Documenting, Teaching, and Revitalizing Uchinaa-guchi: the Future of the Okinawan Language
Stewart Curry, Kyoko Hijirida, and Leon Serafim (University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa)

Overview: Okinawan as a moribund language

Aging speaker population
Most Okinawans under the age of 45 are monolingual in Japanese, and while those roughly 45 to 75 may understand and use some Okinawan (generally preferring Japanese), it is mostly those 75 and older for whom Okinawan is a living language (and even these are bilingual in Japanese).

Official promulgation of Japanese and discouragement of hōgen
This state has come about due to active Japanese-only policies after the annexation of the Ryukyus to Japan in 1879 through the end of World War II. The ascendency of Japanese continued during the American occupation period, as a means of expressing solidarity with Japan and support for reversion. Japanese is the language of modern life — media, education, business, etc. — in Okinawa.

Compounding the problem for Okinawan is the popular notion that it is a dialect of Japanese rather than a distinct language related to Japanese: a dialect in danger seems of less concern than a language in danger.

Okinawan today
There has been a steady and perhaps growing interest in public use of Okinawan, including radio, television, and internet. Traditional and contemporary Okinawan music, and traditional theatre are popular as well.

In addition, actual educational efforts are being made, with the production of language texts and teaching programs undertaken by various entities.

The idea that Okinawan — compared to other moribund languages — is relatively healthy and has perhaps bright prospects can be reasonably advanced. The speaker population is still fairly large, and use of the language, though limited in domain, is steady. Okinawan has also received a comparatively large amount of documentary attention and interest. It also has an indigenous written tradition, dating from 1532 with initial compilation of the Omoro sōshi, right up to the present day.

Conservationists working on languages in danger of complete disappearance may reasonably wonder: why Okinawan? Our response: a good foundation begs to be built upon, not only in Okinawa itself, but in the world-wide Okinawan diaspora as well.

Okinawan reference works in English (and other languages of the Okinawan diaspora)

Rationale for creation of non-Japanese reference works
Nearly all reference documentation of Okinawan is in Japanese, which limits access to materials by the general community of linguistics scholars, and by interested non-scholars in heritage communities where Japanese has limited currency. (The Okinawan diaspora numbers some 670,000 persons, including 50,000 in Hawai‘i.)

Extant and planned works
The Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Hawai‘i sponsored the publication of the first such work since Chamberlain’s 1895 grammar and dictionary, the Okinawan-English Wordbook, published in 2006. Currently in preparation under the sponsorship of The UH Center for Okinawan Studies is Compleat Okinawan — a Comprehensive Portrait of its Modern and Historical Vocabulary, a full-scale dictionary of the language. In addition, as the majority of the Okinawan diaspora is in Latin America, publication of localized Wordbooks in Spanish and Portuguese is under consideration.

Selected resources
www.rokinawa.co.jp
www.okinawabtv.com
ryukyu-lang.lib.u-ryukyu.ac.jp/index.html
yuntakusabira.ti-da.net
A

aa', n. [awa] A bubble; foam; froth; scum; suds.

aa', inf. Opening mouth.


Also abukku, abuku. Same as aa'.


aain, vi. [aai] 1 To fit; suit; be suited to. 2 To agree (with); fit together; correspond to; jibe. 3 To be right; be correct. 4 To pay.

aakee, n. A dragonfly. Also aakeejuu.

[GSS]

aakee-juu, n. [akizu*] A dragonfly.

aaki, n. [aki] A crevice; a crack; a gap; an aperture.

aakii, n. Paths; a scene of lamentation in drama.

aat-juu, vi. 1 To split; cleave; fissure; crack apart. 2 To be inconsistent; contradict.

aat-man, n. A hermit crab; a pagurian.

aat-mui, n. An indigenous liquor of Okinawa made from millet or rice; awamori.

aatanka-a, n. A person who is frank, candid, and artless.

aat-a, n. [asa] A sea lettuce; a kind of green liverwort [Monostroma nitidum (Wittrock)]. [ODI]

aat-tai, n. An Okinawan dish in which dried moomaa is stir-fried with pork, fish cake, and bean sprouts. [ODI]

aat-i, n. [awase] Lined clothes. Same as aashimun.


aat-ti, n. [awasu] 1 To bring together; unite; combine. 2 To set (fit, adjust, adapt, conform) one thing to another; align; synchronize.

aa-sun, vi. To mix; compound; knead.

aat-tai, n. Same as attaichaaa, watta-abii.


aat-tai, n. [aai] A rough-and-ready guess; a hit-or-miss business. 2 A person who makes haphazard guesses; a blunderbuss. [GSS]

aat-tai, n. interj. Holy be the god! Amen! May the god be honored! Also uu-tai.

aat-tai, n. [awa + tori] Removing the bubbles from the surface of boiling sugar cane juice during the process of making brown sugar. [UKH]

aabaa, n. An elder sister. Same as ‘nmii. See also appii.

aab-chun, vi. [abaku] To divulge; disclose; expose. See abasaa.

aab-chun, vi. [abaku] To divulge; disclose; expose. See abasaa.

aab-chun, vi. [abameru] To be violent; riot; run amok; rage (about); be unruly; (of horses) lash out; go wild.

aab-saa, n. pej. 1 A prattler; a tattler.


aab-saa-gii, n. Hard, tough hair. [UKH]

aab-gi, vi. 1 To shout; cry; yell; shriek; scream; howl. 2 (Of dogs, cats) to bark; meow.

aab-shi, n. [abumi] A stirrup; a footstall.

aab-shi, n. [abumi] A stirrup; a footstall.

aab-shi, n. [abumi] A stirrup; a footstall.

ab-i, vi. [abumi] A stirrup; a footstall.

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Explanatory Notes

The sample below illustrates the content and layout of a typical Wordbook entry. For specific information about abbreviations used, see the List of Abbreviations and Bibliographical Abbreviations following.

A Okinawan items, in headword or other position, in bold
B Homonyms distinguished with unique superscript numbers
C Part of speech and usage information about headwords in italics
D Conjugation information for verbs and adjectives, if not predictable from the headword form
E Etymological information about the entry word: Japanese cognates in plain text, related Okinawan terms in bold, words from other languages as marked

\[\text{chi-in}, \text{vt.} \, [\text{ran, tchi; kiru}]\]
1. To cut; chop; hash; saw; clip; shear; slash. 2. To break off; hang up.
See also chiriin.

Additional information in entries
- The following markings give additional information about etymological citations:
  - < indicates the source of a word borrowed from another language, or the base form for a derivation
  - ? indicates an unproven etymological connection
  - * indicates a Japanese term that is no longer in current use or is used only dialectally
  - A related term resulting from the addition of a grammatical marker ("particle"), the verb -sun 'to do', or certain other items to the headword is given as part of the entry:
    - chidé, n. [tsuide] Occasion; chance. -ni, adv. By the way; incidentally...
    - chiki-bi, n. [tsukebi] Arson; incendiaryism. -sun, v. To commit arson...
    - shiduu-ga-fuu, n. humble Thanks. -deebiru, phr. formal Thank you....
- For plants and animals, non-cognate Japanese equivalents and scientific names are provided when possible:
  - chiri-bira, n. A leek; a scallion [I nira; Allium ramposum L.]
  - Bibliographical information is presented in square brackets: [UKH]
A

aa', n. [awa] A bubble; foam; froth; scum; suds. Aa nu tachun. A bubble formed. Unsu sekken ya yuu aa nu tachun: This soap has rich lather. Aa nu een natan A bubble burst. Aree munu inee, kuchi kara aa fuchun: When he talks, he foams at the mouth.
aa', n. inf. Opening mouth. As see Open your mouth. Aa saami, ha misshiti maai Open your mouth and show your teeth.
aa-buku, n. [abuku] A bubble; suds. Biiru nu aabuku ya maakoo neen Beer suds are not tasty. Kachasukitee, aabuku nu tachun. If you stir it, bubbles will rise. Duku achina nu, ‘uma nu kuchi kara aabuku fuchi tooritan: It was so hot that the horse frothed at the mouth. Also aabukuu, aabuku. Same as aa'.
aa-chu, n. inf. Heat. Unu aacho yu a gutu, saatee naran Don't touch it, because it is hot.
aa-in, vi. [aai] 1 To fit; suit; be suited to. 2 To agree (with); fit together; correspond to; jibe. 3 To be right; be correct. 4 To pay. Aaen It fits. Aaan It does not fit. Aaan It fit. Aaranu It did not fit. Aamii? Does (= will) it fit? Aaiti? Did it fit? Aaan! Make it fit! Aaankee! Don’t make it fit! Mushii aaiiie... If it fits... Unu 'waaji ya aasuka aarun This coat is a poor fit. Unu kutsu yu yuu aarun These shoes fit well. Yamatu nu tinchi yu un ninkai yu aarun The weather in Japan does not agree with me. Ari too hanashi nu aaiin He and I have common interests to talk about. Unu shikashu yu shin yu saanne aarun. This job is not worth 1,000 yen. Tai nu hanashi ya aasoo Their stories jibe with each other. Ari ga ‘waaji tu boosshi yu aarun Her coat and hat do not match. Samuni ya aamii? Do the accounts tally? Mushii aarannee, jin nu fuesuku sun If the accounts do not tally, we’ll be short of money.
aa-ke, n. A dragonfly. Aakoe yu nii nu nii taw Dragonflies are found near water. Aakoe ya mimtamaa yu Aakoejuu yu ichii

Aa-sun, vi. [awasu] 1 To bring together; unite; combine. 2 To set (fit, adjust, adapt, conform) one thing to another; align; synchronize.

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A

aa’, s. [awa] Burbuja; borbollón; ampolla; espuma.
aa’, s. inf. Boca abierta.
aa-buku, s. [abuku] Burbuja; espuma; jabonadura. Igualmente aabukuu, abuku. Lo mismo que aa’.
aachu-u, s. inf. Calor.
aa-in, vi. [au] 1 Venir, ajustarse, acordarse, o conformarse (una cosa a/con otra). 2 Convenir; concordar. 3 Tener razón. 4 Pagar.
aakee, s. Libélula. Igualmente aakeejuu. [CSS]
aakee-juu, s. [akizu*] Libélula.
aaki, s. [aki] Hendedura; raja; grieta; abertura; agujero; hueco.
aakii, s. Lo patético; lástima; (en el drama tradicional) una escena de lamentación.
aaki-in, vi. 1 Henderse; romperse; divirlse. 2 Contraer; ser contrario o inconstante.
aa-man, s. Cangrejo ermitaño.
aa-mui, s. Licor aloholístico okinawense de arroz o mijo; awamori.
aaranka-a, s. Una persona simple y ingenua.
aasa, s. [asa] Lechuga brillante [Monostroma nitidum (Wittrock)], un género de alga marina comestible. [OD]
aasa-ichii, s. Plato okinawense de moom/aasa seco frito en poco aceite con carne de cerdo, pasta de pescado cocida, y brote germinado de soya.
aashi, s. [awase] Ropa con forro. Lo mismo que aashimun.
aashi-mun, s. [awasemono] Kimono (ropa formal tradicional de Japón y Okinawa) con forro.
aa-sun, vt. [awasu] 1 Unir; juntar. 2 Conformar; concordar; sincronizar.
aa-sun, vt. Mezclar; componer; amasar.
aataabii, s. Lo mismo que atabicha, wattaabii.
aataabii-nu-kkwa, s. Renacuajo.
aatcha, s. inf. [< atchun] Anda.
aatin-pu, s. 1 Conjetura. 2 Conjeturador. [CSS]
aa-tootu, interj. Que el diós sea santo! Amén! Igualmente uutootu.
aa-tu-i, s. [awa + tori] Quitando las burbujas de la superficie de jugo de caña de azúcar hirviendo durante el proceso de hacer azúcar moreno. [UKH]
abaa, s. Hermana mayor. Lo mismo que ‘nmii. Vea también appii.
abachiiri-in, vi. Sufrir dolientemente. [UKH]
abari-in, vi. [abaruru] Ser violento; robabar; ser silvestre.
abasa-a, s. emp. 1 Charla. [CSS] 2 Buena maula; perra; mujer asquerosa. [UKH]
Vea también abachun.
abasaagii, s. Pelo correoso. [UKH]
abi-in, vi. 1 Gitar; vocer. 2 El perro) ladrar, (el gato) miar o maullar.
abii-suubu, n. Combate de gritar, en el cual los participantes insisten de hablar sin escuchar a los otros.
abugaa, s. Lo mismo que kuragaa’.
abui, s. [abumij] Estribio.
abui-kuu, s. [aburi-ko] Parillas.
abu-in, vt. [aburu] 1 Asar. 2 Calentar. Igualmente anjun.
abushi, s. [abushi] Diique.
Revitalization of Uchina-guchi In Hawai‘i

Community-Based Uchina-guchi Classes

Uchina-guchi Class at the Lanakila Senior Center
In June of 1985, Takenobu Higa, with the assistance of Chiyoko Shiroma, initiated an Uchina-guchi class at the Lanakila Senior Center.

Uchina-guchi Class at the Hawai‘i Okinawa Center
The Uchina-guchi class at the Hawai‘i Okinawa Center (HOC) began in 1996 based on ideas and discussions generated in a meeting of program officers.

Media-Oriented Community
KZOO 1210, an AM radio station in Honolulu, has developed strong ties with the Okinawan community. Keiko Ura, a native Okinawan, has been a central figure in the promotion of an Okinawan language program for young people in Hawai‘i Okinawan communities since 2001.

Institution-based Classes: Uchina-guchi Courses at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
Okinawan Language and Culture courses JPN 471 and JPN 472 are offered by the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures. The courses were implemented in 2004; currently Kyoko Hijirida teaches JPN 471 and Leon Serafin JPN 472 (for information on course content for JPN 472, see p.9).

JPN 471 Okinawan Language and Culture Course I
(1) Okinawan Language
(2) Okinawan Proverbs
(3) Okinawan Folklore
(4) Influential People in Okinawan History
(5) Okinawan Songs and Dance
(6) Okinawan Foods
(7) Annual Events in Okinawa
(8) Okinawan Communities in Hawai‘i

Student research and presentations
When the basic studies are finished, students are free to pursue further the themes of their interest on their own, producing a paper for class presentation.

Course Objectives
The overall course objectives are: 1) While comprehending the linguistic significance of the Okinawa Language, students come to understand the basic grammatical rules along with the practical communication at the beginner’s level; 2) While understanding the culture of Okinawa, students come to appreciate its value system and way of thinking through actual class participation; and 3) While encouraging and enabling students to participate freely in the cultural activities of the local Okinawan communities in Hawai‘i, students attain cultural enjoyment and enrichment.

Teaching Strategies
For class activities, unique Okinawan values such as yuimaaru (cooperative way of thinking and doing) are adopted and practiced in the classroom. Students are divided into six groups which offer help to other class members as needed.

Using the Okinawan-English Wordbook as a language tool
The Wordbook is used to introduce new vocabulary so students can read works such as short stories, serving as a first step to guide students toward independent reading of folk tales and other works.

Future Agenda
Okinawan language textbooks

Instructional Materials Used for the Course
Wakai hitotachi no tame no Uchina-guchi nyūmon, Shigehisa Karimata
Champuru Handbook, Kyoko Hijirida and Tomoko Oshiro
Okinawan-English Wordbook, Mitsugu Sakihara, ed. by Stewart Curry
Uchinaa na kurashi tu nkashi-bunashi, Okinawago Fuyū Kyōgi Kai
昔、山原ぬ崎本部なんかい砂糖屋あたん。砂糖屋ぬ東方なんかいウスクぬ大樹ぬあたん。うぬ樹ぬ根元なんかいキジムナーが住家そーたん。キジムナーは背丈小さしが、赤茶髪そーてい大変敏 捷や てい、魚業ぬ手なって魚ぬ目玉びけーん取ってい食むたん。キジムナーは夏冬雨ぬ日 ん風ぬ日 ん毎日夜漁しーが出していゆるっとう暮しぐーたん。

キジムナーぬ住家そーるウスクぬ大樹ぬ隣いんかいいカメラーとうマカテーんでい言 る若夫婦 ぬ暮しょーたん。ある夜、カメラーとキジムナーとう一縁ぬ夜漁かいい行じゃん。キジムナーは直に潮口 んかいい足入たがやーんでい思たれー、波ぬ上駆足っしい行じゃん。カメラーとキジムナー様子見しどう仰天地さん。

キジムナーとカメラーなんかい早くなーふぇーくなーんち急まーちゃん。

カメラーがキジムナー後追いでい行じゃれー、イラブチャー、タマン、ミーバイ、色々ぬ内海漁ぬ山積とーたん。やしが、魚よー全部目玉ぬねーらんたん。

目玉まーい、キジムナーが食だんでいぬ事やたん。多さぬ魚ぬ中にてさんがキジムナーが好ちゅ る蛸ぬ見るらん。何やってい見らんがんでい問 たくとう、キジムナーと「私ねー蛸 好かんくう蛸取らん。また、人間ぬ屁 うう太陽好かん。あんし私 ねー昼 日中樹ぬ住家をういてい曲とーてい 黄 昏 に起いてい漁業す ん」カメラーとキジムナーとう友達になってい毎日魚駆走そーたが、愛さる妻 ぬマカテー寂らーさしみてい毎晩夜漁なんかい一緒行かんだれーならなんたくとう、夫 婦だーいいるる相談さん。
あんし、或日ぬ事、相談さるぐとにキジムナーが住家ぞーるウスクぬ根焼きて
る事にたたん。平常ぬ夜漁えー前ぬ海んかいどう行ちゆたしが、うぬ日や兼久原ぬ
前ぬ遠さる干瀬かんかい行ちゆる事にたたん。幸うえに海んshelfてい干瀬にてい魚ん
多く採とーたしが、急にキジムナーが鼻広げてい私住家ぬ焼臭すんでい言ち、岸ん
かい向かってい一目散騒足すたん。うぬ仕様見ちるカマデーや、妻ぬどう火付きたし
か解らん様子つし、キジムナー追ってい走えーたたん。キジムなーや住家ぬ燃とーし眺
てい落胆っし、カマデーんかい向かってい涙ぐるまーいっし、今日から私ぬ何処をう
てい暮すがやーんでい泣ちかたん。やしが、気丈者のキジムナーやシンナナ橋ぬ側
ぬウスクぬ在しゆーんでい言ち直に騒足っし行じゃん。うりから後、キジムナーぬ
音沙汰ねーらんなたんでい言る事やん。キジムナーを地域にゆってい「キムナー」
「セーマ」「ブナガヤー」んでいん言ん。

注：① ウスク「アコウ」 ② 敏捷やてい「すばやい」 ③ ゆるっとう「平穏に」
④ 涙ぐるまーっし「涙ぐんで」 ⑤ 泣ちがかたん「泣いてよりかかった」
キジムナー Tale of Kijimuna

昔、山原ぬ崎本部んかい砂糖屋あたん。砂糖屋ぬ東方んかいウスクぬ大樹ぬあたん。うぬ樹ぬ根元んかいキジムナーが住家そーたん。キジムナーを背丈小さしが、赤茶髪そーてい大変敏捷やてい、魚業ぬ上手なてい魚ぬ目玉びけーん取てい食むたん。キジムナーを夏冬雨ぬ日ん風ぬ日ん毎日夜漁しーが出ていゆるっとう暮しょーたん。

1) Find the meanings of the words listed below using Okinawan-English Wordbook.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ことば</th>
<th>読み方</th>
<th>意味</th>
<th>頁</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>東</td>
<td>agari</td>
<td></td>
<td>p.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ウスク</td>
<td>usuku</td>
<td></td>
<td>p.199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>大</td>
<td>ufu-</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>キジムナー</td>
<td>kijimunaa</td>
<td>[n. a tree fairy; a tree spirit]</td>
<td>p.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>背丈</td>
<td>taki-fudu</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>赤茶髪</td>
<td>aka-gantaa</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>大変</td>
<td>ip-pee</td>
<td></td>
<td>p.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>敏捷</td>
<td>guru-mun</td>
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注）Noun (place) + んかい： Noun (place) + に

2) Summarize the paragraph in your own words.
Okinawan language revitalization in Okinawa — and elsewhere

Identifying the language in space and time
Just what is this thing called Okinawan? It is typically said to refer to the common language of the most heavily populated areas of the prefecture, roughly from Naha in the south to just past the Kadena area, the area of the old Chūzan Kingdom, which eventually encompassed all of the Ryukyus. This common language is thought to be based either on the language of the old capital of Shuri, or else the language of Shuri’s former commercial town, Naha. For traditionalists, Uchinaaguichi is the speech of Shuri, and for those who think of the most vibrant and heavily populated area, it is the speech of Naha. Shuri is also the dialect that is considered to be the direct descendant of Old and Middle Okinawan. The different viewpoint is encapsulated in two dictionaries that share the same name, Okinawago jiten, or Dictionary of Okinawan. The earlier one, from 1963, is a lexicon of the Shuri language, and the latter, from 2006, is a dictionary of the Naha dialect.

Okinawan in the context of Ryukyuan
Hattori Shirō believed that all of Northern Ryukyuan was really one language, but with a great deal of variation from village to village. Hattori also pointed out that a deep linguistic divide separated any Ryukyuan dialect from any Japanese dialect.

Linguistic legacy in the diaspora
The bulk of emigrants from Okinawa came from the areas roughly co-equal with the Chūzan Kingdom, although a fair number came from just north of there. The question of just what should be called Okinawan is close to a moot point for them.

From recording Okinawan to teaching Okinawan
Since the 1970s, the weakening of Ryukyuan dialects has been a concern for scholars. Uemura Yukio and others began large-scale work to record at least a homogeneous data-set for each dialect. Professor Karimata Shigeisa of the University of the Ryukyus, who studied under Prof. Uemura as an undergraduate, has continued this work in field linguistics and in teaching Okinawan as a living language. Now that Prof. Miyara Shinshō is teaching Okinawan as well, Prof. Karimata has focused on teaching the language of Miyako. In addition, the Okinawa-go Fukyū Kyŏgikai [Society of Okinawan Language Revitalization] may soon support the teaching of Okinawan in the public school system, with the cooperation of the Prefectural Board of Education.

From Okinawa to the diaspora in Hawai’i — and beyond
Excerpts from the society’s intermediate reader, Uchinaa nu kurashi tu nkashibanashi, and material from another textbook, Shinpen · Okinawa no bungaku, on Ryukyuan literature, which includes a great deal of material in the classical language, have been used in UH’s second-semester Okinawan Language and Culture course, JPN 472.

Two scholars have come to Hawai’i at different times to study the local Ryūka — or Ryukyuan poetry — scene: the late Kadecaru Chizuko, of Okinawa Kokusai Daigaku, and Professor Nakahodo Masanori, of the University of the Ryukyus. The latter has been known to say that the Ryūka production scene in Hawai’i is more vibrant than that in Okinawa. The new generation here includes large numbers of people who are eager to learn more Okinawan.

So Okinawan is also being taught in the diaspora, including non-university classes in Hawai’i and South America. For the younger generation, a sufficient knowledge of Japanese can be a big stumbling block. For people such as these, Prof. Mitsugu Sakihara compiled his English-Okinawan work, on which the OEW is based. Work will continue on its successor, and as time passes, on the creation of more and more English-language-based study materials.

Selected references
Okinawago Fukyū Kyōgikai (= Uchinaagushi Firumiru Jinmi no Kwai), eds. Uchinaa nu kurashi tu nkashibanashi (Okinawa’s Daily Life and Folk Stories). Naha: OFK.