Linguistic exchange, colonial lag and a South Sea Island dialect of Japanese

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue for the conceptualization of a South Sea Island variety (dialect) of Japanese. This dialect group includes the Japanese dialects of the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands, Palau and the Marianas Islands. The linguistic commonalities among these varieties are the results of similar social, historical and geographical circumstances. In this paper, I am particularly interested in the “linguistic exchange” of lexical items among these three dialects which have contributed to their lexical similarities.

Keywords: Bonin Islands, colonial lag, Japanese dialects, language contact, Northern Marianas Islands, Saipan, Palau

THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION

For three decades before the end of World War II, Palau and the Northern Marianas Islands (Saipan, Tinian and Rota) were part of the Japanese Empire, collectively known as the South Sea Islands. The Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands differ from these areas in that they remain part of Japan, but what all of these islands have in common is a non-Japanese population prior to the colonization by the Japanese. The Japanese language spoken in three island groups -- Palau, the Marianas and the Bonins -- presents enough similarities to be considered to form one variety of the Japanese language, which can be tentatively named “South Sea Island Japanese”. In this paper the author deals with examples obtained from a decade of fieldwork on the islands\(^1\) to demonstrate some of these similar linguistic features and the factors (such as a comparable historical and linguistic background) which contributed to their formation.

One feature of the South Sea Island language variety is “colonial lag”, which

\(^1\) The author’s fieldwork on the Bonins consists of over forty trips to the islands between 1997 and 2011. Fieldwork in Palau was conducted 2008/9, 2009/1, 2010/9, 2011/3 and 2011/9. Fieldwork in Saipan was conducted 2002/12, 2004/3, 2005/9, 2006/3, 2006/9, 2007/6, 2008/6, 2/2010 and 2010/5.
refers to older linguistic traits remaining in colonial varieties of a language long after they have disappeared in varieties in the mother country. Another feature is grammatical changes, which seem to have been facilitated by a weaker sense of “language norms” in the island communities. These weakened norms seem to be the result of non-native speakers outnumbering native speakers of the language, and also of the geographical distance from the main islands of Japan (henceforth referred to as “mainland Japan”). Thus, insularity (in both the literal sense of “island-ness” and the extended meaning of “isolation”) seem to have been a contributing factor in the Japanese language taking a different path in these three island groups from the way it did in other former colonial regions, such as Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan, or on the home islands of Japan.

**BONIN AND OTHER SOUTH SEA ISLAND LANGUAGE VARIETIES**

There are similarities among the varieties of Japanese spoken on the Bonins, Palau and the Marianas, and these similarities are sufficient in number and significance to warrant the positing of a “South Sea Island” variety of the Japanese language. These characteristics range over three linguistic areas, namely phonology, grammar, and the lexicon.

Phonological “pitch accent” distinctions in Japanese mean that words with the same segmental features but different meanings are distinguished by their pitch differences. In varieties which have such distinctions, such as the Standard Japanese of Tokyo for example, the word *hashi* could mean three different things depending upon the high-low (HL) pitches of its syllables. The sentence *hashi ga aru* could mean either “there is a bridge” or “there is an edge” or “there are chopsticks” depending upon whether the three syllables *hashi ga* (ga being a subject particle) are pronounced LHL, LHH or HLL, respectively. In varieties which lack such distinctions, pitch differences and word meaning are not related, and thus any of the three pitch patterns could be used to mean any of the three meanings. Published results on the Japanese spoken by “Westerners” Bonin Islanders (Long et al, 1988) show that middle-aged speakers use pitch patterns randomly while the Japanese of some older speakers is influenced by English stress accent. Preliminary results from fieldwork on Saipan and Palau show that these language varieties lack pitch accent distinctions as well. The Japanese dialect of Hachijo Island also lacks pitch accent distinctions, and many speakers of this dialect migrated to the island groups in question. At least two factors contributed to the lack of pitch accent distinctions on the three island groups in
question. One was this native Japanese input from Hachijo and the other was the first language influence due to the fact that the native populations of these islands spoke languages (Bonin English, Chamorro, Carolinian, Palauan) in which pitch is not used for semantic distinctions between words.2

Innovative grammatical features found in the Japanese of speakers in these island groups include the following:

- use of deshō to mark new (as opposed to shared) information. For example, a speaker on Tinian repeatedly used this kind of expression towards an interviewer in sentences like gakkō ikkenai deshō “we can’t go to school, you know”3, even when it was obvious that all this was new information to the listener
- use of mitaku (conforming to adverb formation rules, as opposed to mitai ni), to mean “like, as”
- use of -rō (as opposed to -yō) endings in vowel-stem verbs, for volitional ‘let’s do –’ expressions (example, kore wo anata ni agerō ka? “Shall I give these to you?”)
- use of -re (as opposed to -ro) endings in vowel-stem verbs, for imperatives

These are all features found in mainland Japanese dialects as well. But that being said, there are relevant details regarding these features’ usage on the mainland that must be considered. Let us take the use of desho to mark new information as an example. Firstly, this phenomenon is relatively recent on the mainland whereas on these islands it is found about speakers many generations older than those on the mainland. Secondly, this feature is not the isolated idiolectal peculiarity of one individual but is found in many of the speakers from whom data has been collected (Arai 2008). Thirdly, a similar “precursor” trend has been studied among other non-native users of Japanese, particularly among speakers of Japanese on Taiwan (Chien 2011). The expression mitaku can be found in mainland Japan as well, but the point is that, on the southern islands it is common used among elderly speakers, whereas in Japan it is a relatively new expression which only began to be commented on by linguists in the 1980s and

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2 On another prosodic topic, sentence intonation contours, it is intriguing that speakers in the Bonins, the Marianas and Palau use a rising intonation pattern for the Japanese equivalent of wh-questions (content questions). In mainland varieties of Japanese (as in English), rising intonation is reserved for yes-no questions (polar questions). The Chamorro language (which has been influential on the Bonins as well as the Marianas) reportedly has rising intonation even in content questions (Topping 1969: 5). Future research in this area could reveal the origin of rising-intonation pattern of content questions in South Sea Island Japanese.

3 The speaker uses the non-past ikenai here even though the event is clearly one in the distant past. Chamorro native speakers often use the present tense in Japanese to designate events in the past; an interlanguage feature due to the lack of grammatical distinction between past and present in Chamorro.
then as a minor form gaining usage among young speakers (Inoue 1989: 110). The significant point here is that, on the Marianas it is found among speakers born before World War II. Furthermore, a recent book (Kanazawa 2008) whose title translates as The Japanese of foreign students is the Japanese of the future: The dynamics of language change, has pointed out that several other quite recent (and still minor) grammatical innovations in Japanese are commonly found in the “interlanguage” spoken by non-native learners of Japanese.

Several of these seemingly unrelated grammatical changes may be attributed to overgeneralization and uniformization of grammatical rules⁴, but they are innovations nonetheless. Below (in our discussion of colonial lag), we will see that the lexicon can be quite conservative. Ironically, the innovative nature of grammatical features and the conservative nature of lexical features may be due to the same factor, namely insularity.

**PATTERNS OF “LINGUISTIC EXCHANGE’” IN THE PACIFIC**

We find patterns of what I call “linguistic exchange” (definable as a language contact phenomenon in which lexical items are commonly transmitted back and forth among members of a set group of non-contiguous language communities) among the southern islands under consideration.

On the Bonin Islands, the local variety of Japanese (as well as the local variety of English and the Ogasawara Mixed Language) contains words which were transmitted during the early to mid-twentieth century from Chamorro, the language of Saipan and the other Mariana Islands. These include the following:

- **kankong** ‘water spinach, swamp morning glory’
- **guili**⁵ ‘gray chub, grey drummer’
- **shiikamba** ‘yam bean, jicama’
- **tagan tagan** ‘white popinac, benjamin tree’
- **aiyaiyai** expression of surprise

One finds a good degree of linguistic influence from Hachijo on the Bonins. The Talking Dictionary of the Bonin Islands Language includes 110 entries of

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⁴ The -ku ending on the innovative form mitaku (Standard Japanese mitai ni ‘like, as’) is the result of overgeneralization; i.e, “drop final -i and add -ku” is the general rule for forming adverbs from adjectives. The use of -ro (SJ -yo) in volitional expressions and -re (SJ -ro) in imperatives means that rather than having two rules for the two classes of verbs in Japanese, all verbs are conjugated with a uniform rule.

⁵ Borrowings on the Bonin Islands often retain their original pronunciation even when they do not adhere to Japanese phonology. The use of the lateral [l] in guili, rather than its replacement by a Japanese flap is another case of this.
Hachijo origin such as the ones below (Long & Hashimoto 2005: 358-359).

- hanke, dongo ‘fool’
- shattsuru ‘hateful’
- oyako general term for “relatives” (not just parent and child)
- nomoru ‘to sink’
- hogeru ‘to clutter up (a room)’
- akaba, chigi, sasayo various species of fish
- (da) ja sentence final particle

The Hachijo Island dialect (distinct enough from mainland Japanese varieties to be recognized by UNESCO as a distinct language) also found its way to the South Sea Islands colonized by Japan, but its effect have all but disappeared today, but we do find a few examples of Hachijo’s linguistic influence. One interesting example of the usage of the Hachijo dialect from the can be found in the popular song *Palao Koishiya* (Yearning for Palau) written by Kazuo Moriji and Gento Uehara and recorded by Haruo Oka in July 1941. It begins with the lyric “Palao-jima ni ojare “come to Palau Island”, containing the honorific Hachijo expression ojare (irasshai in Standard Japanese). Many Hachijo Islanders made their way to the South Sea Islands (including Palau and the Marianas) prior to World War II, just as they had moved into the Bonin Islands when they were colonized by Japan in the 1860’s and 1870’s. A second type of linguistic influence can be found in the names of Palauans. One finds prominent local business leaders and politicians (Palaun citizens, of course) with typical Hachijo family names like Asanuma. A third example of Hachijo’s linguistic influence is found in the pronunciation of that island’s name. The pronunciation used throughout mainland Japan (and thus the closest one can come to claiming that a certain pronunciation is “Standard Japanese”) is Hachijo-jima. The local pronunciation on the island itself, however, is Hachijo-shima. It is this latter pronunciation which is used by Palauans. So while Japanese loanwords from the standard variety (including those obsolete words found in the discussion of colonial lag below) are common in Palau and the Marianas (Josephs 1979, Long 2012), the linguistic influence of Hachijo is basically limited to these three, admittedly trivial, characteristics.

A couple of dozen Bonin words are unmistakably borrowings from Hawaiian carried there by 19th century settlers (Long & Hashimoto 2005: 359). Of these at

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6 Minami-Daito Island in Okinawa Prefecture is another Hachijo diaspora island which also retains many of that islands’ terminology (Nakai, Higashi and Long 2009).
at least one word entered Palau via the Bonins. This is the word tamana, the
name of a tree (Calophyllum inophyllum). In Hawaiian, it is called tamani (or
kamani). In English, incidentally it is referred to variously as alexandrian
laurel, beauty leaf, mast wood or tamanu. We do not know why the final vowel
changed from [i] to [a] on the Bonins, only that it did. We see in the variant		
tamamu, however, that there is a tendency of the final vowel to vary and change.
Of course, one explanation for tamani in Hawaii and tamana in Palau is that this
is pure coincidence. It is impossible for this to be considered the result of a
common Austronesian root form, because Palauans believe tamana to be a
borrowing from Japanese, and are quick to point out that there is a native word
for the tree, btaches (interview Humiko Kingzio, 2008/9/18). It might seem
possible that the word was brought directly from Hawaii, but there are problems
with this theory. One problem is that there is no way to explain the same vowel
change from tamani to tamana occurring independently in the Bonins and Palau.
Another is that there is no record of significant migration from Hawaii to Palau
prior to World War II. One might think the word came to Palau from Hawaii in
the postwar period when the two groups of islands were connected through their
U.S. ties. There are problems here as well, because elderly Palauans remember
the word being used during the Japanese era (ibid.). Furthermore, in Hawaii
itself there has been a steady sound change in the consonant [t] to [k].
Although some varieties (dialects) of Hawaiian still retain [t] and some speakers
retain it as an allophone of /k/, by 1826 American missionaries considered the [t]
pronunciation minor enough that they removed the letter “t” from the standard
Hawaiian orthography they had developed a few years prior (Schütz

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory A</th>
<th>Theory B</th>
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<tr>
<td>transmission to Palau through Bonins</td>
<td>transmission to Palau directly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaiian tamani</td>
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<td>Bonins tamana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palau tamana</td>
<td>(Bonins tamana)</td>
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Figure 1, Two Theories of the transmission of tamana

Historically it makes sense to find the older [t] pronunciation in the Bonins
(because the Hawaiian settlers there arrived in 1830; Long 2007: 40), but even if
we consider a postwar borrowing of the word directly from Hawaii, it still would
not make sense to find the older [t] sound in Palau (Theory B in Figure 1). The
The only viable explanation seems to be that the Bonins operated as the conduit for the word’s trans-Pacific crossing (Theory A).

The Japanese language spoken by elders of Palau and Saipan born during the Japanese administration includes many features common to the Japanese of Okinawa. Here I do not mean the traditional language (or dialect) of Okinawa but rather the Okinawan version of Standard Japanese. A detailed explanation of these would require providing more description of the Japanese language and its geographical variation than is possible in this paper, but I will provide a few examples (Okinawan form found in former colonies, followed by Standard Japanese, and the English meaning).

- **oru** SJ iru, ‘to be’ for animate objects
- **-te oru** SJ -te iru, progressive verb ending ‘-ing’
- **-n** SJ -nai, negative verb ending
- **nanmei, nimei, sanmei** (in non-formal contexts, and in first person) SJ nannin, ‘how many people, two people, three people’
- **sā** SJ yo, sentence final particle

These forms (particularly the first three) are used not only in Okinawa, but widely throughout the western parts of mainland Japan as well. Thus migrants from those areas may also have contributed to these linguistic forms’ movement to the South Seas Colonies; however migration patterns (66.5% were from the Okinawan language area) indicate an Okinawan linguistic conduit. The usage here of **mei** rather than **nin** to count people differs the word’s usage in Standard Japanese. In SJ, **mei** is used in formal or polite contexts which makes it generally inappropriate for use in the first person. The Okinawan final particle **sā** also has a similar corresponding form (the one-mora **sa**) in many mainland Japan varieties, but there are in differences in the ways the two forms are used.

The patterns of linguistic exchange outlined thus far are summarized below and their geographical aspects are illustrated on the map in Figure 2.

- Chamorro words transmitted to the Bonins (line 4)
- Hachijo dialect transmitted to the Bonins (line 2)
- Hachijo language characteristics (albeit a small number) transmitted to Palau (line 2)
- Hawaiian words transmitted to Bonin Islands (and subsequently to Palau) (line 3)

7 62.4% were from Okinawa Prefecture and 4.1% were from Kagoshima Prefecture, but most of these were from the Amami islands where the language situation was similar to Okinawa.
• expressions used in Okinawa and transmitted to the Marianas and Palau (line 5)
• words transmitted from the Bonins to Okinawa (line 6, not discussed in this paper)

In the following section, we will discuss Japanese words which entered the Bonins, the Marianas and Palau, but have subsequently fallen out of use in mainland Japan. These are illustrated by line 1 in the figure.

Figure 2, Patterns of linguistic exchange

COLONIAL LAG

Colonial Lag is a term coined by linguist Peter Trudgill (2004: 31-82) to refer to linguistic features which are retained in newer colonial varieties of a language after they have disappeared from “old country” varieties. Some common examples of colonial lag with European languages include linguistic characteristics, such as the United States English use of words like mad for ‘angry’, Australian English word-initial /h/ sounds which have been retained (in
contrast to London English h-dropping in which words like heart and hat sound like ’eart and ’at), Canadian French expressions like mais que rather than dès que for ‘as soon as’ (Mougeon 2012), and Mexican Spanish expressions like Mande? rather than Que? for ‘What?’ (see Lipski 1994 chapter on Mexican Spanish).

The Japanese spoken in the Bonins and the former South Sea colonies include many examples of colonial lag, i.e. words which have fallen out of common conversational usage in mainland Japan varieties of the language. Consider the following words listed in the Bonin Island Dictionary (Long and Hashimoto 2005) which can still be heard in the former colonies. For example the word katsudō (shashin) (lit. ‘active photograph’, i.e. ‘moving picture’) has the ring of the outdated English terms flickers or talkies compared to the word eiga ‘movie’ currently used in Japan.

- katsudō ‘the cinema, movies, movie theatre’
- sarumata ‘men’s long underwear’
- kame ‘large ceramic water pot, demijohn’
- kanzashi ‘comb worn as hair decoration’
- gofujiō ‘toilet’
- chichi bando ‘brassiere’
- chappo ‘hat’
- harame ‘pregnant woman’
- naichi ‘Japanese main islands’

Not only are many of these words found in the Japanese of elderly Marianas and Palauan speakers, but many of them have found their way into the local languages as loanwords as well. The following are words which a native speaker reported were in her active Carolinian vocabulary (Long & Arai 2012). All are from Japanese (Japanese etymons and their meanings are given only when they differ from the Carolinian terms), and yet must be considered obsolete in mainland Japan as they would not be used by speakers today, and in many cases are incomprehensible to younger speakers.

- katsido ‘the cinema, movies’ < Jap. katsudō (shashin)
- sarumata ‘underwear (male or female)’ < Jap. sarumata ‘men’s long-johns’
- densuku ‘electric phonograph’ < Jap. denciku

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8 The interview survey was on the knowledge and usage of the 101 Japanese borrowings listed in Jackson & Mark (1991). It was conducted in September 2005 by the author and Masato Arai with a female speaker in her mid 40’s.
• aicho ‘cabinet similar to a pie safe (but with wire screen doors rather than punched metal’ < Jap. haichō
• aikkyu (n.) ‘rations’. The Carolinian verbal suffix -li is added to form the verb aikkyu-li ‘to give out rations, to share’
• kento ‘boxing’ < Jap. kentō
• patsingko ‘spear gun’ < Jap. pachinko ‘slingshot’

These words have fallen out of use in mainland Japan but are still current in the South Sea Island former colonies and the Bonins (albeit used mostly by elderly and middle-aged speakers). Thus they are examples of colonial lag.

One subgroup of colonial lag words are those that have made the transition to socially stigmatize offensive terms in Standard Japanese (and most other mainland varieties) but have not made this transition in South Sea Island varieties (including the Bonins). These were not offensive (or much less so than today) in mainland Japan before the war. It was only after the war that these words became taboo in mainland Japan, and since the former colonies (and the Bonins) were cut off from the changing linguistic norms of the mainland, the words never acquired such stigmas there. Examples, with their older non-offensive connotations, include:

• dojin ‘indigenous person’
• ijin ‘foreigner’
• chōsenjin ‘Korean person’
• shinajin ‘Chinese person’
• kanaka ‘Pacific islander’
• kurombo ‘Black person’
• buraku ‘village’

These words are a sub-group of colonial lag in the sense that their non-offensive usages have disappeared in mainland Japan but remain in the island varieties.

A SOUTH SEA ISLAND DIALECT OF JAPANESE

When speaking of the varieties (dialects) of languages like Spanish, English or French one does not merely enumerate the old-world varieties of Europe but the new-world varieties of the (former) colonies as well. I propose here that the former colonies of Japan (including the Bonins) should be included as dialects of Japanese. The Japanese spoken in Taiwan today can be grouped with Kyushu
dialects, because it retains many of the qualities speakers of those dialects brought to Taiwan prior to World War II (see Sanada’s Foreword to Long & Arai 2012). Similarly, the Japanese spoken in Hawaii can be grouped alongside the Hiroshima dialect (Asahi & Long 2011). The Japanese of Sakhalin can be grouped with the Tohoku dialects (Sanada et al. 2006). In this paper, I have maintained that the Japanese used on the Bonin Islands has much in common with the Japanese of the Mariana Island and Palau. These linguistic features include the following:

- Phonology: Similarities in sentence intonation and the absence of “word pitch accent”
- Grammar: Some common innovative morphosyntactic features
- Lexicon: Similar vocabulary resulting from linguistic exchange and colonial lag

The similarities between certain southern islands (namely the Bonins, Palau, and the Northern Mariana Islands) can be attributed to, (1) the high degree of contact among these islands, (2) “linguistic norms” which were weaker than those of the main islands of Japan. Weak norms were in turn due to (3) the lack of contact with Japan, and (4) the fact that Japanese was being used as a second language on these islands. Similarities among these language varieties warrant their grouping as a “South Sea Island” dialect of Japanese alongside traditional mainland Japan varieties.

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ABSTRACT IN JAPANESE

言語交流、コロニアル・ラグ、そして南洋諸島方言の日本語

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要 旨
小笠原諸島およびマリアナ諸島やパラオの日本語方言に見られる言語的共通点を指摘した上で、日本語の方言区画に「南洋諸島方言」を立てるることを提案する。その共通点は様々な社会的、歴史的、地理的な要因によるものである。例えば、語彙面において、長期にわたる3つの地域との間に起きた「言語交流」がこの共通性の背景にあった。また、「コロニアル・ラグ」(植民地遅延)と呼ばれる社会言語学的現象も見られる。すなわち、「本国」から地理的にまたは社会的に切り離された(旧)植民地には、「本国」で使われなくなった言語的特徴が取り残されるという現象である。

キーワード
小笠原諸島、言語接触、コロニアル・ラグ(植民地遅延)、サイパン、日本語の方言区画、パラオ、マリアナ諸島