

Preface

The present work is a slightly revised version of my PhD thesis submitted to the Australian National University in 2008. It is a descriptive grammar of Irabu Ryukyuan, a Southern Ryukyuan language spoken on Irabu Island, which is one of the Miyako Islands, Okinawa, Japan. Irabu is an endangered Japonic language, with approximately 2,000 elder native speakers. The present work serves as the first descriptive grammar of this language.

It is a shared concern among Japanese linguists that all the local languages in Japan (Ryukyuan, Ainu and the mainland dialects of Japanese) are in an imminent danger of extinction. Many linguists are eager to publish books or organise symposia in which they continuously warn that every dialect will die out soon and make a valiant proposal that someone must describe and document the endangered local languages before they die out. However, the proposal always sounds like dealing with someone else's problem. Who does 'someone' refer to? When will the proposed action start? And in what way? It seems to me that what we must do is *not* to keep publishing books with similar and abstract slogans about language endangerment again and again. What *we* must do *now* is to take an immediate action, and one important task among others is to write a comprehensive grammar of each endangered local language in Japan. I am fully aware that the present work is not at all an ideal example, but I am certain that the present work is one concrete action against the language endangerment in Japan.

The present work has been brought to fruition through the help and support of countless people. My deepest gratitude goes to the people on Irabu Island who taught me their language with patience, eagerness, and generosity: Kimiko Namihira, Setsuko Sugama, Kani Aguni, Koichi Taketomi, Hatsue Ameku, Hiroyasu Sawada, Chiko Shiokawa, Yukio Okuhama, Takeshi Tokuyama, Asako Shimoji, Miyo Karimata, and Yoshiko Kawamitsu. My fieldwork was also supported by many other people whose name I do not reveal here.

My deep thank also goes to my supervisors of the linguistics department of ANU, Emeritus Professor Andrew Pawley and Emeritus Professor Malcolm Ross, who gave me continuous support and encouragement,

without which I would have never been able to complete the thesis and publish this book. Professor Nicholas Evans also helped me at various times, giving me a lot of insightful comments on early drafts of my thesis.

The present work has been refined through countless discussions and interactions with the following great researchers at various occasions: Professor Shigehisa Karimata, Professor Yukinori Takubo, Professor Nobuko Kibe, Professor Hirotake Matsumoto, Professor Akihiro Kaneda, Professor Satoshi Nishioka, Professor Shinsho Miyara, Dr. Rumiko Shinzato, Dr. Leon Serafim, Dr. Alexander Vovin, Dr. Wayne Lawrence, Dr. Jo Nakahara, Professor Daniel Long, Dr. Shinji Ogawa, Dr. Yuto Niinaga, Ms. Reiko Aso, Dr. Masahiro Yamada, Dr. Kayoko Shimoji, Dr. Thomas Pellard, Dr. Yuka Hayashi, Professor Shoichi Iwasaki, Professor Tsuyoshi Ono, Mr. Hiroyuki Nakama, Mr. Kenan Celik, Ms. Yulia Koloskova, Dr. Aleksandra Yorosz, Dr. Hayato Aoi, Dr. Natsuko Nakagawa, Dr. Satomi Matayoshi, Dr. Nana Toyama, Dr. Rihito Shirata, Dr. Hiromi Shigeno, Ms. Akiko Tokunaga, Dr. Gijs van der Lubbe, Dr. Christopher Davis, Professor Matthew Dryer, Professor Tasaku Tsunoda, Professor Masayoshi Shibatani, Professor Toshihide Nakayama, Professor Honoré Watanabe, Dr. Yusuke Hiratsuka, Dr. Soichiro Harada, Dr. Shiro Takeuchi, Dr. Michio Matsumaru, Dr. Kunihiko Kuroki, Dr. Noboru Yoshioka, Dr. Shiho Ebihara, Dr. Ayako Shiba, Dr. Shengkai Zhang, Dr. Yosuke Igarashi, Dr. Tatsuya Hirako, Dr. Tomohide Kinuhata, Professor Kiyoko Somiya, Professor Ritsuko Kikusawa and Dr. Masayuki Onishi.

Before I started my PhD study at ANU, I studied at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) as an MA student. Professor Shinjiro Kazama was my supervisor. His approach of linguistics, which is characterised by a fieldwork-based description of a lesser-known language in a cross-linguistic perspective, is exactly what I pursued in the present work. I would like to express my gratitude to him for his dedicated supervision during the two years of MA and for his continuous support and encouragement until now.

The publication of the present work has been made possible by the publication grant of Studies in the Humanities, Faculty of Humanities, Kyushu University. A deep thank goes to Ms. Yuki Okuno of Kyushu University Press. I would also like to express my gratitude to the two anonymous external examiners of the present work for publication. Of course, all errors and shortcomings are mine alone.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my family from the bottom of my heart. My wife, Mika, gave me strong and continuous support during the process of the revision of my thesis for publication. In fact, I would not have thought of publishing this grammar without her encouragement. My

father, Junji, was an important consultant of this grammar. I am proud of being the writer of the grammar of his own language, which is seriously endangered.

M. S.

November, 2016

Listening to AC/DC's 'It's a long way to the top'