

# Development of a Linguistic Ecosystem: Creation and Management of Linguistic Resources on the Ogasawara Islands

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## Abstract

The Ogasawara Islands provide interesting examples of ways in which a linguistic ecosystem develops. The natural sciences offer tools, concepts and terminology to help us make sense of an ever-evolving island language. This paper, focuses on processes through which such a linguistic ecosystem expands, and proposes the specific categories of naming, coinage and conceptualization. It also examines ways in which island language can be managed, as other resources are, for the benefit of the islanders.

**Key words :** coinage, conceptualization, island languages, language contact, naming

## 1. Aim of this paper

In this paper, I examine the language situation of the Ogasawara Islands from the perspective of this special issue, entitled *Sustainable Management of Oceanic Island Ecosystems: Lessons from a Natural World Heritage Site, the Ogasawara Islands*. The keywords sustainability, management and ecosystems may also be applied to language.

From the “Sustainability” aspect, one could discuss whether or not the local words and phrases grouped together under the name “Ogasawara kotoba” are being passed down to younger generation speakers (i.e., whether the local language variety is being “sustained” or not). Such sustainability questions are outlined in the final two chapters of Long (2007) and expanded in the last five chapters of Long (2018), so I will not rehash those discussions here.

This paper will focus first on the ways in which the linguistic and cultural “ecosystem” of Ogasawara has formed the local language variety, and second on how local linguistic resources are being used, i.e., the “management” of those resources. Since the object of study is linguistics rather than the biological sciences, my discussion will necessarily take liberties in the analogies made with natural science terms. From the standpoint that an “ecosystem” is one in which organisms are born and die and over the long term evolve to fit their environment, I will look at the genesis of new linguistic forms on Ogasawara. I propose categorizing this linguistic processes as naming, coinage and conceptualization.

I must clarify at this point that my usage of some terms in this paper will diverge from established usages in linguistics. Firstly, I should point out that the term “language management” already exists as a field of sociolinguistics advanced by Jiří V. Neustupný (see for example Neustupný, 2012) and others, with its own academic association, the Society of Language Management (<https://lmtjapan.wordpress.com/>). Secondly, other linguists, namely Peter Mühlhäusler, have written entire volumes outlining the new discipline of “Linguistic Ecology” (Mühlhäusler, 1996) and academic organizations exist to explore this field as well (The International Ecolinguistics Association, 2019). My observations below, however, using the terms “management” and “ecosystem” apply to the linguistic situation of Ogasawara based on two decades of linguistic fieldwork there, and are not based on the frameworks of these two disciplines.

As one initial step towards understanding an ecosystem, biologists identify and catalog species. One step in understanding a linguistic system is to identify individual words and catalog them into a lexicon. Other contrasts can be drawn between biology and linguistics. Researchers in the former have a keen interest in labels, but largely as a meta-analytical means towards the ends of understanding species. For linguists, this labeling itself is an object of research. Biologists label (name) a new species by themselves according to the pre-ordained system of classification (biosystematics, i.e., taxonomics) when a researcher discovers it; linguists analyze (in addition to things like grammar and pronunciation) the

labels (vocabulary) which develop social processes within a linguistic community and reflect folk taxonomies. In the next section, I will propose three processes (sub-categories) by which the Ogasawara linguistic system has been expanded: naming, coinage, and conceptualization.

## 2. Naming

“Naming” is simply the process under which a thing acquires a label. In linguistic terms, when naming occurs, our island lexicon expands by one additional word. In a natural ecosystem, we could imagine the number of species increasing, for example, from 781 to 782 through the introduction of an invasive species or through the slow processes of evolution. In linguistic terms, we could think of our island lexicon (dictionary) increasing from 781 to 782 entry words. “Naming” is only one of a handful of processes which give birth to new words and thus expand a linguistic system.

Some examples of “naming” occur through the borrowing of words from another language. One example of this is *biide-biide*, the name of an endemic species of ‘coral tree’ *Erythrina boninensis*. The word derives from the Hawaiian *wili-wili* or *vili-vili* (*E. sandwicensis*), the name of a similar species endemic to those islands. When the first European (including American) and Pacific Islander settlers came to Ogasawara in 1830, only the latter group had a possible name for this tree.

Some other examples of “naming” also make use of preexistent words but combine them into new combinations. On Ogasawara, we see this process in the terms *shimazushi* and *nanyō-odori*. *Shimazushi* is the name given to a unique variety of sushi developed on the islands, in which sashimi (usually wahoo fish) is soaked in soy sauce and flavored with mustard (rather than wasabi as in mainland Japan). *Nanyō-odori* refers to a kind of dancing which developed in Micronesia and had no previous name in Japanese.

## 3. Naming and Coinage

Some instances of naming occur through, not just the compounding of pre-existent words, but also through the creation of new words, i.e., “coinage.” As seen in Fig. 1,

some words fit into both categories.

One Ogasawara word which fits the definition of both naming and coinage is *guriin pepe*, the name of a local bioluminescent mushroom (*Mycena chlorohos*). *Guriin pepe* are tiny and white, growing wild in the island’s jungles and glowing faintly green at night. They are well known even among Ogasawara’s tourists. *Guriin pepe* is one of those rare cases in language history where we can point to the exact individual who named a thing (for details of this and others etymologies, see Long & Hashimoto, 2005).

Another such term is *akapoppo*, coined as a nickname for an endemic bird (‘redheaded wood pigeon’ *Columba janthina nitens*). This critically endangered bird’s official name is *akagashira-karasubato*, so a more easily memorable term was needed for increasing public awareness. This is another case where we know the coiner’s identity. The name was created by the Institute of Boninology’s Hajime Suzuki.

It is not only biological organisms which need and acquire labels. High schools and colleges in Japan hold yearly school festivals and Ogasawara High School’s is called the *Biide Sai*. *Biide* is a shortening of *biide-biide*, combined with *sai*, the word for ‘festival.’

Of course, few coinages are truly 100% new. The first elements of the compound words *guriin pepe* and *akapoppo* are the Japanese color terms for ‘green’ and ‘red.’ The name *akapoppo* is reminiscent of *akakokko* (‘Izu thrush’ *Turdus celaenops*), a different species found on the neighboring Izu Islands and the naming reflects onomatopoeic associations with “hato” as in Japanese children’s song, “Poppoppo, hato poppo.”

One word which has no obvious antecedents is *kaka*, a term coined around 1987 to refer to a newly created percussion instrument (a hollowed out log used as a drum). The term seems to be onomatopoeic, i.e., representing the sound of tapping a log.

In some cases the details of the naming process have yet to be uncovered. The Ogasawara Islands were not inhabited by humans until 1830, so their history is less than 200 years. Just the same, 190 years is plenty of time when it comes to forgetting who named things. The bird names *wirowiro* ‘petrel’ *Pterodroma hypoleuca* and *kiikii* ‘rock thrush’ *Monticola solitaries*, as well as the shellfish *umpōshi* ‘cowry’ *Mauritia mauritiana* were bestowed so

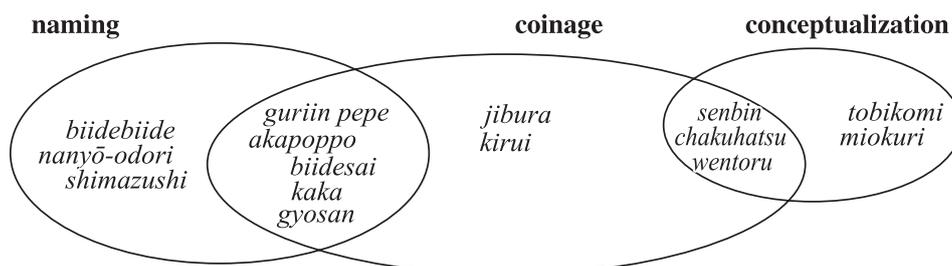


Fig. 1 Word creation through naming, coinage and conceptualization.

long ago that no one remembers why, how, when or where these names came about.

One word formed from parts of pre-existent words is *gyosan*, a type of sandal worn by almost all residents of Ogasawara. Their design is different from the beach sandals worn on mainland Japan. They have become so iconic as part of the Ogasawara brand that even when sold in mainland Tokyo or in Okinawa they are marketed as *Ogasawara gyosan*. The word is a blend of *gyogyō* (fishing) and *sandaru* (sandal).

Although this term is similar to the compound words *shima zushi* and *nanyō-odori* discussed above, *gyosan* combines only parts of words (bound morphemes) rather than whole words (independent morphemes) as in those cases. What this means is that a person who had never heard the former terms could nonetheless figure out the meaning. Any Japanese knows what the four words *sushi*, *shima*, *odori* and *nanyō* mean. On the other hand, the words *gyo* and *san* do not exist on their own. For this reason, *shima zushi* and *nanyō-odori* are not regarded as coinage, but *gyosan* is.

#### 4. Coinage Only

The common trait in the “naming” processes examined here is that all the names came into being in response to the questions “What do you call that food?,” “What do you call that dance?,” etc.

There are however, cases of coinage which do not fit these notions of naming. These are shown in the middle of Fig. 1. The term on Ogasawara corresponding to the reflexive first person plural pronoun ‘ourselves’ is *jibura*. It would be *jibun-tachi* in Standard Japanese. An island term for ‘clothing’ is *kirui*, which probably comes from a blend of *kirumono* and *irui*. At any rate neither of these words would have been in a dictionary. These are coinages based on their constructions, but the former term is just a pronoun and the latter is just a generic word for clothing. In the sense that nobody would look at clothes and ask “what do you call those?,” the words can not be said to have been created through the process of naming.

#### 5. Conceptualization

Look again at Fig.1 and notice the term “conceptualization.” I shall explain what this term means and how it differs from the other two.

On Ogasawara, if you say *tobikomi*, any person familiar with the island will have a concrete and fairly precise idea of exactly what you are talking about. The same can be said for the term *miokuri*. If you were to look these terms up in a dictionary, *tobikomi* would be translated as something like “jump into” and *miokuri* would be rendered as something like ‘see (someone) off.’ Both are noun (nominal) forms of verbs (*tobikomu*,

*miokuru*). When I say that these terms have been “conceptualized,” that means that on Ogasawara these terms are no longer just general terms for ‘jump into’ and ‘see someone off,’ but have more specific and concrete connotations. On Ogasawara, *tobikomi* is the term used for islanders jumping into the sea from boats or from a pier as a sendoff for the ship which weekly carries seven hundred passengers, mostly tourists, back to the main islands of Japan. It could also mean “to jump into the ocean when the ship is not leaving,” but this is not the principal connotation understood on the islands. It could also mean to jump into the swimming pool at the local elementary school, but this is not the main connotation on the islands. A quick photo search on the internet (of these terms in general, not of their usage on Ogasawara) is all that is needed to back up my claim. Searching for *tobikomi*, one finds many photos of swimmers jumping into pools, many of these in high diving competitions. There are several photos of non-humans acting out *tobikomi*, namely polar bears, dogs and seabirds. And yes, there are also many photos of people jumping into the ocean, from cliffs, from kayaks or diving boats, sometimes in just swim suits, sometimes with snorkeling or scuba gear. But none of these *tobikomi* divers are doing this action for the purpose of sending off tourists leaving their islands. On Ogasawara, yes, the term *tobikomi* could point to the actions in any of these images. It could in theory, but it does not in everyday life. On Ogasawara, if you ask someone if they did *tobikomi*, the first thing which pops into their minds is a person jumping into the sea while waving to 700 passengers departing on the weekly ship. This is an example of “conceptualization,” or rather this is an example of how a couple of general terms have undergone a specific conceptualization on Ogasawara. Another aspect of this conceptualization is that the terms now occupy a semantic place different from what used to be their fellow terms. For example, on mainland Japan *tobikomi* has no more special significance that similar bodily actions such as *tobihane* (jumping up into the air), or *tobiori* (jumping in the sense of falling, as with suicides), or *tobiagari* (jumping up, as a sleeping person awoken by an earthquake). On Ogasawara, however, *tobikomi* no longer belongs on the same general level as these nominal verbs. It has become “a thing,” in the sense that Americans would say *tobikomi*? Has that become a thing now?” Becoming “a thing”; this is what I mean by “conceptualization.”

Incidentally, I recently purchased a topical pictorial dictionary of another island language. This was the Hawaiian language and even though it is called a dictionary, it is not organized in alphabetical order as most dictionaries are, but according to themes. There is a page with pictures of food and the names of those foods written under them. Another page is family relations, another is for clothing, things in the house, hunting and fishing, etc. One page is for sporting activities. Alongside

soccer, baseball, basketball, etc. this dictionary gives the term *ka lele* with a picture of a boy jumping off a bridge into the sea (Housman, 2012).

I checked the similar, but much more extensive, *Oxford-Duden Pictorial English-Japanese Dictionary*. It is also a topical illustrated dictionary organized on the same principles but it has 28,000 objects in 384 fields covering 864 pages compared to the 1,000 words in 34 fields covering 67 pages of the Hawaiian picture dictionary, and no such picture or word is given there. The closest things in the English-Japanese Dictionary index are the terms *high jump* and *long jump* listing on the “Athletics (Track and Field)” page. The Japanese index guides us to *tobikomi* terms on the swimming page but all are pool terms translated as ‘highboard diving,’ ‘competitive diving,’ etc. In Hawaii, ‘jumping off into’ is “a thing,” it is conceptualized to a further extent than in mainstream English language varieties.

*Miokuri* refers to the action of islands giving the weekly ship a sendoff. This can be done standing on the pier and waving to departing tourists lined up at the railing on the decks. It might also be waving to the ship from one of the six or eight smaller scuba diving or whale watching boats which run alongside the ship for fifteen minutes as it navigates its way out of the harbor and heads into the open sea for its 24 hour journey back to Japan. A mainland Japanese person might think the term *miokuri* could also apply to a B & B owner giving a ride to departing guests to the dock, but driving away without waving them off; for an Ogasawaran simply driving someone to the dock would not qualify as *miokuri*. The way in which expressions like *tobikomi* and *miokuri*, which are vague in mainland Japan, have come to describe more specific phenomena in Ogasawara is shown in Fig. 2.

Not all examples of conceptualization are abstract objects. The term *wentoru* ‘young green sea turtle’ *Chelonia mydas* is also an example of conceptualization. The term refers not just to a sea turtle of any age, but one in young adulthood. This is being differentiated from full-grown turtles in a similar way that *puppy*, *kitten*, *colt* and

*calf* are different concepts from *dog*, *cat*, *horse* and *cow*.

If we think of naming as developing in response to the question “what do you call that?”, we could think of conceptualization as something of the opposite. Conceptualization would elicit the reaction “Wow, you have a special word just for that?”

## 6. Branding

The term “branding” is from the world of advertising and different scholastic disciplines use the term in different ways. I will use it here to mean not simply that a certain word has strong associations with Ogasawara, but rather that these associations have become so strong that when people hear the word it triggers thoughts of Ogasawara. In other words, not only do people think of the word when they hear Ogasawara, but they think of Ogasawara upon hearing the word.

In this sense one could say that “Broadway musicals” have become a brand for Manhattan, or that “safari” has become a brand for the sub-Saharan Africa region. I would claim then that *guriin pepe* has achieved branding for Ogasawara. The reader may think “but most people in Japan have never heard of *guriin pepe*” or “most people in the world have never heard of Ogasawara,” but such comments would be missing the point. That is, when people hear *guriin pepe* if they have heard the term and do associate it with any place, that place will be Ogasawara rather than Okinawa or Hachijo or Saipan. Another example of branding is *nanyō-odori*, discussed at length in a paper by Junko Konishi in this special issue.

One can think of “branding” as the association of a name (word) with a specific product. *Tamana* is the name of a bakery on Chichi-Jima, and in the sense that the term is the name of a business, we can think of this usage as a kind of branding. When we consider that islanders say things like “*Tamana no kashipan wo katte kita yo*” (I bought Tamana’s pastries for us) we see that the use of *tamana* as the name of this bakery can be considered branding.

One way we can distinguish between “naming” and

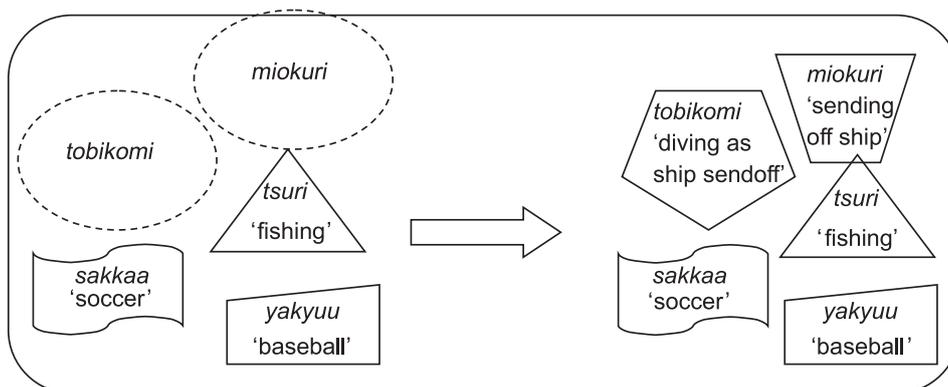


Fig. 2 Processes of “conceptualization” in Ogasawara.

“branding” is that the former is the “primary” usage of a term, while the latter is a “secondary” usage. What does this mean in everyday language usage? On Ogasawara there are bioluminescent mushrooms called “*Guriin pepe*.” There is also a restaurant with this name. “*Guriin pepe*” is actually the name of the mushroom; this is primary usage. The restaurant, on the other hand is named after the mushroom, a fact that is clear by the usage of pictorial mushroom design on the restaurant’s sign. Cases such as this in which a restaurant is named after a fungus are “secondary” usages of a term, and can be thought of a kind of branding.

Shops and products whose names use island words (including place names) may be considered cases of branding. There is a restaurant named *Heart Rock*, using the name of a cliff at the southern end of Chichi-Jima with a red, heart-shaped rock face. On Haha-Jima, there is an inn called *Anna Biichi* from a place name evolved from *Anya Biichi* and thought to originally derive from the English “Onion Beach.” Also on Haha-Jima is a *Villa Kobunoki*, which takes its name from an endemic species of tree (*Elaeocarpus photiniifolius*).

Recently the village of Ogasawara has started the “Ogasawara Brand.” The campaign posters for “Ogasawara Brand” show various products made on the island which are marketed to tourists (passion fruit jam, honey, dyed cloth, laser carved wood products from the invasive bishop wood tree *Bischofia javanica*, etc.). There is branding involved here. Branding in this sense is the process through which the village wants to create the impression in the minds of tourist consumers that a certain passion fruit juice has more value because it is Ogasawara passion fruit juice and not just any old passion fruit juice.

Product branding is the attempt to associate a product with value in the minds of consumers through the use of names or symbols. Marketers say “There are a lot of colas out there, but we want consumers to think of Pepsi brand cola.” In the same way, one can think “There are a lot of honeys out there, we want potential buyers to

think of Ogasawara honey.” Marketing experts are trying to create an impression of value in the consumers mind. They need a mental tie up with the product. One way they do this is through product names, and names are language, the object of study in linguistics. Just as Ogasawara uses island things as tourism resources, Ogasawara can also use island words to illicit reactions in people’s minds. This is the use of words for branding. “This isn’t just any old beach, it’s Kopepe,” “This isn’t just any old mushroom, it’s a *Guriin Pepe*.” “This is not just any old bird, it’s an *Akapoppo*.” “This is not just any old sandal, it’s a *Gyosan*.” The local language is not being branded; it is being used as a tool to accomplish the branding. As I have attempted to illustrate in Fig. 3, language is being used as the glue to link the product to the impression of value.

## 7. Linguistic Resource Management

One of the implications of being designated a World Heritage Site is that the human community must appropriately manage their resources but balance this against local residents’ need to sustain their economic standard of living. This balance is sought through means such as eco-tourism. In other papers, I have referred to situations wherein local residents try to manage their cultural resources to support their economic stability while at the same time trying to avoid damaging those cultural resources as “cultural eco-tourism.” Language can be used as a cultural eco-tourism resource if the linguistic resources are managed properly so as not to cheapen their value.

For example, the Ogasawara expression *mata miru yo* has been used on the tanktop shirts made by the island hula group in Ogasawara. Since the group chose to print this island phrase on their shirts rather than wearing shirts with nothing printed, we can say that the island language variety was tapped as a linguistic resource to add value (if not economic, then emotional) to the shirts.

Linguistics has a centuries old legacy of benefiting

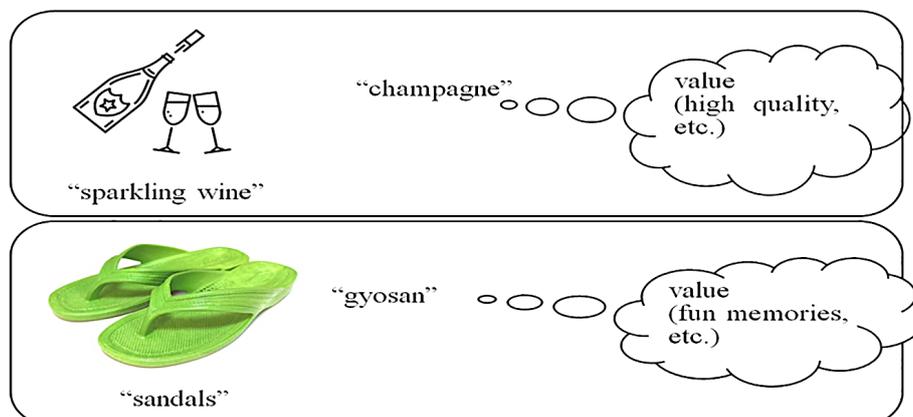


Fig. 3 Branding: Using words as a glue to link products and perceptions of value.

from biological concepts and terminologies (linguistic genealogy, glottochronology, the founders principle, etc.). An anonymous reader has pointed out possible analogies which could be drawn between, on the one hand, biosystematics and the linguistic processes of naming and coinage, and, on the other hand, between biology's concept of ecosystems and the linguistics processes of conceptualization. This reader has pointed out that it is the linguistic changes brought about by conceptualization which more closely reflect the social environment of the island. Such stimulating observations indicate directions for future contemplation.

Let us recall for a moment that the title of this volume is *Sustainable Management of Oceanic Island Ecosystems: Lessons from a Natural World Heritage Site, the Ogasawara Islands*. While the concept of "sustainable management" does not directly apply to language in that words (unlike trees and fish) do not disappear just because we overuse them, nonetheless we can find some helpful metaphorical applications of the term "management." "Management" is the "planned usage of resources," so in the future we must surely consider the management (planned usage) of Ogasawara's linguistic resources as well.

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