

The perfective use of *-ti* in Shuri Ryukyuan

Categories: morphology, historical linguistics

Research on the Ryukyuan languages can generally be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there is a large number of synchronic studies, which often incorporate fieldwork and language documentation, tasks of high value for the preservation of these highly endangered languages. On the other hand, comparative linguistic research involving the Ryukyuan and Japanese languages as well as the analysis of older manuscripts and other sources help to deepen the understanding of various phenomena and their diachronic development in these languages.

As the official language of the Ryukyu Kingdom, the variety of Okinawan as spoken in Shuri (and Naha) counts among the most influential Ryukyuan languages. Therefore, research on the history of Shuri Ryukyuan is of importance not only for the study of the language spoken around Naha, but for a great number of other Ryukyuan varieties as well. Written sources on Okinawan go back as far as the 15th century, and much research has already been undertaken on a wide range of topics pertaining to the language history of the Ryukyus, but there are still many issues that warrant further study.

This presentation aims to outline the independent use and development of the participle *-ti* to express the perfective aspect in Okinawan over the course of the past 500 years, from early sources such as the glossary *Ōim pōn'yōk* 語音翻譯 (1501) and the anthology *Omoro sōshi* おもろさうし (1531–1623) over later Chinese glossaries like the *Zhongshan chuanxin lu* 中山傳信錄 (1721) and Ryukyuan poems (*ryūka* 琉歌) up to the 19th century and ultimately, contemporary Okinawan.

Nowadays, the perfect in Shuri is formed by suffixing *-ta-* to the verb stem, as for example in *tu-ta-N* [take-PRF-FIN]. This morpheme resulted from a contraction of the participle *-ti* followed by a form of the existential verb *ʔan* ‘to have; to be’ (< *ari*),¹ and while syntagmatic constructions involving these elements can be traced back several centuries, *-ta-* arrived at its contemporary state only in the 19th century along with its non-perfect counterpart *-yu-*, a contraction of verbal continuative *-i* followed by *un* ‘to be’ (< *wori*), e.g. *tu-yu-N* [take-NPRF-FIN].²

There is, however, both synchronic and diachronic evidence that the participle *-ti* was and is used without *ʔan* to express the perfect. Several words and sentences found in the *Ōim pōn'yōk* (1501), a glossary of Korean provenance appended to Sin Sukchu’s 申叔舟 *Haedong chegukki* 海東諸國紀 (1471), count among the earliest examples of this phenomenon. The *Ōim pōn'yōk* contains 169 Chinese words and sentences with Ryukyuan translations, the latter of which are rendered in Korean script. There, we find sentences such as the following (Ifa 1974: 67):

- (1) 我舊年正月起身
 환구조쇼옹과즈탄체
wan ku^dzo šoo^ggwaci tač-č[ɪ]
 I last.year first.month leave-PTCP
 ‘I departed in the first month of last year.’

Ifa Fuyū 伊波普猷 (1974: 68) remarks that the participle had been used to express the perfect at that time, thereby differing from corresponding contemporary forms such as *tača-n* [leave.PRF-FIN]. However, he does not explain the morphological process involved in cases such as the above. Takahashi Toshizō 高橋俊三 provides evidence for the “finitive use of the participle” in the famous Ryukyuan anthology *Omoro sōshi*, although he acknowledges that it can, at times, be difficult to ascertain whether some of the occurring final *-ti* can be interpreted as the actual end of certain sentences due to the high number of ellipses found in the *Omoro sōshii* in general (Takahashi 1991: 11).

However, while later sources on Okinawan, such as Chinese glossaries or the Ryukyuan poems of the 17th and 18th centuries, exhibit a number of similar forms, their appearances in these works are less well documented. The use of sentence-final *-ti* in declarative sentences gradually fell out of use over the

¹ While the resultative *-tari* etymologically goes back to a similar contraction, *-tari* and *-ta-* have to be distinguished, seeing as the former evolved much earlier and the two morphemes co-exist as a separate entities. Forms with either of the morphemes can be found in early Okinawan sources as well as in a number of other Ryukyuan languages today, and especially in the Southern Ryukyu branch, we find a large number of variations on *-tari*.

² See Sakiyama (1963: 6–8) for a proposed timeline of the developments of *-ta-* and *-yu-*.

course of the following centuries, but even after the development of *-ta-* in Shuri, we find single instances of perfective *-ti* as late as the middle of the 19th century, namely in B. J. Bettelheim's (1849) *Elements or Contributions towards a Loochooan & Japanese Grammar*, the first full-length academic work on Ryukyuan. While perfective forms involving *-ta-* prevail in this work, we find a few sentences such as “Fitunu chi” (*fitu=nu čči* [person=NOM come.PTCP] ‘a man has come’ or ‘men have come’; example sentence quoted from Iha 1981: 143).

Even nowadays' language provides evidence that a verb in *-ti* can function by itself as the final lexical element in a sentence to express the perfect. In Okinawan, interrogative sentences are generally formed by using either the verbal suffix *-mi* or the particle *=i*. Either of these morphemes may only occur at the very end of a sentence, a fact that becomes significant when taking perfective interrogative sentences into account. Such sentences end in *-ti=i* (example from Nishioka 2007: 54):

- (2) ガッコーヤ ナー ウワテイー?
gakkoo=ya naa 'uwa-ti=i?
 school=TOP already finish-PTCP=INT
 ‘Is school already over?’

Extending our view beyond Okinawan, we find several varieties of Northern Ryukyuan that make use of forms such as “kaci,” “kacii,” “kači,” or “kaççi” for ‘have written’, i.e. finitive perfective verb forms expressed by employing the participle alone (the corresponding Shuri form is *kači* [write.PTCP]).

Historically, this use of *-ti* goes back to syntagmatic constructions involving *ari*, just as with *-ta-* and *-tari*, but the widespread employment of the participle in varieties of Amami Ryukyuan as well as Shuri sentences such as (2) clearly demonstrate that the ellipsis of *ari* (or any contemporary equivalent) is a systematic reduction which enabled the participle to express the perfect by itself. Early sources such as those mentioned above support the thesis that this development goes back at least to the 15th and 16th centuries.⁴

Shuri Ryukyuan has changed significantly over the past 500 years. The development of the perfective in Shuri and related varieties can be documented using historical evidence as well as synchronic internal and cross-linguistic data. Cases like the one outlined in this proposed presentation demonstrate the high diversity and flexibility in the use and development of Ryukyuan morphological elements, seeing as Northern Ryukyuan languages feature varieties of at least three different morphemes originating in syntagmas of participle plus *ari*. For studies pertaining to this type of morphological development, research on both the synchronic and diachronic level is needed, which will lead to a deeper understanding of the Ryukyuan languages in general.

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³ Examples taken from map 96 of the *Grammar Atlas of Japanese Dialects* (Kokuritsu kokugo kenkyūjo 国立国語研究所: *Hōgen bunnō zenkoku chizu* 方言文法全国地図).

⁴ Steven Hagers (1997: 36–37) tries to explain forms such as *tač-čr* in in the *Ōim pōn'yōk* (see (1) above) as verbs suffixed by the resultative (contemporary Okinawan: *-tee-*) lacking both the modern finitive *-n* and a supposed earlier conclusive ending that had allegedly fallen out of use by the 15th century. This interpretation, however, is unlikely for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of evidence for such an “earlier conclusive ending” or the semantic difference between perfective and resultative in cases like (1).