

# How much visibility do endangered Japonic varieties have in Japan?

– *The example of Hachijō*

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# Introduction

# Introduction (1) – What is Hachijō?

- Hachijō (locally simply called 島言葉 *Shima-kotoba* 'island speech') is an endangered **minority language** of Japan, originally spoken on the **South Izu islands**:



Distribution of  
Hachijō

# Introduction (1) – What is Hachijō?

- Hachijō belongs to the **Japonic language family** (日流語族).
- **Its classification within Japonic is debated** (*cf* KUPCHIK, 2011:7, vs PELLARD, 2018:2).
- It was long considered **a dialect of Japanese** (*Hachijō-hōgen*), but is now usually treated as **a separate language** (*Hachijō-go*).

# Introduction (2) – Current status

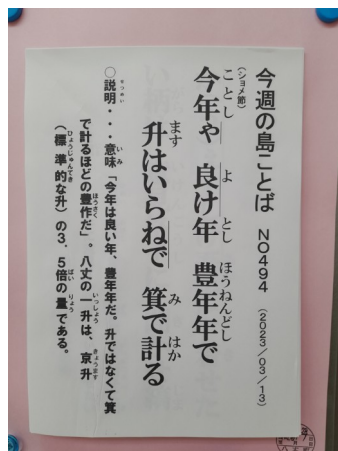
- Hachijō was **included in UNESCO's *Atlas of the world languages in danger*** (MOSELEY, 2009), alongside 7 other languages of Japan:



Map of the 8 endangered languages of Japan

# Introduction (2) – Current status

- This acknowledgement by UNESCO led to **local efforts toward its preservation** (MOTEGI, 2013).



'Word of the week',  
displayed in Hachijō-jima  
public buildings



Kawakami Ayako reading a Hachijō folktale  
© Hachijō-jima Styles, 2021

# Introduction (3) – Linguistic landscape

- In this perspective, we can wonder what **visibility** Hachijō has in its native territory.
- For this, we can study the **linguistic landscape** of Hachijō-jima and Aogashima.

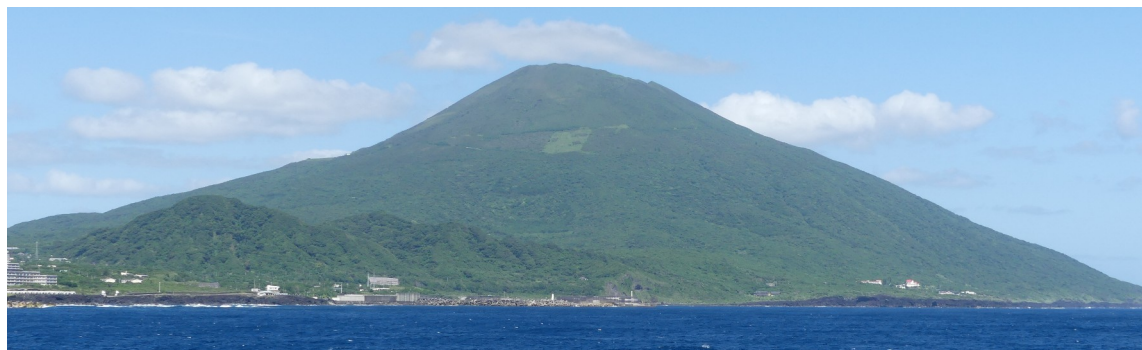


Public sign on display at the Hachijō airport

*ojari yare* 'welcome'

# Introduction (3) – Linguistic landscape

- To the best of my knowledge, **such a study was never conducted about Hachijō.**
- It is based on photographic data collected during my **fieldwork**, in **March, April and June 2023.**





# (1) Linguistic landscapes in Japan

# (1) – Linguistic landscape in Japan

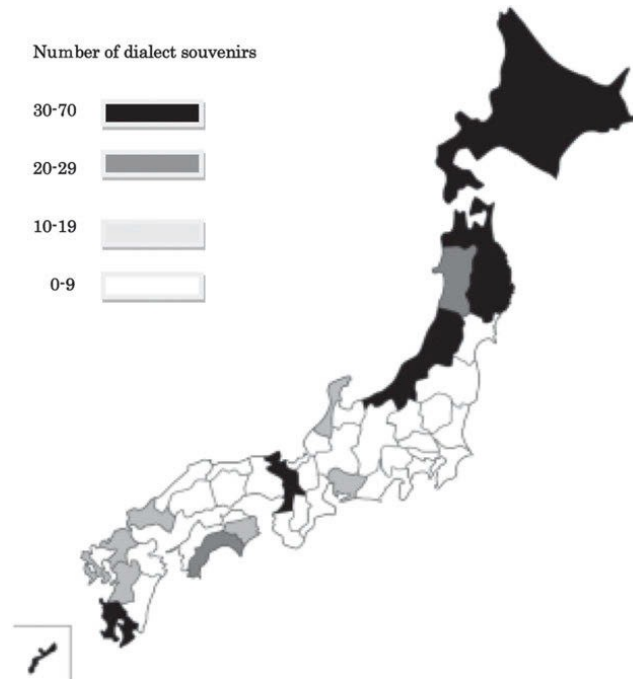
- The notion of 'linguistic landscape' belongs to **sociolinguistics** and '**econolinguistics**' (INOUE, 2005).
- The idea is to **quantify** and **analyse** the occurrences of languages and dialects in a given place (LANDRY & BOURHIS 1997).
- Its goal is to understand the **sociolinguistic dynamics** of a given community (GORTER, MARTEN & VAN MENSEL 2012).

# (1) – Linguistic landscape in Japan

- Japan was **one of the earliest fields** for the linguistic landscape (LL) approach (BACKHAUS, 2019:158).
- Before that, the LL approach in Japan was prefigured by **linguistic geography** (ISHIHARA et al., 2019:28; BACKHAUS, 2019:*ibid.*). Therefore, it tends to adopt both a **quantitative** and a **qualitative** analysis.
- Interestingly, the LL studies in Japan were **originally conducted about English, and later about immigration languages**, rather than about native languages (BACKHAUS, 2007).

# (1) – Linguistic landscape in Japan

- **INOUE Fumio** (2000; 2012; 2022) added a **diatopic**, **diachronic** and **economic** analysis to the LL approach in Japan.
- Sadly, he did not include Hachijō to his studies.



Map of 'dialect souvenirs' (*cf infra*) in Japan

(INOUE, 2022:125)

# (1) – Linguistic landscape in Japan

- So far, LL approaches in Japan have been conducted for:
  - **the Daitō islands** (LONG, 2009; LONG & SAITŌ, 2022)
  - **the Ryūkyū archipelago** (HEINRICH, 2010 & 2016; LONG, 2010; MIYAHIRA & PETRUCCI, 2017...)
  - **Hokkaidō** (ASAHI, 2011; LONG & SAITŌ, 2022)
  - **Kansai** (ŌNISHI, 2011; TAKAGI, 2011)
  - **a few other regions** (YAMADA, 2010; KISHIE, 2011; NAKAI, 2011; LONG & IMAMURA, 2012; LONG & SAITŌ 2022...)

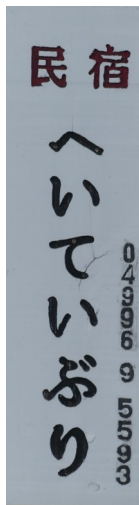
## (2) The South Izu linguistic landscape

## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- **What?**
- Dialect signs in the South Izu include all kinds of displays **with various functions**, such as **public and private signs**, but also **company names, commercial products and souvenirs**, or even food and drink **menu items**.



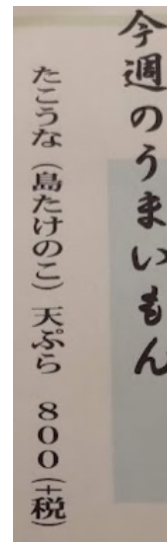
A welcome sign  
(*ojari yare* 'come in') (*heitei-buri* 'long time no see')



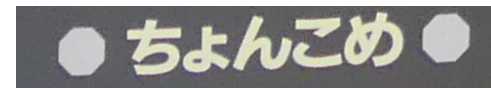
A hotel name



A souvenir accessory  
(*yoke ko* 'pretty girl')



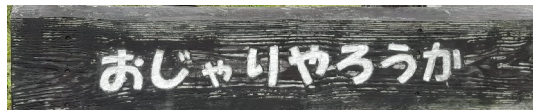
A food menu  
(*takouna* 'bamboo shoot')



A museum sign  
(*chonkome* 'young cow')

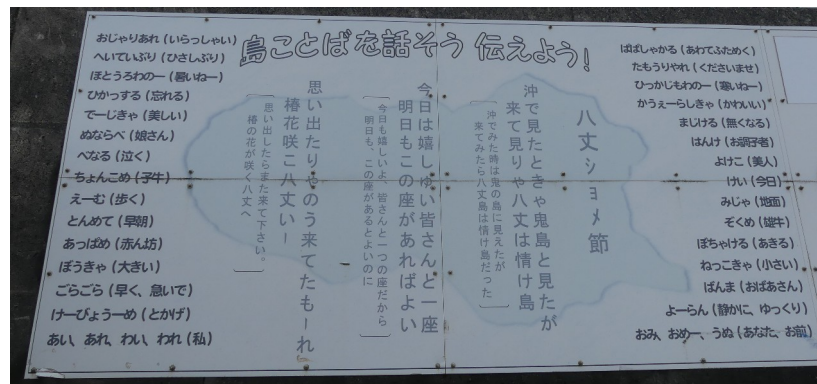
## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- *How much?*
- Overall, I counted **roughly 60 unique dialect signs** in Hachijō-jima and Aogashima.



A short dialect sign in the Fureai farm

(*ojari yarō ka* 'hey there!' [lit.: 'did you arrive [safely]?'])



A long dialect sign in Hachijō-jima's main harbour (Sokodo)



## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- This excludes signs that can be seen **in several places** (such as tourism maps, company names, event names, advertisements, commercial products, or restaurant menu items).
- If added, it can be estimated that there are **at least about 200 dialect signs** in Hachijō-jima and Aogashima.



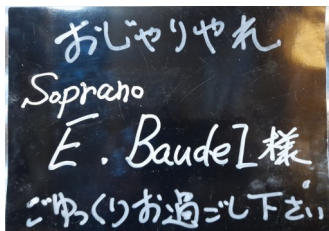
*Ojari yare* 'welcome' sign, found on top of every tourism map



A very common ad for an NGO called *chonkome* 'baby cow'

## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- The most common dialect sign is by far **ojari yare** 'welcome / come in' (equivalent to Tokyo Japanese いらっしやいませ):

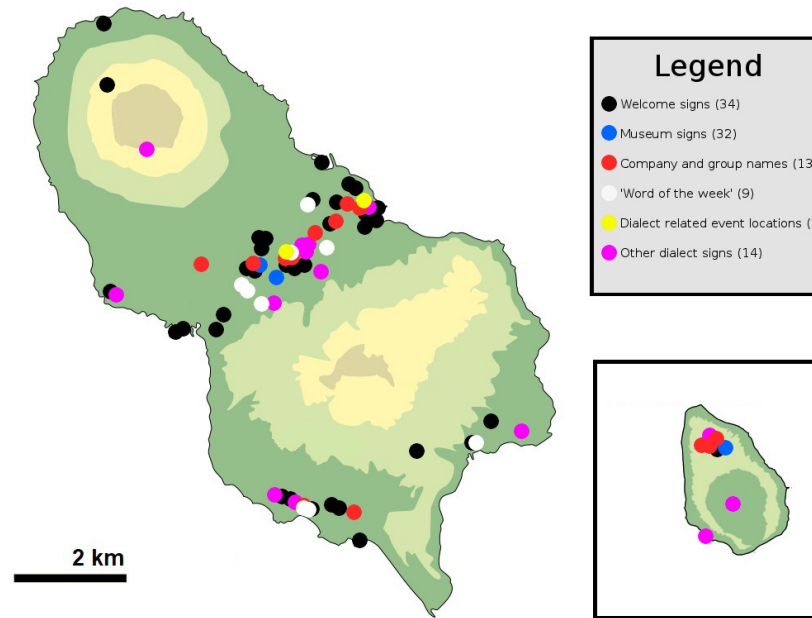


## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- Other commonly seen dialect items include:
  - **formulas**, e.g.: *heitei-buri* 'long time no see', *agari yare* 'have some food / drink', *mērarai* 'here I am / sorry' (dial.)
  - **food items**, e.g.: *kanmo* 'sweet potato', *kabutsu* 'bitter orange', *takouna* 'bamboo shoot'
  - **words expressing cuteness or endearment**: *menarabe* 'young girl', *yoke ko* 'pretty one', *appame* 'baby', *chonkome* 'baby cow'...
  - **one geological word**: *hingya* 'fumarole' (*cf infra*)

## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- ***Where?***
- They are unsurprisingly primarily found in more densely populated areas.



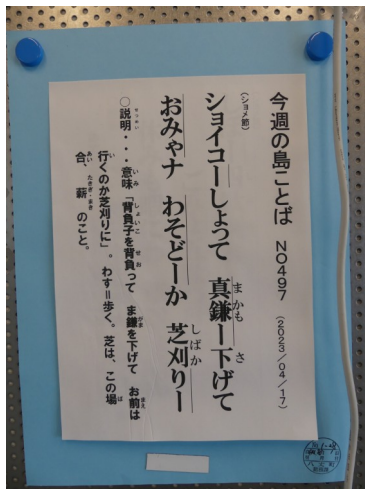
Partial map of the dialect signs in the South Izu islands

## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

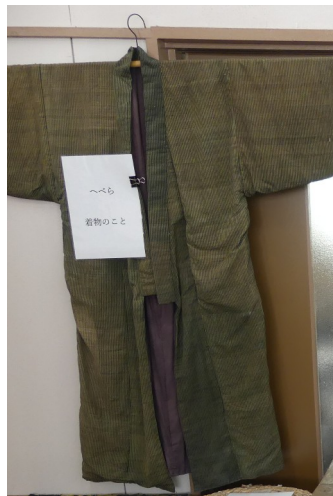
- ***By whom? / For whom?***
- There are two main types of dialect signs in the South Izu:
  - signs that are primarily **targetted toward tourists**
  - signs that are **targetted toward locals**, or **toward the general public** without distinction

## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- Signs that do not specifically target tourists can mostly be found in **libraries**, **schools** and **public buildings** (e.g. town halls), as well as in **museums** and **visitor centres**.
- They are mostly (more than 80%) funded by **public institutions**.
- They mostly use *hiragana* or *katakana* (esp. in museums), but *kanji* with *furigana* can also occur.



'Word of the week', displayed in every public school of Hachijō-jima, as well as in the town hall



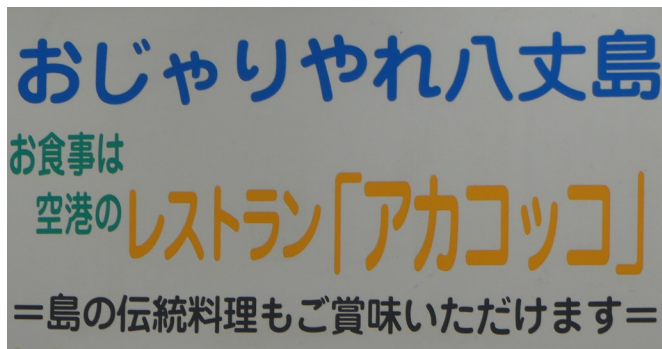
へべら

Traditional clothes displayed with the dialect tag *hebera*, Aogashima Village Library



## (2) – The South Izu linguistic landscape

- Signs that are visibly targetted toward tourists are mostly found on **tourism maps**, inside **shops, hotels** and **bars**, and in **transportation hubs** (harbours & airport).
- They are **funded by public or private organisations in almost equal proportions**.
- Their number seems to be **increasing**.
- Although *hiragana* are dominant, *rōmaji* are also quite common.



a welcome sign, in the  
Hachijō airport restaurant



name of hotel in Nakanogō:  
*wagai* 'my home'

# (3) The emerging of a 'dialect branding'?

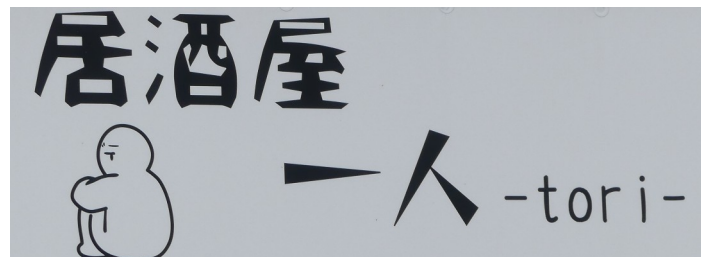


### (3) – ‘Dialect branding’

- The Hachijō language seems to be **increasingly used for commercial purposes**.
- During my fieldwork, I noticed Hachijō forms in at least:
  - **19 commercial products**
  - **13 group, company or organisation names**



a cow cheese: *menalabe* ‘young girl’



a bar: *tori* ‘alone’

### (3) – ‘Dialect branding’

- In several instances, this commercial use of the language is made **explicit** for customers, through a **note** and/or a **translation**:



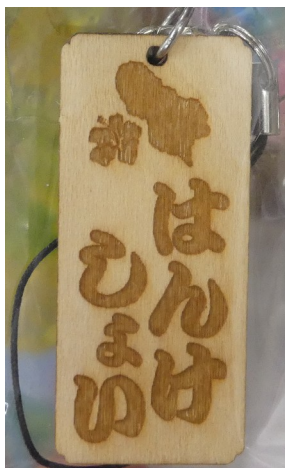
a doll: *appa-me* 'baby', translated  
as 赤ん坊 *akanbō*



a beauty cream: *yokeco* 'pretty one',  
translated as 美人 *bijin*

### (3) – ‘Dialect branding’

- In other cases, **the language itself is part of the product** (Inoue, 2000 & 2022 calls those products ‘**dialect souvenirs**’ *hōgen-miyage*).
- **Most of those products appear to be recent.**



an accessory: *hanke-shoi* ‘funny guy’



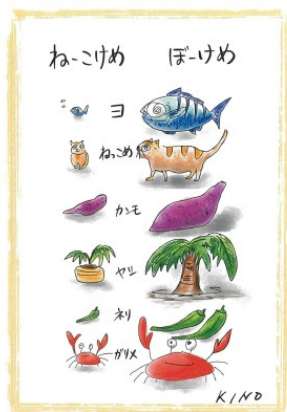
*Mērarai* ('here I am') cookies, with the inscription *nou ojari yare* 'do come back!'

### (3) – ‘Dialect branding’

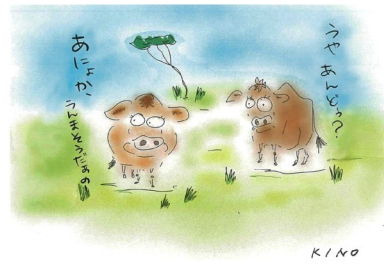
- A good example of dialect souvenirs is **Matsuoka Kino’s drawings**.
- Her drawings are featured on no less than **4 different types of items** (magnets, stickers, postcards, folders) + **1 book** since 2018.



a magnet  
*gora-gora* ‘quickly’



a sticker with various  
Hachijō words



a postcard with Hachijō dialogue:  
- *Uya, an dō?* (Oh, what's that?)  
- *Anyoka, unma-sou dā nou!*  
(That looks tasty, somehow!)



a folder with various Hachijō  
words



Matsuoka Kino, *Hanke na shima-kotoba*  
[The funny island language] book, 2022

### (3) – ‘Dialect branding’

- Finally, in one case, the local language seems to act as a **designation of origin**: *hingya* salt (lit. ‘fumarole salt’)



*hingya* salt



*hingya* salt water



*hingya* salt *rāmen*

### (3) – ‘Dialect branding’

- It seems to me that Hachijō is being gradually associated with branding, in an attempt to develop **cultural tourism**, or even **linguistic tourism** (*cf* LONG, 2012 for a similar phenomenon in Ogasawara).
- This seems to be an illustration of INOUE’s theory of the value of minority languages (2012:87). Namely, **the economic value of a dialect is correlated with its ‘scarcity value’**.
- In the case of Hachijō, **its endangered status (acquired in 2009) made it look more valuable** to the locals, and to tourists, leading to its use in various commercial items.

# Conclusion



# Conclusion

- In spite of its endangered status, **Hachijō does have some visibility in its native territory.**
- Similarly to other minority languages of Japan, **its visibility seems to have been increasing** in the recent year, with **private companies playing an important role** in this regard.
- The recognition of a value in the traditional language seems to be accompanied by **an increase in its commercial use.**
- The increased visibility of Hachijō is **unlikely to lead to its preservation or revitalisation**, but it might lead to the **retention of some iconic words.**



# Conclusion

- Several questions need to be tackled by future research, such as the **comparison with other dialects and minority languages of Japan**.
- A more thorough study of the **chronology** of those signs could also provide valuable insights on the evolution of the perception of Hachijō.
- Finally, **further materials could also be included** to this study (such as food and drink menus, boat names, dialect toponyms, Hachijō dialect signs outside of the South Izu, etc.)

おかげさまで！  
/ Thank you very much!

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