

国立国語研究所学術情報リポジトリ

Project Overview

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1 Project Overview

1 Purposes of the project

The ‘General Study for Research and Conservation of Endangered Dialects in Japan’ project was started in 2009 as a core collaborative research project of the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics. The purposes of the project are as follows.

As globalization proceeds, minority languages around the world have become endangered. Among Japanese dialects, almost all of the dialects of Okinawa Prefecture, the Amami dialects of Kagoshima Prefecture, and the dialect of the island of Hachijōjima, part of Tokyo Metropolis, are classified as ‘endangered’ in a UNESCO report published in February 2009. Many of these endangered dialects retain features from Old Japanese that have already been lost in other dialects and have linguistic systems different from theirs. These dialects are therefore not only valuable for the dialectology of a particular area, but also for historical and general linguistics. Moreover, these dialects often differ from village to village, so the question of how this variation arose is also of interest.

In this project, a group of researchers from throughout Japan with a track record in fieldwork was brought together to study these endangered dialects and elucidate their characteristics, as well as to shed light on linguistic diversification processes and general properties of language. In addition, the endangered dialects are recorded, preserved, and promoted by recording and preserving video and audio data of them and making these available to the general public.

2 Research methods

Endangered dialect research is an urgent matter. It is therefore necessary to organize researchers from both inside and outside Japan with a track record in field research, in order to move their research forward efficiently. Additionally, in order to obtain high-quality data, dialect (or language) survey and description methodologies need to be made consistent, which they have not always been. Furthermore, it is necessary to train young researchers to be able to undertake future dialect (or language) research. In light of the above, this project is being carried out based on the following two kinds of research:

- (1) field research conducted by each of the collaborating researchers at their respective research sites, and
- (2) joint research conducted by the collaborating researchers in concert.

In the case of the former, each of the collaborating researchers conducts field research at their respective research sites and presents the results of this research at the project's collaborative research workshops, which provides them with an opportunity to develop their research further. Additionally, young researchers who are not part of the group of collaborating researchers are sometimes invited to give presentations, in order to support their research.

In the case of the latter, a survey site is decided upon and its dialect described comprehensively in terms of, among other things, its phonetics, accent, grammar, and basic vocabulary, as well as discourse. Not only the group of collaborating researchers, but also young researchers such as postdoctoral fellows, research fellows of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, and graduate students participate in this research; the participants carry out the survey, organize the data, and produce a report collaboratively. The first joint survey was conducted on the island of Kikaijima in Kagoshima Prefecture in September 2010. The present volume constitutes the research report resulting from that survey.

3 Collaborating researchers

As of July 30, 2011, this project is being carried out by the following collaborating researchers (in alphabetical order):

Akihiro KANEDA (Chiba University), Shigehisa KARIMATA (University of the Ryukyus; invited scholar at NINJAL), Tomoyuki KUBO (Kyushu University), Haruo KUBOZONO (NINJAL), Wayne LAWRENCE (University of Auckland), Daniel LONG (Tokyo Metropolitan University), Satomi MATAYOSHI (Shigakukan University), Akiko MATSUMORI (Japan Women's University; invited scholar at NINJAL), Hirotake MATSUMOTO, Harumi MITSUI (NINJAL), Jo NAKAHARA (University of the Ryukyus), Yumi NAKAJIMA (Hitotsubashi University), Satoshi NISHIOKA (Okinawa International University), Tetsuo NITTA (Kanazawa University), Takuichiro ONISHI (NINJAL), Kayoko SHIMOJI (Okinawa International University), Michinori SHIMOJI (Gunma Prefectural Women's University; invited scholar at NINJAL), Koko TAKEDA (temporary researcher at NINJAL), Yukinori TAKUBO (Kyoto University; invited scholar at NINJAL), Zendo UWANO (invited scholar at NINJAL).