

Once upon a Time in South Izu: The expression of time in the Hachijō folktales

The Hachijō language (simply called *Shima-kotoba*, ‘island speech’, by its native speakers) is a critically endangered minority language of Japan, traditionally spoken in the southern half of the Izu Archipelago, roughly 250 km south-east of Tokyo. Although it was for a long time considered a dialect of Japanese, its classification has been highly debated since the 1930s, and the current majority tendency is to consider it an independent language (YAMADA, 2010; IANNUCCI, 2019), possibly belonging to the Eastern branch of Japonic languages (KUPCHIK, 2011: 7-9).

Hachijō is now critically endangered, as it is quickly getting replaced by Tokyo Japanese, the only language of education and of the media. Thus, it was included in 2009 in the UNESCO’s *Atlas of the World’s Languages in danger*, alongside Ainu and six of the Ryukyuan languages (MOSELEY et al., 2009). However, its use remains culturally important for local populations, especially through its use in oral traditions, such as folk songs, and folktales, in which the local language plays an important and iconic role (ASANUMA, 1963; KANEDA & NAITŌ, 2002).

Those tales were transmitted orally for generations, and are therefore highly codified. For instance, they rely a lot on formulae, such as ‘*Mukashi-mukashi, ō-mukashi, sono mata-mukashi no mata-mukashi...*’ (‘A long time ago, a very long time ago, even a longer time ago before this long time ago...’), which is a customary introduction sentence, designed to attract the audience’s attention, and to settle a different and fictional time; that is an imaginary past, that is intrinsically different from the historical time, but it is not completely fictional either, as it ‘stand[s] in metaphoric relation to the ‘real’’ (CONRAD, 2014: 334).

Moreover, the codification of folktales is even perceptible on a grammatical scale. For instance, those tales are usually entirely narrated on a **hearsay mode** (occasionally inferential), in the **past tense**, and are recited in only one utterance and without any interaction of the storyteller with the audience. Thus, they appear to be syntactically made of **only one long sentence**, in which countless smaller concatenated phrases are embedded. Therefore, the tense-aspect-mood system of folktales is remarkably different from the normal speech (KANEDA, 2007), or to other genres such as folk songs (KANEDA & OKUYAMA, 1991).

Besides, it has long been noted that the tense-aspect-mood and the evidentiality systems of Hachijō are, even in the average speech, remarkably different from a lot of other Japonic languages.

As a matter of fact, due to the preservation of some archaisms (KANEDA & OKUYAMA, 1991), to various local innovations (KANEDA, 2012), as well as to recent standard influence from standard Japanese (KUDŌ, 2000, KANEDA & HOLDA, 2005), the Hachijō language features a very complex system, with a large variety of marks and forms (KANEDA, 2001a, b, c), and frequently overlapping and entangled categories (KANEDA, 1996a and 1996b). As a consequence, the categories used to describe classical and standard Japanese are often difficult to apply to Hachijō, and often cause some confusion between diachronic and synchronic analysis.

Thus, this presentation will first be dedicated to a brief general description of the expression of time and the tense-aspect-mood system in ‘normal’ Hachijō, in comparison with standard Japanese. This preliminary presentation will try to illustrate what distinctions are considered primordial within the language, and what kind of markings are used to express them.

Then, in a second part, we will focus more specifically on folktales, in order to study how they differ from the ‘normal’ speech, and especially how the tense-aspect system gets combined with evidentiality and phrase concatenation constraints.

Prospective References

- ASANUMA Ryōji. 1963 [reed. 2016]. *Hachijō no minwa*. Tōkyō: Miraisha.
- CONRAD, JoAnn. 2014. 'The Storied Time of Folklore', *Western Folklore*, v. 73, No. 2/3, pp. 323-352.
- IANNUCCI, David. 2019. *The Hachijō Language of Japan: Phonology and Historical Development*. PhD dissertation. Mānoa: University of Hawai'i.
- KANEDA Akihiro:
 - 1996a. *Ren'yōkei no shūshi yōhō o megutte: Hachijō-hōgen no bunpō genshō kara*, *Chiba University Departmental Bulletin*, Chiba University International Student Center, pp. 77-84.
 - 1996b. *Kanjō kankaku ni okeru kyokumen no torae-kata – Hachijō-jima Mitsune hōgen wo rei ni*, *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, 61, No. 1, pp. 77-87.
 - 2001a. *Hōgen bunpō kenkyū ni okeru tensu - asupekuto kenkyū - Hachijō hōgen no genzai shinkō to dōji-sei o megutte*, *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*, 46, No. 2, pp. 82-88.
 - 2001b. *Hachijō hōgen no genjō to ikutsu no bunpō genzō o megutte*, in SANADA Shinji. *Nihon no shōmetsu ni hin shita hōgen ni kan suru chōsa kenkyū*, 1, pp. 33-45. Suita: Faculty of Informatics, Ōsaka Gakuin University.
 - 2001c. *Hachijō hōgen dōshi kiso kenkyū*, Tōkyō: Kasama shōin.
 - 2002. *Hachijō hōgen no danwa shiryō to bunpō kaisetsu*, in SANADA Shinji (ed.), *Shōmetsu ni hin shita hōgen gōhō no kinkyū chōsa kenkyū*, 1, pp. 115-264.
 - 2007. *Minwa no bunpō - Hachijō-jima no 'ichimon dake no minwa'*, *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, 72, No. 1, pp. 184-189.
 - 2012. *Hachijō hōgen ni okeru arata na henka to jōdaigo*, *Gengo kenkyū*, 142, pp. 119–142
- KANEDA Akihiro & NAITŌ Shigeru. 2002. *Hachijō hōgen no ikita kotoba: minwa, densetsu, danwa: taiyaku tsuki*. Tōkyō: Kasama shōin.
- KANEDA Akihiro & OKUYAMA Kumao, 1990. *Hachijō-jima Mitsune hōgen dōshi no keitairon – Asupekuto o megutte*, *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, v. 55, No. 7, pp. 133-142.
- KANEDA Akihiro & HOLDA, Martin. 2005. 'The tense-aspect system and evidentiality in the Hachijō dialect', in *Lingua Posnaniensis* 47, pp. 75-86. Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk.
- KUDŌ Mayumi. 2000. *Hachijō hōgen no asupekuto, tensu, mūdo, Handai nihongo kenkyū*, pp. 1-20.
- KUPCHIK, John E. 2011. *A Grammar of the Eastern Old Japanese dialects*. PhD dissertation. Mānoa: University of Hawai'i.
- MOSELEY, Christopher et al. (ed.). 2009. *Atlas of the world's languages in danger*. Paris: UNESCO Publications.
- YAMADA Heiemon. 2010. *Kieteiku shimakotoba: Hachijōgo no keishō to sonzoku wo negatte*. Tōkyō: Ikuhō-sha.