Ikema Ryukyuan: Investigating Past Experience and the Current State through Life Narratives

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Moore Hall 258
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Ikema is a language variety spoken in three communities on and near Miyako Island in Okinawa. The Miyako language, of which Ikema is one dialect, has recently been designated by UNESCO as ‘definitely endangered’. Currently, only people in their 60s or older are said to speak Ikema fluently. As part of an Ikema documentation project, we have been investigating past experience and everyday use of Ikema in order to determine the current state of Ikema and what factors may have contributed to it. We have conducted in-depth interviews of 13 community members, who are between 44 and 69 years old. They all attended local elementary and junior high schools during the post-war period when Standard Japanese was heavily promoted, leading to the use of infamous hoogenfuda ‘dialect placard’ at school. Partly due to this vigorous language policy, by the time they finished middle school, most of our interviewees had become fluent in Japanese. When they grew up, the TV broadcast (often known as ‘cultural nerve gas’) began. Although primary care givers had influence on the acquisition of the dialect, speakers’ general life styles play a more significant role in maintenance of the dialect. I will also discuss the role of speakers’ gender and changing marriage patterns, as well as the role of religious and cultural events in maintaining the language.


The talk is open to the public, and light refreshments will be served.
For further information, please contact DongKwan Kong (dongkwan@hawaii.edu) or L. Julie Jiang (lijiang@hawaii.edu).