Title of Project **Comparative historical research on Ryukyuan by using linguistic family trees**

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Research Area : Linguistics

Keyword : Ryukyuan languages, genealogical study of language, history of Japanese

【Purpose and Background of the Research】

Ryukyuan is in a sister relationship with Japanese, and is thus expected to play an important role in the historical study of Japanese. However, previous works focused mainly on comparisons between the Central dialect of the Nara period and a limited number of Ryukyuan languages, and no major attempt has been made to examine the surprising internal diversity of Ryukyuan and to uncover how it emerged.

【Research Methods】

This project aims to reveal how Ryukyuan, Kyūshū and Hachijō diverged from Proto-Japonic and how Ryukyuan diverged into various local varieties by constructing the following three different types of family trees:

1. Trees based on 200 lexemes from 600 Ryukyuan varieties, Kyūshū dialects and Hachijō.
2. Trees based on 1,100 lexemes from regionally balanced 100 Ryukyuan varieties, Kyūshū dialects and Hachijō.
3. Trees based on approx. 200,000 lexemes in total from ten dictionaries of Ryukyuan varieties, two dictionaries of Kyūshū dialects, and the Old Japanese dictionary 'Jidaibetsu Kokugo Daijiten Jōdaihen'.
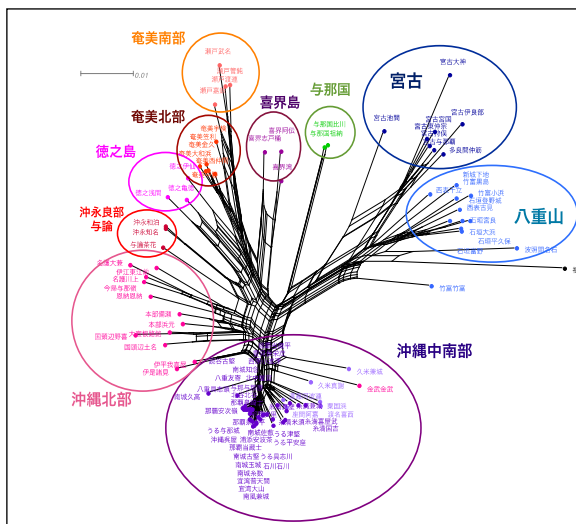

Figure 1. Neighbor-Net network based on 72 words

We have developed a method for quantifying linguistic features whereby a family tree can be generated even from a single lexeme. The method has been verified by comparing it with the findings of linguistic geography. Our method is applicable to different dimensions depending on whether our concern is phonology, semantics or grammar. The current approach thus enables us to visualize multidimensional processes of language change by taking into consideration the three major dimensions of language structure.
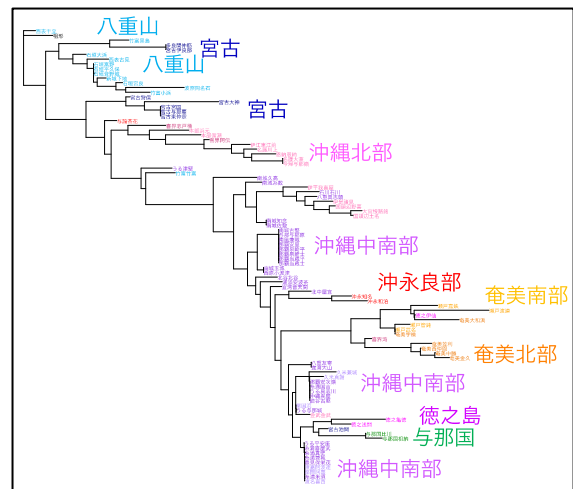

Figure 2. Rooted tree based on the words with initial p

【Expected Research Achievements and Scientific Significance】

The comparative linguistic research based on the above-mentioned tree model introduces a new methodology to Japanese historical linguistics.

【Publications Relevant to the Project】

Karimata S. (2016) Ryūkyū-hōgen no Gengo-chirigaku to Dōteki-keitōju. *Shīkwāsā no Chie.* pp113-144, Kyoto University Press.

【Term of Project】 FY2017-2021
【Budget Allocation】 135,600 Thousand Yen
【Homepage Address and Other Contact Information】 Not yet available