have already pointed out there is the lack of sociolinguistic research in this field. Addressing the lack of sociolinguistic research which undermines the understanding of sociolinguistic problems, like language shift to standard Japanese, my research is an attempt to describe the sociolinguistic situation of the village of Iheya. Located north of the Okinawa main island. Iheya is a village which encompasses the small islands of Iheya and Noho. It has a population of 1238 (Sōmushōtōkeikyoku, 2016), divided in five settlements. The dialect of Iheya belongs to what is called the Okinawan language, an endangered language spoken in the main island of Okinawa. One characteristic of the Iheyan dialect is in the fact that it has features both from Northern Okinawa dialects and Central-South Okinawan dialects (Nago, 2006). In my research I start with the objective of understanding attitudes towards Iheyan dialect, its use and transmission, through the interviewing of informants from different age groups. In particular, I focus on transmission of the Iheyan dialect from one generation to another, differences in attitudes between generations, dialect use and comprehension especially in the younger generations. I also try to understand the role of family environment, education, media usage and such, in relation to the informant's language attitudes and usage. The final objective of my research is not only to understand these problems, but also to encourage similar research in other areas of the Ryukyuan archipelago.