

“Scaling” the Linguistic Landscape in Okinawa Prefecture, Japan

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Abstract

This paper discusses four different linguistic landscapes in Okinawa Prefecture: Naha Airport, Yui Monorail, Heiwadōri Market and Yonaguni Island. In addition to Japanese, Ryukyuan local languages are spoken there – Uchinaaguchi in Okinawa and Dunan in Yonaguni. Okinawan Japanese (Ryukyuan-substrate Japanese) is also used. In the linguistic landscapes these local languages and varieties are rarely represented and, if they are, they exhibit processes of language attrition. The linguistic landscape reproduces language nationalism and monolingual ideology. As a result, efficiency in communication and the actual language repertoires of those using the public space take a back seat. English differs from all languages employed in that it is used generically to address “non-Japanese” and not simply nationals with English as a national language. The public space is not simply filled with language. The languages employed are hierarchically ordered. Due to this, and to the different people using these public spaces, the meaning of public sign(post)s is never stable. The way in which meaning is created is also hierarchically ordered. Difference in meaning is not a question of context but one of scale.

Keywords

Linguistic landscape, scales, social multilingualism, Okinawa, Japanese, Ryukyuan

1. Introduction

Japan’s long-overlooked autochthonous multilingualism has become much more visible in recent years. Upon the publication of the *UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger of Extinction* (Moseley 2009), Asahi Shinbun (2009) declared on its front page that eight indigenous languages of Japan were endangered. Since then, a large number of newspaper articles and also TV documentaries (e.g. ETV 2014) have taken up the issue of endangered

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languages in Japan. In addition, the governmental Agency for Cultural Affairs has established a task force to gauge the possibilities of maintaining Japan's endangered languages (Bunkach n.d.). Not only Japanese societies, such as the Japanese Dialect Society, but also international linguistic societies have organised large-scale symposia on the topic (see e.g. Heinrich / Ostler 2014). The National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics has even published a *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages* (Heinrich / Miyara / Shimoji 2015).

Linguists are in agreement today that the Ryukyuan languages are sister languages of Japanese and not dialects of Japanese, and that Ryukyuan and Japanese together form the so-called Japonic language family (see e.g. Miyara 2010). With the once mighty ideology of Japan as a monolingual nation now being challenged from both academics and governmental policy institutions, the question is how languages other than Japanese are represented in the public space today. In order to shed light on this issue, this paper first outlines the distinct sociolinguistic situation (language ecology¹) of Okinawa Prefecture, before examining four case studies of the linguistic landscape in Okinawa Prefecture.² The results of these surveys are then analysed in terms of language ideology, policy and use, before their implications for the diverse people present in the Japanese public space are discussed. Towards this end, the notion of scaling is employed.

2. Language ecology in Okinawa

Until 150 years ago, Japanese was a language used solely by a very small elite as a foreign language in Okinawa.³ Japanese was only the second foreign

¹ Linguistic landscape refers to written signposts in the public space, whereas language ecology refers to the economic, cultural, geographic, political, etc. environment in which a language is spoken.

² For more case studies of linguistic landscapes in Japan, see Shōji et al. 2009 and Uchiyama et al. 2011.

³ Okinawa is the southernmost prefecture of Japan; it is composed of more than 100 islands which stretch roughly over 1,000 kilometers from Kagoshima Prefecture in the northeast to the Republic of China (Taiwan) in the southwest. It was established in 1879, seven years after the other Japanese prefectures, as it was initially unclear whether and with what status Okinawa would be part of the Meiji state (1868–1912). It is important to note that Okinawa only became seen as being part of Japan after the Japanese modernisation and that it was separated from Japan from 1945 to 1972 when it was occupied by the US. In addition to having its own distinct languages, cultures and history, people in Okinawa have also had ample opportunity to develop identities which are distinct from those on the Japanese mainland.

language, as Chinese was perceived to be more important (Heinrich 2015a). Japanese only began to be used among the population after the annexation and abolishment of the Ryukyuan Kingdom in 1872. Compulsory school education, established in 1879, played a major role in the spread of Japanese (Yoshimura 2014). As the Japanese language spread, the Ryukyuan languages were suppressed and stigmatised by language planners, administrators and educators in various ways (Kondo 2014). With the spread of a new language in Okinawa Prefecture, i.e. (Standard) Japanese, a new contact variety of Japanese emerged in Okinawa. It is part Japanese but shows influences from the languages that were spoken previously, i.e. it has a Ryukyuan substratum and a Japanese superstratum. What linguists call “Okinawan-substrate Japanese” is popularly known as *Uchinaa Yamatoguchi* (“Okinawan Japanese”). It shows considerable variation across time and region (Anderson 2015: 481–482) and has its origin in the incomplete acquisition of the Japanese language in Okinawa during the 19th century. It later involved code switching by bilingual Okinawan-Japanese speakers. Among the young generation in Okinawa today, it frequently includes “language crossing”, i.e. mimicked use of Okinawan Japanese by monolingual Standard Japanese speakers (Takaesu 2005). Okinawan Japanese has replaced Ryukyuan languages in many domains of language use over the past 100 years, and, in doing so, has changed shape. As a tendency, it has become less “Ryukyuan-like” over time. As a result, speakers choose today among three distinct varieties according to the context in which they speak: (1) a local variety (dialect) of a Ryukyuan language, (2) Standard Japanese or (3) Okinawan-substrate Japanese. These varieties differ from each other at the level of intonation, phonology, lexicon and grammar. In order to illustrate the differences, consider the examples below (Table 1).

Table 1 illustrates three import points for the discussion that follows. Firstly, Okinawan-substrate Japanese is a new variety of Japanese and not of Okinawan. Secondly, this new Japanese variety has been shaped by substrate influences from Okinawan. Thirdly, Okinawan is not only regionally stratified but also socially. In other words, it features both regional varieties (dialects) and social varieties (sociolects). The social varieties (gentry vs. commoners) are residues of Okinawan as it was spoken in the feudal society of the Ryukyuan Kingdom. These variants are a reminder that Okinawan has never been adapted for use in modern Okinawan society (see Heinrich 2014). It should also be remembered that around 400 local varieties are spoken on Okinawa Island itself (Lawrence 2015: 157), and that speakers of other Ryukyuan languages (Amamian, Miyakoan, Yaeyaman and Dunan) reside in Okinawa as well. The language

TABLE 1: Comparison of Standard Japanese, Okinawan (Naha-Shuri variety) and Okinawan-substrate Japanese (Naha variety)*

Standard Japanese	Okinawan	Okinawan-substrate Japanese	English translation
<i>ojiisan</i>	<i>tanmee</i> (gentry) <i>usume</i> (commoners)	<i>ojii</i>	grandfather
<i>obāsan</i>	<i>unmee</i> (gentry) <i>haamee</i> (commoners)	<i>obā</i>	grandmother
<i>oniisan</i>	<i>yatchaa</i> (gentry) <i>ahii</i> (commoner)	<i>niinii</i>	(older) brother
<i>onēsan</i>	<i>'nmii</i> (gentry) <i>abaa</i> (commoners)	<i>nēnē</i>	(older) sister
<i>sōdesune</i>	<i>yakutuyoo</i>	<i>dakarayō</i>	yes, indeed
<i>dōshite darō</i>	<i>nuunchigayaa</i>	<i>nandekanē</i>	I wonder why
<i>yasumu</i>	<i>yukuin</i>	<i>yukuru</i>	to rest
<i>oishii</i>	<i>maasan</i>	<i>māsai</i>	delicious
<i>ikuyo</i>	<i>chuusa</i>	<i>kuruyo</i>	to go
<i>basu de kita</i>	<i>basu kara chan</i>	<i>basu kara kita</i>	came by bus

* Japanese is transcribed in the modified Hepburn system; Okinawan and Okinawan-substrate Japanese are transcribed according to the conventions set forth by the *Handbook of the Ryukyuan Languages* (Heinrich / Miyara / Shimoji 2015).

Source: compiled by author

repertoire of Ryukyuan also involves English as a second language, which is compulsory in schools. Because of the presence of US military personnel and their families stationed on Okinawa, more than 30,000 native speakers of English reside on the island. In Okinawa's language ecology, we thus find varieties of Japanese (Standard Japanese, Okinawan-substrate Japanese), varieties of Okinawan (local and social varieties), local and social varieties of other Ryukyuan languages, as well as varieties of English (native varieties and language learner varieties). The sociolinguistic situation is complex.

Okinawa's language ecology differs markedly from other language ecologies in Japan. It is multilingual, but undergoing rapid transformation towards the monolingualism model which characterises mainland Japan. The languages and language varieties present in Okinawa's language ecology are

in competition. Standard Japanese is growing at the expense of Ryukyuan and substrate-Japanese (see Heinrich 2015b). All varieties of Ryukyuan languages are falling out of use and are today endangered (Niinaga et al. 2014, Aso et al. 2014). Since Okinawan-substrate Japanese requires the existence of Okinawan, it is also bound to disappear in the event that the Ryukyuan languages become extinct (see Anderson 2015: 487–489). English, finally, is not expanding at present. It has never replaced Ryukyuan varieties or substrate Japanese at any point in time, nor is there any indication that this will happen. Despite the presence of the US military on Okinawa, the status of English and its use is not different in Okinawa from that in any other part of Japan (Shibata 2013).

3. Linguistic landscape in Okinawa

Linguistic landscape is defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 23) as “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region.” Backhaus (2007: 1) provides for a more detailed outline of linguistic landscape, writing that “[e]very urban environment is a myriad of written messages on public display: office and shop signs, billboards and neon advertisements, traffic signs, topographic information and area maps, emergency guidance and political poster campaigns, stone inscriptions, and enigmatic graffiti discourse [...] the total of which constitutes the linguistic landscape of a place.” The study of linguistic landscape has drawn considerable attention among sociolinguists in the last decade as a means to study how language ideology, language policy and language use interact in the public space. Since the linguistic landscape addresses the general public, and not specific individuals, it serves as an illuminative field to explore how the general public is imagined and how different languages coexist within a given society (Long 2010: 179). Linguistic landscapes have existed ever since writing was invented, but they expanded considerably with the onset of modernity as an effect of the transformations of the public space and the emergence of mass literacy.

In this paper, four different studies on linguistic landscape in Okinawa Prefecture are discussed: (1) the linguistic landscape of Naha Airport, (2) the linguistic landscape of the Yui Monorail, which connects Naha Airport with Shuri Castle, (3) the Heiwadōri Market located halfway between the airport and the castle, and (4) the complete linguistic landscape of Yonaguni Island in the extreme southwest of Okinawa Prefecture. While these samples are not representative for Okinawa Prefecture as such, they are representative for the four cases studied. All cases indicate patterns of language

choices which also confirm other sociolinguistic studies on Okinawa Prefecture (e.g. Niinaga et al. 2014, Aso et al. 2014). In other words, these data on language use and attitudes allow for generalisations beyond the cases studied here.

In studying these different linguistic landscapes, both signposts written by governmental agencies and other official institutions, as well as signs by private citizens, shop owners, etc. are examined. Following Calvet (1993: 112–133), the former are called *in vitro* signs and the latter *in vivo* signs.⁴ The linguistic landscape of Naha Airport and the Yui Monorail is predominantly *in vitro*, Heiwadōri predominantly *in vivo* and the linguistic landscape of Yonaguni a balance between the two.

3.1 Naha Airport

With 15 million passengers a year, Naha Airport is at present the seventh busiest airport in Japan. 15 million passengers are impressive for a prefecture of 1.5 million inhabitants. One reason for such a high amount of air traffic is that Okinawa is a popular tourist destination for Japanese, and increasingly also for visitors from neighbouring countries. There are flights to more than 50 destinations, among them international flights to the People's Republic of China (Beijing, Hangzhou, Hong Kong), the Republic of China (Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung), South Korea (Busan, Seoul), and seasonally also to Myanmar (Yangon) and Aotearoa/New Zealand (Auckland). Naha is a so-called regional or second-class airport (*chihō kanri kūkō*), which means that it is largely under control of Okinawa Prefecture.

The dominant language in the linguistic landscape of Naha Airport is Japanese.⁵ Japanese is ubiquitous on signposts, vending machines, restaurant menus, advertisements and pamphlets. Japanese is the sole language of all written ad hoc information, and the vast majority of monolingual signs (signs using only one language) are in Japanese. The second most widely used language in the airport is English. English signs address generic non-Japanese-speaking travellers. There exists no single English information source addressing US military service-personal and their families in particular. The presence of the US military and their specific needs for

⁴ *In vitro* signs are those created by official institutions such as the government or public transport companies, whereas *in vivo* refers to individual signs created by shops, restaurants or private citizens. This distinction is considered to be important in the study of linguistic landscape as *in vitro* signs often follow a specific language policy whereas *in vivo* is less restricted and therefore displays more diversity and linguistic creativity.

⁵ For a more comprehensive analysis and discussion of the linguistic landscape of Naha Airport see Heinrich 2011a.

information are not reflected in the linguistic landscape. Signs, which are part of the airport infrastructure (departure, arrival, parking deck, etc.), often use four languages in parallel – Japanese, English, Korean and Chinese (Mandarin) (Figure 1). The writing conventions for Chinese are those of the Republic of China (Taiwan).

FIGURE 1: Signpost using Japanese, English, Korean and Chinese



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It is important to note that these signs give the exact same information in four different languages. The intended readers of such signs are, however, expected to read only one of the four languages used. Hence, these signposts are strictly speaking not multilingual, but feature parallel monolingualism. The indigenous language Okinawan (Uchinaaguchi) is represented on two signs in the airport which read *mensoore* / *welcome* (Figure 2) and also on some decorative ceramic tiles on poles of the visiting deck which depict Okinawan fauna and flora.

Decorative use on ceramic tiles aside, the existence of only two signs in the indigenous language of Okinawa is a surprising neglect of local language. What is more, the word in question is not only written incorrectly but also linguistically inappropriate. The spelling should be *mensooree* (めんそーれ), and the word is an unusual choice for greeting visitors, as it is usually uttered when entering a restaurant but not an airport. Its Japanese equivalent would be *irasshaimase* (“come in”) and not *yokoso* (“welcome”) (Sugita 2014: 192–193). The term *mensooree* was coined and used to mean

FIGURE 2: A sign displaying the word *mensoore* (“welcome”) in Okinawan (top line)



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“welcome” in Okinawa after 1945 in order to have an equivalent to *aloha*, which is employed to greet visitors to Hawaii. Note in this context that Hawaii served as a model for the launch of the tourist industry in Okinawa and that Okinawa has undergone a cultural and environmental “tropicalisation” or “Hawaiianisation” since Okinawan reversion to Japan in 1972 (Figal 2012: 89–123). Airport infrastructure aside, the use of Okinawan can be found on souvenirs (e.g. *chibariyo*, “try your best” keyholders or *shiisaa kurosato*, “temple-lion brown sugar”) sold at the various shops in the airport, or on restaurant menus featuring Okinawan cuisine (e.g. *rafutee*, “braised pork belly” or *mimigwa*, “sliced pig ears”).

3.2 Yui Monorail

Yui Monorail (*Yui rēru*) was inaugurated in August 2003. It is the only railway in Okinawa at the present. The old railway system was destroyed during the Pacific War and has never been rebuilt. Okinawa, like the US, whose forces occupied the islands until 1972, is a car society. Yui Monorail is currently 13 kilometres long and connects the airport to Shuri Castle. There are altogether 15 stations. 35,000 passengers a day use the railway operated by Okinawa Urban Monorail Incorporated. The *yui* in *Yui-rēru* is Okinawan and refers to *yuimaaruu* (“a collaborative effort”), i.e. joint com-

munity efforts during harvest, etc. The name was chosen to convey the message that Okinawa rebuilt its own railway in a joint effort involving all prefectural citizens (OTMKK 2006).

In each of the 15 stations, 100 *in vitro* signs within the station and 100 *in vivo* signs outside each station were documented. The survey was conducted in July 2013. The area of the survey was chosen following a methodology set forth by Backhaus (2007: 65–67).

TABLE 2: Language used on *in vitro* signs within the 15 stations of the Yui Monorail (total: 1,500 signs)

Language(s)	Signs in %
Japanese	50
Japanese-English	32
Japanese-English-Korean-Chinese	10
English	5
Okinawan-Japanese	0.4
Okinawan	0.3
Okinawan-substrate Japanese	0.3
Other	2

Source: compiled by author

The trends, which emerged from the survey at Naha Airport, are also evident on the official signs (*in vitro*) in the monorail stations (Table 2). Japanese is the dominant language. Half of all signs are in Japanese only (50%), and Japanese also appears most often on multilingual signs (Japanese-English, etc.). Just as in the airport, we find a large number of signs in Japanese and English (32%) as well as multilingual signs featuring Japanese, English, Korean and Chinese (10%). The linguistic landscape of the monorail is very much an extension of the landscape at the airport. As a matter of fact, the monorail connects the airport with a large number of hotels in downtown Naha. It can safely be assumed that a large number of Okinawa’s tourists use the monorail to reach their accommodations. As in the airport, Okinawan signs and also Okinawan-substrate Japanese signs are basically absent in the linguistic landscape. English-only signs (5%) are also relatively rare, given the fact that English is the foremost global language and is also taught to everyone in Japanese school from the third grade onwards.

Let us consider the linguistic landscape outside the stations. Across a number of linguistic landscape studies, *in vivo* landscapes have been found to reflect multilingual situations more directly (Backhaus 2007: 32–33).

TABLE 3: Language used on *in vivo* signs within the 15 stations of the Yui Monorail (total: 1,500 signs)

Language(s)	Signs in %
Japanese	56
Japanese-English	31
Japanese-English-Korean-Chinese	3
English	8
Okinawan-Japanese	0
Okinawan	1
Okinawan-substrate Japanese	0
Other	1

Source: compiled by author

In the *in vivo* landscape of the Yui monorail (Table 3), Japanese-only signs are even more dominant (56%), Japanese-English signs (31%) amount to a similar number as in the *in vitro* landscape, but the number of Japanese-English-Korean-Chinese signs (3%) is considerably lower. These differences to the *in vitro* landscape are indicative of the fact that it is easiest to produce signs in Japanese-only and that it takes a considerable amount of planning and money to produce signs featuring four languages. There are slightly more English-only signs (8%) outside the station. The local languages are again basically absent from the landscape with 11 Okinawan-only signs and one Okinawan-substrate Japanese sign.

3.3 Heiwadōri Market

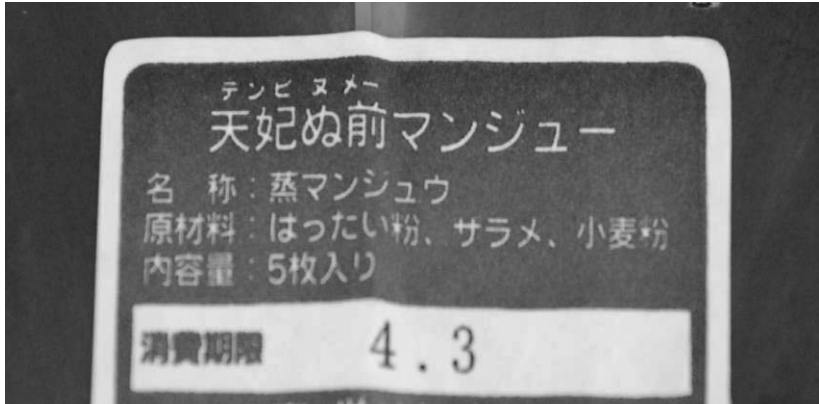
The Heiwadōri market emerged initially as a black market after WWII. Today, it is a mixture of local shops and restaurants visited predominantly by locals, and souvenir shops, ice-cream parlours, etc. catering mainly to tourists. The latter have been rapidly increasing in the past years, with the result that the local shops are now concentrated in the back of the market area. The market is located right next to the main tourist street in Naha, Kokusaidōri, which can be accessed by three different stations of the Yui monorail.

This section summarises a survey conducted by Peter Petrucci and Katsuyuki Miyahira in 2011.⁶ In their analysis, Petrucci and Miyahira discuss altogether 93 items featuring Okinawan. Japanese is also the dominant language in this specific landscape. However, Petrucci and Miyahira were able to analyse a relatively high number of Okinawan signs due to the fact that a large part of the merchandise at the market is local, and that – because of geographic and climatic differences between Okinawa and the mainland of Japan – many items that can be purchased here are not available in mainland Japan. Local fish, for example, tend to be referred to by their Okinawan name, e.g. *irabuchaa* instead of *aobudai* (“blue parrotfish”). A preference for Okinawan over Japanese is also evident in Okinawan cuisine, as seen on menu cards displayed outside restaurants. Many local dishes have become popular across Japan in the past 20 years, making Okinawan words such as *chanpuruu* (dish of mixed tofu and vegetables), *rafutee* (braised pork belly) or *tebichi* (pigs’ feet) known to virtually anyone in Japan today.

Some Okinawan words are known to locals and tourists alike (mostly regional dishes), while others are intelligible only to locals (fish, vegetables, etc.). Still other signs address tourists only, such as on souvenirs. Petrucci and Miyahira (2015: 541–542) discuss the example of the self-termed Japanese-language “Take-a-shot-in-dialect stickers” (*ippatsu hōgen sutekkā*) which are sold as a souvenir. These stickers feature Okinawan words presented as “roar of laughter” (*bakushō*) dialects. In order to make people laugh, one sticker, for example, features the word “testicles” in Okinawan. The word in question, *fugui*, is fully transcribed in Okinawan but translated in censored fashion into Japanese as *kiOtama* (= *kintama*). Note, that the “joke” simply consists of using a vulgar expression of Okinawan on a sticker.

Language shift and language loss is also manifested in the linguistic landscape of the market. Some expressions of Okinawan show influences of Japanese; that is, they have become more similar to Japanese. One such example is *tenpi nu mee manjū* (“in front of *tenpi* steamed buns”, a popular snack). *Tenpi* refers to a no longer existent ancient shrine, the name of which was, however, *tinpi* (“heavenly princess”). Words which share the same history with Japanese usually feature vowel-raising in Okinawan. That is to say, an /e/ in Japanese corresponds to /i/ in Ryukyuan languages or an /o/ to an /u/. *Tenpi* instead of *tinpi* is an example of such an invasion of the Japanese vowel system into the linguistic system of Okinawan. (For a detailed discussion of such structured language erasure, see Heinrich 2005).

⁶ Please see Petrucci / Miyahira 2015 for more a detailed discussion.

FIGURE 3: The label for “*tenpi* steamed buns” at the Heiwadōri Market

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Linguistic diversity is more visible at Heiwadōri market than in the two landscapes analysed previously. It is worth noting that Okinawan is used for addressing different people. Three different target groups can be identified: (1) local inhabitants, (2) non-local Japanese nationals and (3) tourists. In addressing these three different audiences, Okinawan serves different sociolinguistic functions. In the first case, Okinawan serves as a linguistic resource, because Okinawan has a well-developed and popularly known vocabulary for referring to local nature and culture. In the second case, elements of Okinawan have become part of Japanese. Very often this includes an adaptation of Okinawan elements to the linguistic system of Japanese (*mensooree* becomes *mensoore* or *tinpi* becomes *tenpi*). In the third case, Okinawan serves as an object of exotification for Japanese-speaking tourists (as in the case of the stickers). These three functions have different trajectories. The first one goes back to a time when all communicative functions were expressed through Okinawan (Heinrich 2012: 132–138). The second results from contact and the ensuing borrowings of linguistic elements from Okinawan into Japanese which has accompanied the popularisation of Okinawan cuisine and other cultural artefacts across Japan. The third function is an effect of the stigmatising campaign against the Okinawan language. Until the 1990s, rather than being accepted as a language and a linguistic and cultural system in its own right, Okinawan used to be presented as a highly deviant form of Japanese. Ryukyuan languages were declared by government officials to be dialects of Japanese,

but since they did not allow for mutual intelligibility with Japanese, their use was discouraged and suppressed by various means, mostly by a popular campaign stigmatising them as being “incorrect” and “inappropriate” in all settings (for details, see Heinrich 2013 or Kondo 2014).

Due to the different trajectories and functions of Okinawan, the writing of Okinawan terms in the landscape is not uniform. There are, for example, differences in how vowel length is represented orthographically, but most importantly the choice of the writing system deserves attention. Chinese characters are rarely used and if they are used, they need to be complemented with *furigana* (characters telling how to read a word, written above the word) in Okinawan, otherwise, e.g. 沖縄 (“Okinawa”) is pronounced without fail in Japanese as *Okinawa* and not in Okinawan as *Uchinaa*. This usually restricts the choice of the writing system to either *hiragana* or *katakana*⁷ for writing Okinawan. Hence, one finds signs writing *mensoore* either in *katakana* as メンソーレ or in *hiragana* as めんそーれ.

In the largely *in vivo* landscape of Heiwadōri Market, we encounter a more diversified and dynamic linguistic landscape than in the two previous case studies. These differences, and also the different sociolinguistic functions that Okinawan serves in this landscape, are not simply “differences” but also expressions of on-going change. The language chosen in the linguistic landscape, too, is part of the message. We will see this in more detail in the final case study.

3.4 Yonaguni Island

Yonaguni is the most southwestern island of Okinawa Prefecture. It is located 500 kilometres south of Okinawa Island or 2,000 kilometres south of Tokyo, but it is only 110 kilometres away from Taiwan. Yonaguni Island is a town composed of three settlements: Kabura, Sonai and Hikawa. The island has an area of 28 km² and has at present a population of 1,600 inhabitants. Due to outmigration, the population has declined by 70 per cent since 1950 (Teruya 2006). The survey of the linguistic landscape on Yonaguni was conducted in 2009. On Yonaguni Island, Dunan is spoken, one of altogether six distinct Ryukyuan languages.

A total of 964 signs were found on Yonaguni by the author. Given the fact that Yonaguni has no noteworthy industry or commercial centre, and that restaurants or guesthouses are rare there, the majority of signs turned out to be *in vitro* and hence in dominant language (see Table 4). This trend

⁷ *Hiragana* and *katakana* are Japanese syllabaries which are used in the Japanese writing system together with logographic Chinese characters (*kanji*) and the Latin alphabet.

is manifested in a large number of monolingual Japanese signs (85%). With comparatively little tourism and few foreign visitors, multilingual signs are rare. The scarcity of multilingual signs is also indicative of the difficulties in providing signs in any language other than Japanese. There were none of the Japanese-English-Korean-Chinese signs that have become typical of public transport infrastructure across many places in Japan, and only 7 per cent of all signs were in Japanese and English. A relatively large number of Japanese-Dunan signs exist (4%). These signs typically provide information on the ecology and history of Yonaguni, thereby embedding the local language in an otherwise Japanese text. For example, the local word for the world's largest moth (Dunan *ayamihabiru*, Japanese *yonagunisan*), an insect native to Yonaguni, is used in information presented otherwise entirely in Japanese.

TABLE 4: Languages used in the complete linguistic landscape of Yonaguni (total: 964 signs)

Language(s)	Signs in %
Japanese	85
Japanese-English	7
Japanese-English-Korean-Chinese	0
English	1
Dunan-Japanese	4
Dunan	1
Other	2

Source: compiled by author

As in the other case studies, use of the local language is extremely limited on public signs, despite the fact that this small island hosts one of the world's 7,000 languages and despite the fact that a large number of people continue to use Dunan in daily life (Aso et al. 2014). There are very few monolingual signs in Dunan. As a matter of fact, there were more signs in Hawaiian than in Dunan on the island. One example of a Dunan sign is the sign *abyan* ("lovely") placed in front of a house in Kubura (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: Sign reading *abyan* (“lovely”) on Yonaguni



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With some 400 fully proficient speakers of Dunan remaining today and another 400 who are passively bilingual, not many who pass the house will understand the significance of the sign.

3.5 Discussion

In his seminal book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) stated that the imagination of the nation had only become possible and was permanently reproduced due to newspapers and novels written in the national

language.⁸ On the basis of the four cases studied above, we can safely add “linguistic landscape” as a domain where the idea of the nation is reproduced. Despite the fact the Ryukyuan languages are native to the Ryukyu Islands, despite the fact that one third of the population is proficient in these languages, despite the fact that another third is able to understand them, and despite the fact that basically everybody in the prefecture expresses support for the maintenance and revitalisation of the Ryukyuan languages (Ryūkyū Shinpō 2012), these languages play basically no role in the linguistic landscape of Okinawa Prefecture. Okinawa Prefecture and also municipalities have yet to recognise the importance of the Ryukyuan languages in the public space. The absence of Ryukyuan languages in the public space evidences the fact that the authorities continue to see little or no practical or symbolic utility in these languages. This being the case, the linguistic diversity of Japan and the linguistic heritage of Okinawa Prefecture is obscured, if not hidden. Language ideology claiming the linguistic unity of all Japanese citizens is confirmed in the linguistic landscape.

It is also worthy noting here, that the linguistic landscapes are not simply an instance of Japanese-language nationalism. Signs in Chinese and Korean also reproduce the idea that all Chinese and Koreans can be defined on the basis of one language, despite the fact that Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China are linguistically very diversified. Nor are Korean nationals united by only one language (Brenzinger 2014). Furthermore, the parallel monolingualism we find on the so-called multilingual signs reveals the expectation that Japanese signs are meant to address Japanese, Korean signs – Koreans and Chinese signs – Chinese. One is not expected to read all signs – nor are Japanese expected to read the Chinese part, etc. Note in this context that many of the signs in Japanese and Chinese are highly similar due to the use of *kanji* characters and that many Chinese would indeed be able to read Japanese signs or Japanese be able to read Chinese signs. The unsimplified *kanji* used in Taiwan⁹ would certainly be the characters which could be read by the largest number of users at the airport. However, the linguistic landscape is not regimented along the lines of the language repertoires or language proficiencies of those populating the public space. Only the case of English differs. English does not address native speakers of English, but is conceived of as an international language. This is evidenced most clearly in the large numbers of Japanese-English signs in the land-

⁸ “National language” is of course also part of the imagination of a nation and a more analytic sociolinguistic term would be “dominant language”.

⁹ The *kanji* used in Japan and China are simplified versions. In Taiwan, the underlying original version of these simplified forms is used.

scapes studied. English addresses generic “foreign” visitors or residents. This function is never present in Japanese, despite the fact that most foreign residents in Japan speak Japanese, albeit with different levels of proficiency. Addressing foreign residents in Japanese would thus be best achieved by using Easy Japanese (*yasashii nihongo*) or by adding *furigana* (*kana* – small syllabic characters – used as a reading aid) above the *kanji* (see Carroll 2008: 28–29). Chinese and Korean do not have an international function either. This is clear by the fact that these languages appear only on signs where English is already present.

Given these insights, we now better understand the language choices manifested in the linguistic landscapes studied above. In public space, as Spolsky (2009: 33) states, people write (1) in a language they know, (2) in a language they think others will understand and (3) in a language they identify with. Along the lines of language nationalism, nationals “identify with”, “speak” and “know” their own national languages and no other language in addition. Other languages in their repertoires are “erased” (Irvine / Gal 2000) in a linguistic ideological process which accompanies the simplification from the complex sociolinguistic situation to the simplistic situation presented in the linguistic landscape.

The linguistic landscape does not reflect the language repertoires of speakers in Okinawa Prefecture. It is therefore not strictly about “effective” communication. In the linguistic landscapes of Okinawa Prefecture, local languages are not used as resources either. Specialists of social multilingualism point out that languages provide speakers with various benefits pertaining to economy, knowledge, aesthetics and empowerment (Mühlhäusler 1996). For example, naming products in Okinawan is a means of enhancing their commercial value, while knowledge of Okinawan provides its speakers also with insights into the history, society and culture of Okinawa. Local language can also be employed in arts such as theatre or music, or be employed to renegotiate social, cultural and political autonomy (for a detailed discussions of the benefits of Ryukyuan languages, see Heinrich 2009). The obscuration of the local languages appears to be peculiar because Okinawa Prefecture serves as a popular tourist destination. Rather than hiding an important part of Okinawa’s cultural heritage – its local languages – the Ryukyuan languages could also be employed for tourism. A tourist is after all defined as “a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change” (Smith 1989: 1). The use of (also) Ryukyuan languages in the linguistic landscape would seem to qualify as such an experience. The linguistic landscape we encountered in Okinawa Prefecture is, however, nothing but an order of power. This holds true for official signs as well as for private signs. The

linguistic landscape is thus a manifestation or expression of a language ideology where only powerful national languages are used in the public space. The languages and language varieties of powerful people are presented, irrespective of the fact of whether or not these languages are autochthonous to the region. With this in mind, let us now proceed to discuss the order of power implied by public signs for the various people populating the public space.

4. Scaling a language regime of power

The public space is not simply filled with languages – it is filled with norms and expectations. Linguistic diversity is not simply about diversity – the diverse languages are in competition with one another, making diversity also a site of struggle and inequality. The study of linguistic landscapes is important because it reveals much about the sociolinguistic situation or language ecology in which languages are used. Mackay (1980: 34) has a point in writing that “[l]anguages too must exist in environments and these can be friendly, hostile or indifferent to the life of each of the languages.” Many foreign visitors must certainly appreciate the fact that some languages of their repertoire (Korean or Chinese) are relatively prominent in some of the linguistic landscapes studied. English might be expected by many who do not speak Japanese. Other users, however, will find their languages excluded. Well-known international lingua francas such as French, Spanish or Russian play no role. The same holds true for the local Ryukyuan languages. There is a difference, though. In the first case, visitors using French, Spanish or Russian as an international lingua franca may be seen to be numerically negligible by language planners, and linguistic signs as we know them today can only feature a limited number of languages, after all.¹⁰

Ryukyuan languages are without doubt the second most frequently known languages by those visiting the public spaces studied here. The exclusion of these languages from the landscape conveys a clear message. They are perceived to be inferior to other languages, most notably to Japanese. The absence of Ryukyuan languages has of course much to do with the fact that they were framed as dialects of Japanese in the last century (Heinrich 2011b), and while this view has been successfully challenged by linguists of Ryukyuan languages as well as by Ryukyuan language activists, these views have yet to become manifested in the linguistic landscape. As a

¹⁰ This is why linguistic landscapes are often enhanced with pictorial icons, providing information independently of language to indicate exits, lifts, buses, etc.

consequence of this, these languages have never been modernised or popularly written. No standard variety of any of the Ryukyuan languages exists, there is no official orthography for writing in Ryukyuan and the lexicon remains underdeveloped for communicating contemporary issues (Heinrich 2014). But while Okinawa Prefecture has now set itself the goal of revitalising the endangered Ryukyuan languages (see. e.g. Shimakutuba Kentō I’inkai 2009), their absence in the linguistic landscape communicates the fact that their utility is considered to be low. However, languages can only be revitalised if they serve real and important communicative functions. The more frequent use of the Ryukyuan languages in the linguistic landscape would be beneficial for the goal of language revitalisation, which both governmental authorities as well as the vast majority of the local population seek to achieve today.

The neglect and low appreciation of Ryukyuan languages can be challenged. Some of the signs using local language reveal such a stance. A case in point is the sign *abyan* (Figure 4). The sign is placed not at the house entrance but on a street corner, and therefore at a location with maximum exposure. It signals to those who do not speak Dunan that there is something about Yonaguni they do not know. It also excludes non-Dunan speakers, as only those who know the language will read the message that a rather average looking house is declared to be “lovely”. The sign *abyan*, in a word, functions differently according to different readers. These differences are, however, not random. There is the local level of Yonaguni Town on which this sign operates. For visitors from other islands, the word *abyan* will be unintelligible. The Okinawan equivalent of *abyan* would, for example, be *churasan*. Still, prefectural inhabitants are aware of the existence of local languages, and the inflectional ending *-an* would most likely help them to guess that the word in question is an adjective of the local Ryukyuan language. Most Japanese nationals on the other hand, will read the sign as a feature of local speech, but will be unable to understand its meaning, as the Japanese equivalent, *utsukushii*, is not related to the Dunan word (is not a cognate). Japanese nationals from outside of Okinawa Prefecture will literally have no clue about the meaning of the sign, nor will they be able to make any guesses as to the word class, nor will they have any idea about the linguistic diversity which exists among the many islands which make up Okinawan Prefecture. Most foreign visitors, finally, will simply take this sign as being yet another sign in Standard Japanese that they cannot read.

Abyan has no stable significate. The changing meaning derives from (1) movements of people and their languages, and (2) the norms and ex-

pectations versus language in the Japanese public space. Both (1) and (2) are results of influences from higher scales¹¹ (municipality, prefecture, state, international travel, tourism, etc.) on the local language ecology. Inequality is also part of this, as not everyone has access to every scale, and this results in different accessibility to the various interpretations of any given linguistic sign. Hence, we are not simply dealing with “context” in order to account for the different interpretations of any given sign, but with a hierarchical structure of contexts which Blommaert (2010: 33) calls “scales”. This hierarchy of contexts can also be purposefully employed. Note for instance that the house where the sign *abyan* is placed (Figure 4) is by normal standards not “lovely”. Declaring the house to be *utsukushii* (“lovely” in Japanese) would thus not work. Declaring a less than average house to be “lovely” is an act against prevailing common sense. It is an act of resistance against the norms according to which houses are judged. The stance underlying such a declaration is “cool”. In cultural studies, cool refers to a strategy used to compensate for a lack of power, prestige and influence. Cool is an attitude which expresses the fact that mainstream mores and norms do not apply. Power, prestige and influence is uncool – this is why cool can so easily be associated with young people, minorities, blacks, etc. (see Putin / Robins 2000). The cool act of declaring the house in question to be “lovely” could never be achieved in the language of power and prestige, Standard Japanese (for use of cool language, see Maher 2005). Hence there is a preference for Dunan over Japanese here. *Abyan* is marked language use – it violates expectations. It is also no coincidence that the sign *abyan* is part of the *in vivo* linguistic landscape. *In vivo* and *in vitro* not only have different originators, they are on different scales – they are part, respectively, of the private, local, situated and temporal versus the official, national, widespread and timeless. *In vitro* is on a higher scale and it is for this reason that local languages feature less here. Resistance against authority and the conventions upheld by powerful actors and institutions are on the other hand challenged in the *in vivo* landscape.

The public space, to conclude, is not an empty space. It is invested with power, inequalities, challenges and struggles. It is for this reason that “meaning” in the linguistic landscape is never fixed and stable. Meaning can never be captured by description or quantitative studies alone. The linguistic landscape needs to be examined in terms of scale in order to reveal the struggles and socio-historical background which have shaped it and in order to reveal how it is reproduced or challenged.

¹¹ “Scales” refer here to different layers of norms, expectations and behaviours which coexist in any setting, ranging from one-time situated, private and local “lower scales” all the way to macro, decontextualised and global “higher scales”.

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