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Translating songs between endangered and modernized languages: The case of Ryukyuan in Okinawa, Japan

Abstract

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Examining the severely endangered languages of the Ryukyuan Archipelago from a translation studies perspective reveals that song is the only domain where translation is occurring, and that this translation has hardly been researched. This leads to more serious questions that remain understudied, such as how to translate indigenous languages and indigenous nonconformist concepts into the world's modern dominant languages or how to address all the sociolinguistic issues that accompany those decisions. A song translation studies perspective provides an insightful metric for exploring how translation is taking place in Okinawan music. This study investigates three translation projects, including an archival documentation of song translations from Ryukyuan into Japanese, English subtitles for videos, and singable cover versions of songs translated from Japanese into Ryukyuan. The problems and decisions made in these contexts are documented to foster discussion and to encourage further translation research into indigenous languages.

Keywords: indigenous song translation, language documentation, ethnolinguistics, language shift, translation studies

1. Introduction

Song translation studies (here referred to as STS) has grown from an understudied field to one with a solid corpus of literature (Greenall et al. 2021). This article adds to this literature regarding the topic of indigenous song translation, which despite

the growing STS corpus remains gravely understudied. Folk music can be a powerful tool in revitalizing endangered languages, as song often remains one of the last locations of indigenous language use and one of the most prestigious remaining aspects of the native society (Gillan 2012: 3). This combination makes the translation of indigenous song an important task in our world that is set to lose half of its linguistic diversity this century (Evans 2010; Perley 2012). Additionally, the translation of attractive products, even pop music, into endangered languages creates materials that may help engage new learners and add a level of prestige that comes to any language that has its corpus expanded by translation. It can thus be expected in any positive outlook towards language preservation that indigenous song translation will continue to grow in scope and visibility.

Without access to language policy and political power, few revitalization movements have been successful so far. Even in a successful movement, such as in Hawaii, variant diversity and nonconformist concepts risk being lost or diluted in the attempt, as media and educational resources prefer the efficiency of a standard language. The aim in studying these different contexts of indigenous song translation is to identify the specific problems and strategies involved and enable shared knowledge and comparisons with other indigenous language translation environments. A further goal is to inspire more indigenous language research in translation studies (here referred to as TS). In indigenous song, TS has the potential to explore translation with the non or insufficiently documented languages of the world, often with no or just recently designed orthographies. This extends the realm of translation studies "down", as described by Bellos (2012: 167), to increase the use and knowledge of some of the 6,000 primarily vernacular languages in the world.

This article explores translation in the revitalization movements between two Ryukyuan languages and the two modern languages they come into the most contact with, i.e. Japanese and English. After describing the language background, three specific song translation projects in three different modes of translation are discussed, based on my interviews with Eikichi Hateruma, Matthew Topping, and Homare Mochizuki, respectively. The first case discusses the translation of Ryukyuan folk songs into Japanese with a focus on the 60-page CD booklet to a 2008 compilation of folk songs (Section 3.1). The second case is the translation into English of Ryukyuan folk song lyrics in the form of subtitles to the YouTube videos of the Yaema-nu-musica's archival project, which involved the legendary performer Tetsuhiro Daiku (Section 3.2). The translator, Matthew Topping, offers a window into some of the puzzles that occur when working from a colonized, indigenous context into a modern language. The third case (discussed in Section 3.3) covers the band Nanaironote's production of singable translations of Japanese pop and Disney songs into Uchinaaguchi, the Ryukyuan language found on Okinawa Island (see Map 1). These singable translations are

performed as well as subtitled, in both Uchinaaguchi and Japanese, in YouTube videos produced by the band itself.

Map 1: The Ryukyuan Archipelago. © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

2. Indigenous song translation

Translation of folk song between indigenous and modern languages performs several functions. The wealth of ancestral knowledge and community thought embedded in lyrical songs can, when translated thoughtfully, lend itself to fascinating and profound insights into other worldviews. More straightforwardly, indigenous song translation is an essential part of language documentation providing an accurate source text as well as a target text of songs before they are lost. In other scenarios, recordings of songs may be the only remaining documentation of a now sleeping language[1] and their translation provides a starting point for

1| A sleeping language is a language whose last generation of full speakers has passed after intergenerational transmission has ceased creating a situation with no fluent speakers. This set of circumstances was previously referred to as language death.

a community who in the process of decolonizing wishes to reconnect with their ancestral culture. Translated songs are excellent materials for new speakers to learn about their culture in a way that provides an immediate and intimate connection to their heritage. This can help new language learners overcome some of the pitfalls that accompany learning one's indigenous language (Leonard 2017).

The study of indigenous song translation needs to engage with a complicated set of issues inherent in the indigenous-to-modern translation context. Revitalization challenges the concept of translatability. Fishman first raised this issue in 1974, as it became clear that translatability was a necessary feature of modern languages, despite resulting in the reduction of worldviews (Fishman 1975). Those of us raised and educated in modern society are naturally at risk of being unable to recognize the nonconformist concepts (Brenzinger 2007) in indigenous languages and translate other worldviews away, or push them aside by translating modern conceptualizations into local languages. Recognising and preserving these nonconformist concepts in translation is an essential part of the work. Each language is an accumulation of collected living knowledge on how to survive in a particular environment, and yet, we still do not know what we stand to lose, or how humanity will be impacted with these extinctions (Harrison 2007: 3).

As for the STS theoretical framework to view the varied translation modes in this study down, Susam-Saraeva (2015), in her study of Turkish translations of Greek song, discusses four distinct methods: 1) singing the songs in Turkey with Greek lyrics, not translated at all; 2) supplementing recordings with translations in booklets, with or without added comment; 3) singing covers in Turkish, more or less close in content; and 4) translating and discussing lyrics on websites, with other amateur translators and fans. Additionally, Low (2017: 40–62), in his discussion of translation provision for songs, also lists methods suitable for different *skopoi*: word-for-word translation for studying songs, literal translations for printed programs and CD inserts, simplified translations for surtitles and subtitles, and gist translations for a spoken intro before singing a song – all non-singable purposes distinct from singable translations. However, the cases of indigenous song translation that I have described in this paper involves problems that go beyond or do not fit neatly into these categories. Further research into translations occurring in other indigenous language contexts will be needed to define whether the examples in this study are typical of indigenous STS or simply indicative of this specific context between Ryukyuan languages and Japanese or English.

3. Ryukyuan language context

The Ryukyuan languages are sister languages of Japanese. Their proto-varieties are estimated to have split from the precursor of old Japanese during the Yayoi

period between 300 and 100 B.C. (Pellard 2015). They are abstand languages[2], with often significant diversity between villages or islands in the same vicinity. This complicates choosing one specific variety to promote in language revitalization efforts (van der Lubbe 2022). Despite this level of mutual incomprehensibility among the six languages, let alone between Japanese and any of the Ryukyuan varieties, they had primarily only been studied under the science of dialectology within Japan, until the UNESCO Atlas of endangered languages recognized them as languages in 2009 (Mosely 2010). Language shift, the shifting from one language to a more dominant language in various domains of daily life, such as at work, at markets, or in the house, began with the Meiji restoration in the 1860s. The Japanese government imitated many European nations in embracing a monolingual ideology to unite and modernize the nation. Although different languages and dialects permeate the archipelago, the government focused its efforts on colonizing the Ryukyu Islands once they were incorporated into the state in 1879. Different language domains were targeted over time, culminating with campaigns to stop the use of "island words" at home in the 1930s. After WWII, as the occupation of Okinawa by the United States military imposed significant hardships, many families accommodated this policy out of political and financial self-interest. Learning and speaking Japanese came to be seen as the best way to procure a return to Japanese rule and the departure of the U.S. military. With intergenerational language transmission severely interrupted by 1972, Okinawans received their wish of repatriation to Japan. However, as the return did not result in the departure of the U.S. military, the tide slowly began to turn away from stressing similarities to the Japanese and allowing more room to be Ryukyuan.

The folk music of the Ryukyu Islands is a cultural treasure and naturally plays a large role in current revitalization activities. Although filed under the label *World Music* at record stores, Ryukyuan music is popular in Japan and saw a boom in the first decade of the 21st century with massive selling artists, such as Begin, the Nenez, and The Boom, recording hits that are still popularly sung at Karaoke bars nationwide (Gillan 2012: 149–174). The timing of this boom coincided with Ryukyuans becoming more secure in their identities as Japanese citizens. Now clearly part of Japan, they were less hesitant to celebrate aspects of their culture that signaled their true heritage, much of which they had taken steps to hide in previous decades. One example is calling their instrument *sanshin* by its Japanese name *shamisen* to stress similarity with Japanese culture (see Figure 1 and 2, p. 188).

2| Abstand languages are often distant to the point of non-mutual intelligibility despite close physical proximity. Minority languages may not have a standard spoken or written form and linguistically differ significantly from village to village.

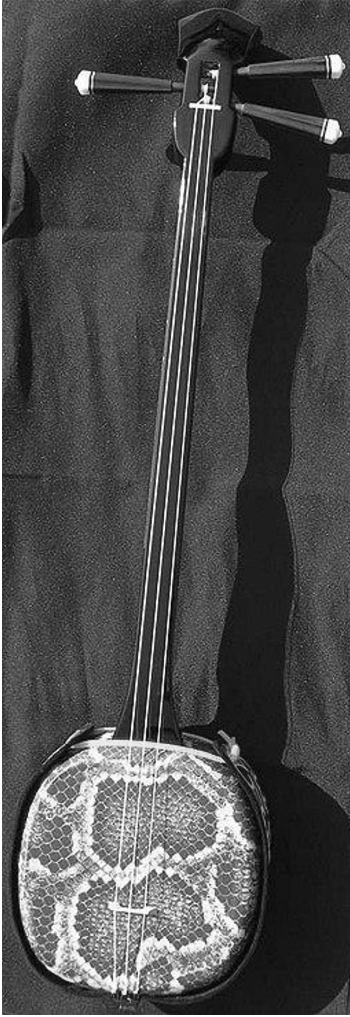

Figure 1: *Sanshin* (with snake-skin) ©TimDuncan, CC BY 2.5[3]

Figure 2: *Shamisen* (with cat skin) ©Timothy Takemoto from Yamaguchi, Japan, CC BY 2.0[4]

34

The current situation among the six Ryukyuan languages covering the archipelago (see Map 1, p. 185) varies between endangered and severely endangered. On the westernmost islands, Yaeyama and Dunan (Yonaguni) are both severely endangered with full speakers born before 1945, rusty or semi-speakers

3| https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5, accessed: via Wikimedia Commons.
4| https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0, accessed: via Wikimedia Commons.

born before 1970, and monolingual Japanese speakers born after 1970. Many shopkeepers and community leaders are now at most passive bilinguals who never use more than a few lexical touchstones in their weekly lives. The situations for Miyako, Okinawa, Amami, and Kunigami are marginally better, with the dates ranging to about 10 years behind those for Yaeyama and Dunan. The criticalness of the situation has now allowed many to see through the colonized view of their heritage imposed by over a century of Japanese monolingual ideology and realize that what is about to be lost is of invaluable importance. However, the Japanese government still refuses to allow Okinawa prefecture to make any local language policy or planning decisions (Ishihara et al. 2019: 37).[5]

3.1. The 2008 Ryukyuan Folk Song Archival Project

Emeritus professor Eikichi Hateruma became the head of the 2008 Ryukyuan Folk Song Archival Project with the passing of his Okinawa Arts Council leader and predecessor, Naokichi Yamashiro. It was Yamashiro's vision to collect and record as many songs as he could, from Iheya in the north down to Ishigaki. His goal included not only to capture sanshin accompanied folk songs, but to spread the net out to document the less documented working songs, sung when praying for good harvests, doing agricultural work, constructing buildings, and at festivals, before they were lost to time. With Yamashiro's passing, Hateruma felt the responsibility to complete the project. He collected over 450 recordings and produced a 17-disc CD compilation, on which only 370 songs could fit.

The project was a success but one overshadowed by sorrow, as the results were significantly lower than the 1,200 Ryukyuan recordings collected and published in four of the 13 volumes of the NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) Japanese folk song anthology completed in the early 1990s. The Ryukyuan section of that compilation was based on Fumio Koizumi's work in the 1960s and compiled by Sumo Kumada at Tokyo University of the Arts in the 1980s. Although songs from Amami were also included in that compilation, the amount of loss is profound.[6]

As the goal of the 2008 project was not just for preservation but for people to listen, sing, and understand lyrics, a great deal of work was put into the packaging. For the Yaeyaman section, each CD pack included two CDs and a 60-page booklet with original lyrics in Hiragana, translations into Japanese, and explanations. The

5| Due to the colonization of the mind, the speakers themselves are also hesitant to use the word 'language' or support measures, such as fluency requirements for highly coveted government positions.

6| The reason Amami was not included in the archival project is that it was funded by Okinawa prefecture. Although Amami has always been part of the Ryukyuan linguistic and cultural sphere, it was annexed by the Satsuma following the war in 1609 and remains to this day part of Kagoshima prefecture in Kyushu, and not Okinawa.

Figure 3: Archival project CD jacket with Obi strip (spine card) in red, with the words "Tsutaetai nowa uta jyanakute, kokoro da"

CD cover explains in a nutshell the goal of the project: "What we want to share is not songs but (our) heart" (my translation from Japanese; see Figure 3). During my interview, Hateruma explained that everyone on the project was motivated by this goal and that the translations (and the whole project) were not for the Japanese (*Yamatu pitu*, 'Yamato people' in his words), but targeted towards helping Okinawans discover their own heart and roots.[7] Another motivation behind the project is the fact that most people taking up the sanshin today are unaware of the meaning of the words they sing, and teachers are not able to explain lyrics with the tools available to them. The third motivation for Hateruma's sacrifice of personal time to head the program as a volunteer was his own regret at never teaching his children even the basic greetings in his language. Now in their 30s, they only know a few words of Yaeyaman.

If the goal as stated was to share the heart and soul of their culture, what does this mean for producing the translation? Not so much emotionality, but rather an effort towards lexical exactness, it seems. A detailed explanation of the approach to the translation is given on page seven of the 60-page booklet that comes with the CD:

> Word-for-word translations that follow the source text are provided to help those who are new to the folk songs, except for when a word-for-word translation would be misleading, in which cases explanations are given within (rounded

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7| All statements, translations, and summaries of Hateruma are based on my translation of our two-hour interview that took place via Zoom on May 31st, 2022. Japanese audio available upon request.

brackets) for explaining terms in the lyrics and within {curly brackets} for additional information that would have been understood by singers.[8]

Hateruma explained the reasoning for this type of translation:

The generation before me created archival works with 意訳 (iyaku: 'sense-for-sense translation') so if you did not understand island language you could only understand the overall meaning and not what the different words meant. Therefore it was our goal to provide 逐語訳 (chikugoyaku: 'word-for-word translation') so one could follow along to the source text and even use the translations to study the language.[9]

The translation process for the archival project occurred in three main steps. First, the performers provided their own translations under the guidelines of the project. Subsequently, Hateruma would check that the translations were reflecting the ST syntax as much as possible, adding explanations only when necessary. Finally, decisions had to be made for how to translate cultural concepts, such as the five seasonal terms unique to the island environment. Examples of four types of translation decisions made in the archival project are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Translation strategies for the booklet of the Ryukyuan folk song archival project CD[10]

ST (Yaeyaman)	TT (Japanese)	Strategy
1. ヒヤ　きゆが　ひーば へーホーイ Hiya kiyu ga hī ba hēhōi, 'Hiya Today's sun Hey hoi'	ヒヤ　今日の日を へーホーイ Hiya Kyono hi wo hēhōi, 'Hiya Today's sun Hey hoi'	Reflect ST when possible
2. みゆしくぬ　みやらび miyushikunu miyarabi, '(a) true beauty young maiden'	美与底（古見の異称）の女童 Biyotei (Komi no ishō) no jodō, '(a) true beauty (the Komi version) young maiden'	Reflecting ST, with extratextual information (in parentheses)
3. しぃとぅむでぃにヨー Sutumudīniyō, ´'in the early morning'	早朝に Sōchoni, 'in the early morning'	Giving a sense-for-sense translation to avoid a misleading TL homonym

8| My translation from Japanese.
9| Interviewed by me, my translation.
10| The lyrics in Yaeyaman as sung on the CD and printed in Japanese orthography, beside the Japanese translation, in the booklet. Hepburn romanization and gloss translation added by me.

ST (Yaeyaman)	TT (Japanese)	Strategy
4. ばがなつ　ぬ　いくだら Baganatsu nu ikudara, 'When young summer comes'	若夏が来たら Wakanatsu ga kitara, 'When young summer comes'	Ignoring the modern equivalent for an older, lesser-known cognate

Example 1 shows the most common set of translation decisions taken in the compilation. A word-for-word interlinear gloss is used to represent Yaeyaman sounds such as *hiya* and *hey hoi*, which appear identically in the Yaeyaman source text (ST) and the Japanese target text (TT). Words such as 'today' and 'day' are relatively similar phonetically, and the case markers *ga* and *ba* are given their closest Japanese approximation in *no* and *wo*. Example 2 shows the same interlinear strategy, but with extratextual information explaining that *miyarabi* is the way to say 'young maiden' in the Komi variety of Yaeyaman, found on the island of Iriomote. Example 3 is a case where reflecting the source language is impossible due to misleading homonymy. The phonetic homonym of *sutumudi* in modern Japanese, *tsutomu,* now means 'to work'. Reflecting the source text in this case would give the reader the wrong information, so the meaning equivalent for 'in the early morning' is used.

Example 4 shows a translation decision on how to deal with a nonconformist concept: a season that does not exist in Japanese, *baganatsu*. Hateruma uses a very uncommon word found in only a few dictionaries that most Japanese people would not be familiar with: *wakanatsu*, which shares the same direct translation as 'young summer'. If the Japanese equivalent *tsuyu*, 'rainy season', had been used, it would have allowed the readers to identify that season in their own environment and given them a clearer understanding of the concept. Another Southern Okinawan season, *uruzïn*, which appears in four different songs, is given the Japanese translation *shōka*, 'beginning of summer'. Besides the question: what is the difference between young summer and beginning of summer?, the actual season and its relation to the Japanese equivalent 'spring', is left unexplained with this translation. How could these terms be left unexplained in such a high-quality effort made with passion by Hateruma and his team for their heritage? Hateruma explained his reason for translating *baganatsu* into the Japanese word *wakanatsu* as an attempt to rekindle the use of the very good word *wakanatsu* in the Japanese language. Could it be that heritage speakers simply do not recognize the value of these concepts as unique? Or is leaving these terms unclear a tacit way of stating that they are untranslatable unique concepts?

3.2. The Covid YouTube project by Yaima-nu-musica and Daiku Tetsuhiro

In February 2022, the Okinawan music company Yaima-nu-musica produced four music videos featuring Tetsuhio Daiku singing and playing sanshin, a band consisting of a yokoboe flute, koto, and taiko-drum, and a group of dancers. The four songs are (in order of discussion in this section) "Yaeyama raised", "Bonsai hill", "The one called Tunusama", and "Yonaguni kitty cat"[11]. The 75-year-old Daiku (Figure 4) is arguably the most active performer of traditional Okinawan music around today, appearing in most major festivals and world tours. He is a proficient rusty speaker of Yaeyaman and has recorded over 20 albums, with many songs currently streaming on multiple platforms. The project was designed to preserve and promote Yaeyaman culture during the pandemic, when travelers were not allowed to visit the islands. Each video was shot at a location of cultural importance in Ishigaki, the largest and most developed island in Yaeyama. Matthew Topping, a local city office employee and Ph.D. student at the University of the Ryukyus, was hired to provide English translations.

Figure 4: Daiku featured in the event poster for the YouTube video recordings, February 11th, 2022

11| The Yaima-nu-musica YouTube channel can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/@yaimanumusica (accessed: 01.06.2024).

Topping[12] said he was asked to provide the music videos with informative subtitles in English. This task included three main challenges for the translator. The first challenge was understanding the content. This was aided by having Japanese translations to consult, but was still a time-consuming endeavor. Secondly, understanding which Ryukyuan language or which combination of languages the lyrics were composed of was complicated. The lyrics are influenced by traditional Ryukyuan *Ryuka* poetic style, which imports many Shuri Okinawan terms and expressions into the text, a language that is not mutually intelligible with Yaeyaman.[13] Thus, knowledge of one modern variety of Yaeyaman, as in Topping's case, rarely guarantees full comprehension. Finally, translating the many refrain lines that are normally understood as glossolalia was a major challenge. Before describing how these challenges were managed over the four songs specifically, it is important to have some context on the translator.

Map 2: Yaeyama islands © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

12| All quotes, summaries and retellings are taken from my two interviews with Topping, one on May 28th, 2022, the other on May 6th, 2023.

13| This issue of translating Ryukyuan folk songs was something I also discussed with Hateruma during our interview about his archive project translations. He was born in Yaeyama, but his mother was from Okinawa Island, so he grew up a speaker of both languages putting him in a very favorable position to work on translating folk songs.

Topping was chosen as he is a well-known Shikaza (downtown Ishigaki city area, see Map 2, p. 194) Yaeyaman new speaker, who wrote a descriptive grammar sketch of that variety for his MA thesis. Having lived in Japan for over 15 years, he is also a fluent Japanese speaker. He was recommended to the production team by a master from a master-apprentice revitalization program he helps run. Topping received 40,000 yen for each song and says he felt well paid for his work. Nevertheless, during the interviews, he talked about how, upon reflection, he doubted some of his decisions and wished he had had more time or more people to discuss his decisions with. Topping had had a moderate amount of freelance translation experience between Japanese and English before starting this project, in addition to working at the Ishigaki city office translating business letters and emails. He had had no professional experience translating from Yaeyaman to English, but had translated folk songs into English for videos made by a local Yaeyaman study group in the past.

3.2.1. Creating English subtitles for "Yaeyama raised"

The first song, "Yaeyama raised", is different from the other three in that it is not a traditional folk song, but a modern folk song written by Yukichi Yamasato in 1995. He added Yaeyaman-substrate Japanese lyrics to a partially preserved traditional melody. Its great popularity with local middle-aged people may be because it talks about the pride and hardship that comes from growing up in Yaeyama.

Table 2: Preserving Japanese terms and expressions in subtitling song lyrics in English[14]

Lyrics sung in Japanese	Subtitles in English
1. クバの葉陰で kuba no hakage de	in the shade of Kuba leaves
2. 鳴くや千鳥の恋の歌 nakuya chidori no koi no uta	The plovers chirp their love song
3. 黄金の稲穂ユサユサと Ōgon no inahō yusayusa to	are covered with golden ears of rice rustling in the breeze

According to Topping, the translation was rather straightforward, as the lyrics were primarily in Japanese. Table 2 shows examples of the documentary approach that he employed. This meant using exact terms such as Kuba leaves and plovers (in Examples 1 and 2, respectively), instead of words that would be more familiar to English speakers. Topping maintains this level of documentary

14| The sung lyrics are transcribed in Japanese orthography, with Hepburn romanization added, by me. The translations are taken exactly from the videos' subtitles.

translation for all these poetic terms, such as "clear flowing stream" and "boundless tenderness", as well as the names of bird species uncommon in both modern Japanese and English. He also made literal renderings of source text expressions, even though they may sound peculiar or old fashioned in modern English, such as "golden ears of rice rustling in the breeze".

3.2.2. Creating English subtitles for Yaeyama "Bonsai hill" and "The one called Tunusama"

Japanese translations of "Bonsai hill" and "The one called Tunusama" were included in the four-volume reference series of Yaeyaman folk songs, released between 2008 and 2013. Also in the archival project managed by Hateruma (presented in Section 3.1), translations were given, word-for-word syntax replicating, when possible, with context summaries, following his recommendations. This type of resource reduced the translation load significantly. According to Topping, without these translations he would only be able to understand about three quarters of the source text. This is due to the amount of Shuri Ryukyuan lyrics in the songs (as mentioned in Section 3.2.1). The Japanese translations allowed Topping to use his "knowledge of Yaeyaman to fine tune" his translations and removed doubt about ambiguous passages.

The gulf between the spoken island language and the Japanese script and the translator's base in linguistics is visible in another subtitling choice: how to represent the significant amount of glossolalia in the English translation. This was the primary challenge for the song "Bonsai hill". Most of the song lyrics are glossolalia known as *hayashi* lyrics in Ryukyuan folk song. The normal practice is to add them directly into the target text with Japanese Katakana script (see Table 3). With so much of the source text simply left to copy verbatim, with Latin-script alphabet, Topping decided to reflect for the viewer a closer sound approximation. He used *ï* to represent a center high vowel, and *ā*, *ē*, and *ū* instead of double vowels (see Table 3). He mentioned upon reflection that it may have been better to just use typical lettering, as a regular English reader would not know these symbols, used in phonetic transcription.

The other song, "The one called Tunusama", is a story of two lovers, told half from the perspective of the woman waiting in Funauki (see Map 2, p. 194) and half from her betrothed who is journeying there by boat. All Ryukyuan languages are, especially with lyrics and poetry, commonly written without subjects and pronouns. This made determining who was the subject in the back and forth of the song very confusing. The Japanese translation made it clear which role at each point was the speaker of the lyrical line. This led to a relatively straightforward translation, except for one line that is repeated at the end of each verse, *shita uchi shyaraayo*, 'unable to stop tongue hitting'. S*hita uchi* is a smacking sound or click that modern Japanese use to express anger, Chinese

to express disappointment, and Italians to express that something is impossible. In this context, it conveyed great anticipation at meeting a lover. Daiku does not perform the sound; it is only sung in the lyrics. In the interview, Topping explained that he chose "smacking her/his lips" as the closest approximation that still included making a noise with the mouth. Discussing other possibilities of translating for an English audience, we wondered during the interview if abandoning the documentary strategy and using the English phrase *licking her/his lips* would have helped TT speakers make more sense of the situation.

Table 3: "Tunusama" and "Bonsai hill" translation strategies[15]

Lyrics sung in Yaeyaman	Subtitles in English	Strategy
エイヤラヤンザ　サエーアイヤーはリバサミシー (Hayashi words)	Eiyarayanza saē eijāharibasamishī	Romanization of *hayashi* lyrics (meaningless refrain lyrics with macron instead of double vowels)
舌打っしやらーよ shita ussharaayo	Smacking her/his lips	Replacement with a term recognizable to the target audience
前差崎 Maizasï	Maizasï point	Translation with *ï* reflecting the central high vowel common in Yaeyaman but not in Japanese

3.2.3. Creating English subtitles for "Yonaguni kitty cat"

Among the videos, "Yonaguni kitty cat" has the most elaborate production. Four female dancers dressed in cat outfits sing the *hayashi* refrains in an almost catcall-like way, as they perform a choreographed dance routine in front of the stage (see Figure 5, p. 198). There was no translation available in scholarly publications that Topping could find, so instead he made use of two online websites with fan translations: one on the Yaeyaman version, and the other about the Okinawan version of the song. The song has such odd lyrics that Topping asked Yaima-nu-musica to include the disclaimer quoted below in the credits, since he felt an extratextual explanation was the only option to understand the metaphors in the lyrics. A similar explanation was included in both of the online Japanese translations he found.

> This song's strangeness lies in its metaphorical descriptions of the bad relationships between local women who were assigned to the visiting government

15| The Topping translations are taken exactly from the subtitles, the Yaeyaman lyrics transcribed as sung in the YouTube videos.

officials as mistresses on Yonaguni island during the days of the poll taxes in the Ryukyu kingdom pre-1879[16]. The author made heavy use of culturally relevant metaphor in order to obscure some of the real-life characters and situations being described (unused subtitle disclaimer, Topping's manuscript).

This explanation would have likely been quite instructive for viewers, but the organizers must have changed their minds, because it is not included in the video. Perhaps these explanations should be placed at the beginning of videos with subtitles in modern languages translated from indigenous languages, or given in the notes below the video. In this case the disclaimer is nowhere to be seen.

Figure 5: "Yonaguni kitty cat" dancers in front of the band

Without a reliable Japanese translation and with such strange lyrics, Topping used his understanding of Yaeyaman to interpret three sets of *hayashi* lyrics, normally understood to be meaningless, to add depth to the translation, as shown in Table 4. He also added subjects to make the narrative clear and left the metaphors as they were in the source text for the viewer to share in the unique imagery.

Examples 1, 2, and 3 are part of the refrain and are repeated many times. The lyrics have been considered as glossolalia by scholars and musicians alike, including Daiku himself. This means that Topping could have just written them directly into the English subtitles as is, but his research led him to some translations of Yaeyaman stories. In them, the word *sutaari* (in Example 1) was defined as meaning 'to keep' or 'to stay'. This combined with his recognition of the common emphatic/imperative word *yoo* (in Example 3), meaning something similar

16| Even though Okinawa prefecture was established in 1879, the poll taxes were still collected in Yaeyama until 1903.

to 'you'd better…' in English, enabled him to write a sense-for-sense translation for the refrain: "stay like that!", instead of writing glossolalia.

Table 4: "Yonaguni kitty cat" translation strategies[17]

Yaeyaman ST	English subtitles	Strategy
1. スターリヨー sutaari yoo	stay like that!	Meaning of *hayashi* word found in Yaeyaman
2. ハリ hari	go!	Continued
3. ヨーヌヨー王ぬ前 yoo nu yoo shunumai	listen well my lord!	Continued
4. Ootsuki tu ootaiyo agaru mi ya itsui hari Hazama nu ou du wantu nu nakaya itsui hari	the sun and the moon rise to the same place, Lord Hazama and I are of like minds	Direct translation of a metaphor whose meaning has been lost to time

Hari in Example 2 is another glossolalia word that also happens to mean 'to go' in Yaeyaman. Finally, there are many metaphors from "Yonaguni kitty cat", including Example 4, about the sun and the moon. Here, Topping felt the only option was to translate them exactly, trusting the disclaimer listed above to offer some elucidation of their meaning. In cases where the meaning behind metaphors is no longer understood by the last generation of speakers, Topping's strategy of translating them directly with extratextual summary appears to be the only viable solution.

In Topping's reflections over his translations, a question remains that may be common in translating indigenous song: do some lines carry metaphors that do not clearly present themselves as such? The line 'From the middle a swollen-eyed hag jumped out, saw them and pulled back' sounds just as much like an event in the story as a metaphor. Topping translated these lines with the same documentary strategy, putting the source text directly into English. On the other hand, Toppings' strategies for dealing with glossolalia terms suggest that the translator's own scholarship and knowledge of the language can make significant contributions to understanding the song. However, this kind of research is time consuming and may well be beyond the time a translator can afford to invest in a project.

17| As in Table 3 (p. 197), the Topping translations are from the subtitles, the Yaeyaman lyrics transcribed as sung in the video.

3.3. Nanaironote's singable translations of Disney and Japanese Pop songs

Nanaironote are a band fronted by producer Homare, who, along with three core members, are joined by local artists to collaborate on a variety of projects with a focus on producing high quality YouTube videos sung in Uchinaaguchi Okinawan. The *skopos* for this band's monthly video releases is to create singable and performable lyrics as part of a multimodal presentation, which also should give an authentically Ryukyuan impression. The simple reason they found their way to this skopos was by trying to get more likes for their videos. Homare explained[18]:

> We grew up thinking our language was only used by bad kids (yankees), but it was through this project that we realized how important part of our lives it is, – – – Honestly my first instinct was not to make videos in Okinawan language, but I wanted to promote my sense of pride in our culture. When we started this project, I was desperately trying to think of what we could do to get more views and that led to singing in the language as well (interviewed by me, my translation).

The rest was history, because the band now has over 12 million views on its YouTube channel. The almost 70 music videos showcase different aspects of Ryukyuan culture, including lacquerware, nature, fashion, and other local arts. Their videos with the most views are Disney hits such as "A whole new world" and "Under the sea"[19], along with popular Japanese pop songs by artists such as Yo Hitoto and LiSA, all shot on sets highlighting the natural beauty of the islands. They are professionally recorded using a variety of Ryukyuan and world instrumentation, but almost always featuring the sanshin.

Unlike the other projects covered in this article, Nanaironote's translated lyrics are performed and thus translated singably. They can be classified as singable near-enough translations (Franzon 2021), but are textually closer approximations of the source text than many song translations that fit this category. This is in large part due to the linguistic similarity of the language pair, comparable to the distance between French and Italian, and a similarity in sung poetics: in both languages the foot rhyme is not a poetic characteristic or is not considered desirable (Guay 2019: 16). Maintaining rhyme in song translation is one of the main reasons for a translation to deviate from the ST semantics. The other often larger challenge in creating a singable translation is matching the song rhythm (Low 2017). Homare states when dealing with singability:

18| All quotations are my translations of our interview in Japanese on June 3rd, 2022. Audio available upon request.

19| The YouTube links are: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQYRB-i_i0M and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgzlfz5NTdc, respectively (accessed: 01.06.2024).

Basically, if the translation does not match the number of notes in the melody, I increase the number of notes or add rests to make it fit.

Homare's strategy is reflected in Low (2017: 100), who warns against attempting to leave the rhythm perfectly untouched in favor of tweaks and flexibility when dealing with singable translations.

There is less approximation in the stylistic and visual elements of Nanaironote's translations as they strive to create an authentically Ryukyuan product. In addition to decisions made for singability, there are deviations from the source text that can be classified as modernizing translation decisions. They include things that did not exist when Ryukyuan languages were still primary languages spoken in all domains, and things that are still uncommon in the Okinawan environment, such as carpets. In "A whole new world", the magic carpet became *mahou nu bluesheet*, 'magic blue tarp', referring to the blue tarps that many use for picnicking outdoors, at the beach or during festivals. This is one of many ways they insert Okinawan cultural references into the TT. For the Disney songs, they mostly ignore the original English texts in favor of the Japanese dubbing translations. Table 5 highlights a few of the 60 translation decisions Homare discussed in our interview and sent me during email correspondence afterwards.

Table 5: Nanaironote singable translation strategies[20]

ST (Japanese)	TT (Uchināguchi)	Strategy
1. 携帯電話 keitaidenwa, 'mobile phone'	むちゅん でぃんわ muchun dīnwa, 'hold phone'	Modernizing translation
2. ハナミズキ　ふるさと Hanamizuki furusato (famous Japanese song title)	はなみじき　ふるさとぅ Hanamijiki furusatu	Translation to mimic TT phonetics
3. みんなにはイキなジャズ・バンド minnani wa ikina Jazz band, 'a jazz band that has everyone grooving'	わったや オキナワんロック！ Wattaya Okinawan rock! 'our Okinawan rock!'	Replacement with Ryukyuan cultural terms and concepts
4. セッション session, 'a (jam) session'	かちゃーしー Kachyāshī (an Okinawan traditional dance)	Continued

20| My romanization of the sung lyrics, and gloss translation below, the lyrics in Japanese and Uchinaaguchi, the later as recorded by Nanironote, taken exactly from the YouTube video subtitles.

In Example 1, a new word, *muchun dïnwa,* was created for a mobile phone, instead of calquing the commonly used Japanese word. In Example 2, the Japanese names *Hanamizuki* and *furusato* were changed to match the way Ryukyuan languages have shifted diachronically from Japanese phonemic production. The last two, Examples 3 and 4, show just two of many situations where Homare and his translation team employ a highly domesticating approach to the Japanese translations' relatively accurate reflections of the English originals. Okinawan cultural words are inserted whenever possible into the TT. One could say Homare is rather ruthless in presenting Okinawan culture whenever he can in the translations. On the other hand, taking advantage of opportunities to add indigenous terms and concepts to the TT, integrating them with the main themes and hooks of the ST lyrics, may present an appealing model for others to follow in the modern-to-indigenous context.

4. Conclusion

Through the analysis of these three quite different projects, the translation of Ryukyuan into Japanese, into English, and Japanese translated into singable Ryukyuan lyrics, this paper has demonstrated a few applications of STS to the domain of language revitalization. Hateruma's archival project shows how the older generations, i.e. minds colonized from growing up in the post-war period that disrupted intergeneration transmission, have mostly shed the negative values placed on their language. They are now working in a documentary way, translating songs not for Japanese to understand, but for Ryukyuans to both appreciate their heritage and use the song lyrics as a way of learning the language. However, in this study, some of the clearest examples of nonconformist concepts, the Yaeyaman seasonal terms, are translated in a way that limits their contrast with Japanese concepts. This suggests that there is still no desire among this generation to emphasize the differences between their heritage and Japanese cultural life.

The analysis of Topping's translation shows that even when there is money and a native English speaker with the skills necessary to work in that indigenous-to-modern language context, the situation is still fraught with time-consuming challenges. While the last full and strong rusty speakers are still alive, a team of one L1 Yaeyaman speaker and an English speaker, both fluent in Japanese, might be the best translation team. However, Topping's impressive ability to use his knowledge of Yaeyaman to recognize meanings in the glossolalia suggest that someone outside of the culture may be freer to work unconventionally. This may allow a fuller picture than the previous, traditional translations into Japanese. On the other hand, sadly, the accurate interpretation of some metaphors has potentially been lost forever. The kind of translation

Topping performed requires dedication to the cause and suggests a double role of translator and language preservationist.

Pop song translation into Ryukyuan requires dealing with many of the same challenges of creating a singable TT facing translators in any context. In an age of ever-increasing social media engagement with growing ease of media production and circulation, Nanaironote's model will hopefully be repeated by youth around the world interested in reclaiming their heritage culture. Not unlikely, there are heritage culture singers in other parts of the world engaged in similar activities. This suggests a new place for STS in language revitalization with the opportunity to compare Homare's process and policy of creating both singable and domesticating translations with others. Homare and his team's approach seems to reflect much of Low's (2017) advice for creating singable lyrics, but also shows unique attributes based on the specific language context. Additionally, they make use of indirect translation from a more linguistically similar language (Japanese), and frequently replace ST concepts with Okinawan concepts to showcase pride in Okinawan culture.

Translating in the indigenous-to-modern context includes dealing with a lack of interest from modern language speakers and thus a lack of funds or incentives to produce such work. There are budgets available to Ryukyuans to document their languages, and these have allowed them to translate folk songs into their *lingua franca* of Japanese in a documentary style, according to the skopos of such projects. However, as the poetic language in the songs is highly stylized and differs from common speech, the complete focus on these types of texts may not be the most needed to support a successful language revitalization program. This mirrors perhaps one struggle for descriptive linguists, whose hard work creates grammars that scientifically document the language but are sometimes of limited practical use for would-be learners.

Comparing the situation in this paper to those in other endangered language contexts may provide a more complete picture of what song translation can offer language efflorescence[21] movements and what other types of texts or semiotic products should be prioritized for translation.

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21| There has been a push to move away from terms involving the prefix *re-* in language revitalization and to get away from their negative connotations that something has died or lost its life. Instead, the use of the term *efflorescence* has been proposed to focus on the growth of language movements worldwide.

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