The Japanese language spoken by elderly Yap people : oral proficiency and grammatical aspects

Masumi Kai
University of Guam

Abstract: Japan ruled the South Seas Islands for 31 years, from 1914 to 1945. Yap was one of these islands. It is known that there are still many elderly people who speak Japanese in Yap even though 65 years have passed. This paper examines the proficiency level of Japanese spoken by five elderly Yap people and analyzes the grammatical aspects of their Japanese, especially particle usages and predicate forms. The data did not show any patterns of errors in particle usage. This is the same result obtained from my previous research in Taiwan. It suggests that particles are learned at an early stage in the acquisition process. However, Yap subjects' proficiency is at the intermediate level and they used many plain forms. I speculate that this is caused by the shortness of education in Japanese and insufficient exposure to a variety of input like reading and listening.

Key words: Yap, acquisition, particle, predicate form, *kogakko*

1. Introduction

Japan ruled the South Seas Islands for 31 years until 1945, and one of these islands was Yap. Yap is about 800km southwest of Guam. It consists of four major islands and 130 minor islands and atolls. There are four indigenous languages, and English is currently used to communicate among people with differing mother languages. Its population is about 10,000, and the capital is Colonia.

Elderly Yap people learned to read, write, speak, and understand Japanese at

from Lonely Planet
http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/pacific/
federated-states-of-micronesia/yap/

school during the Japanese administration period. However, after 1945, most of them did not use Japanese as they had before. There are several areas of research from the viewpoints
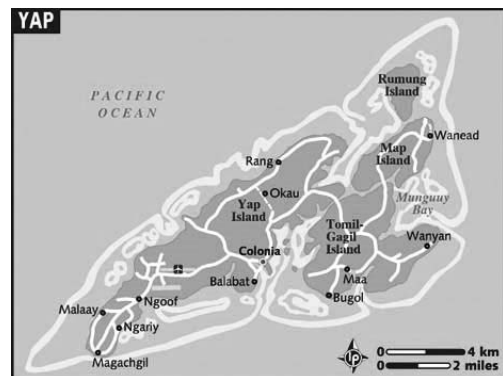
of history, education, and sociolinguistics that have investigated colonial education before 1945 and the Japanese language used in Yap (Miyawaki 1995[1], Yui 1998ab, 2000, 2002[2], Shibuya 1995ab[3]). Previous research has remarked that elderly Yap people still understand and speak Japanese.

Yui (2000: 136) states that there were many bilingual speakers of Japanese and the indigenous languages on the Micronesian islands before 1945. Matsumoto (2000: 87) states that most elderly Palauans were Palauan-Japanese bilingual, but since 1945 competence in Japanese has diminished rapidly[4]. Shibuya (1995a) describes elderly Yapese as maintaining a high competence in Japanese. However, the remarks that Micronesian people have a high level of competence in Japanese or that they were bilingual speakers are subjective judgments as no empirical data was provided. Another issue is the grammatical aspects of their Japanese. Miyawaki (1995) and Shibuya (1995a) list the unnatural usages of Yapese Japanese. Shibuya (1995b: 95) briefly mentions the term 'maintenance and attrition'. But are the grammatical errors, if any, from attrition or the lack of complete acquisition? Providing that their grammatical mistakes are the result of attrition, presupposes that they acquired the language skill or grammar in the first place, which I argue is a big assumption.

In this paper, I present the conversational data elicited from interviews of five inhabitants of Yap in 2009 and examine their language competence. I also investigate the grammatical characteristics of their Japanese, especially the predicate types and particle usage. I cite the results from my Taiwan research for reference as needed.

2. Historical and educational background

Before turning to the detailed analysis of their Japanese, it will first be useful and essential to outline their historical and educational background during the Japanese administration period.

In 1914, Japan occupied Germany's colonies in the South Seas. The South Seas Islands included the Marshall Islands, Northern Mariana Islands, and Caroline Islands, which made up almost the whole of Micronesia with the exception of the easternmost Gilbert Islands and Guam. It is said that Micronesian people never put up a strong resistance to Japan's rule nor used violence on Japanese immigrants (Peattie 1992: 195).

from Merriam-Webster
http://www.merriam-webster.com/
cgi-bin/nytmaps.pl?micronesia
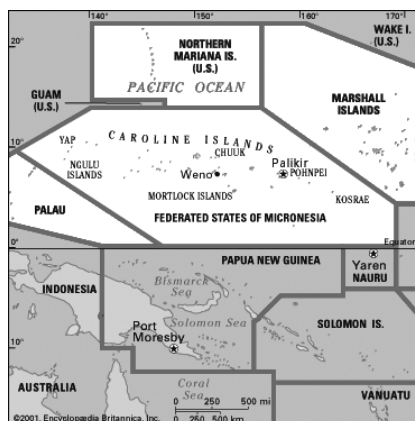
According to Yanaihara (1935: 46-49, 53), the Japanese population in the South Seas Islands numbered only 70 to 80 in 1914, however, after being promoted by the Japanese government's immigration policy, it increased to more than 30,000 people by 1933. Most Japanese immigrants were from Okinawa, followed by Tokyo and Fukushima[5].

The Japanese government built hospitals and fostered better hygiene and sanitation[6], along with promoting economic development, and an increased focus on education. In December 1914, a basic four-year primary education course (*shogakko*) was established targeting eight to twelve year old children. The rudimentary education was carried out by garrison troops, employees of *Nanyo* trading company, and local teachers. From July 1918 to March 1922, it was changed to a three year school (*tomin gakko*), with a two-year supplementary course (*hoshuka*) available. From April 1922 to August 1945 it became *kogakko*, targeting children more than eight years old. Islander children and Japanese children were segregated into different schools as was the case in other colonies like Taiwan and Korea. The enrollment rate at *kogakko* in Yap exceeded 66% in 1933 (Yanaihara 1935: 393). The rate for the entire South Sea Islands in 1939 was about 57%[7], and the number of students who graduated from *kogakko* and *hoshuka* were about 20,000 in total by 1942 (Miyawaki 1995: 58). In 1940, *kokugo renshusho* (language practice institute) was established for adults to teach the Japanese language and ethics at 26 *kogakko* places in the South Sea Islands. The elementary education system prevailed, but there was no postprimary schooling, and the islander children hardly had an opportunity to study in Japan[8].

Islander children who attended *hoshuka* were sent to work as laborers, maids, shop assistants, or helpers for Japanese families after school. In Yap, some female graduate students from *kogakko* were sent to the hospital as apprentice nurses called *eisei-koshu-sei* (hygiene training student). The rest were sent to needlework school to obtain fabrication

Maki *kogakko* site in Colonia (photos taken by author in 2009)

skills such as basket making.

The textbook used was a South Seas Island version of *Kokugo dokuhon*. It was based on the unification of the written and spoken languages. The textbook started from *katakana,* and introduced some *kanji* and *hiragana* gradually. The contents were Japanese folk stories, stories about the Emperor's family, and Japanese culture[9].

Yui (1998a: 94, 1998b: 14, 2002: 242) states that children in central islands like Palau and Saipan could speak Japanese in the second grade, but children in peripheral islands like Yap had difficulties speaking Japanese even after graduating from *hoshuka*. They learned Japanese during their jobs working with Japanese after graduating from school. A description of Yap before 1945 is seen in Yanaihara (1935: 396-397): Yap children only reached to the level of reading books in *hiragana* after graduating *hoshuka*. Those who were hired by the government or native Japanese people could continue to learn Japanese after graduation, but the majority of children would go back to their village after graduation and forget Japanese.

If we only look at the enrollment rate, it can be said that a relatively high number of Yapese children attended school (Yap was 66% in 1933, Taiwan was 34.20% in 1931, and Korean was 41.6% in 1930). But the length of education was much shorter here than in Taiwan and Korea (6 years education in *kogakko*).

3. Methodology and subjects' background

In order to investigate the Japanese language spoken by elderly Yap people, I conducted interviews in 2009 of five inhabitants of Yap. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes to an hour. Subjects were found through the church. The interview started by getting the subject's ethnographic information and then proceeded by eliciting stories about school and daily life before 1945 and Japanese usage after 1945.

When we gather and analyze the natural conversation data, it is very important to use high-quality recording equipment and high-quality earphones. Otherwise one can easily miss a weak sound like a particle or a final sentence element. I used a Sony DAT recorder with a video camera as a supplement. Each data segment was transcribed for 30 minutes. Transcriptions were made based on Du Bois et al's (1992, 1993) style format (see Appendix for abbreviations). All of the subjects received a Japanese education before 1945. Their backgrounds are illustrated below.

Table 1: subjects' background[10]

	ID	Sex	Birth year	Age at interview	Years of Education	Job after graduating from school	Contact with Japanese after 1945
1	MON	F	1921 (*Taisho* 10)	88	5 years	assistant for a nurse for 2 years, baby sitter at home until marriage	used Japanese when meeting with a Japanese
2	MIK	M	1919 (*Taisho* 8)	90	3 years	worked for Japanese soldiers	visited Japan as a sailor, has a Japanese friend who lives in Yap
3	EL	F	1921 (*Taisho* 10)	88	5 years	assistant for a nurse, worked for a Japanese family	visited Japan two times, had Japanese visitors at home, used Japanese to communicate with other islanders
4	GIL	F	1919 (*Taisho* 8)	90	5 years	assistant for a nurse, worked for a Japanese family	visited Japan one time
5	IG	M	1927 (*Showa* 2)	82	5 years	worked at *Nanyo Takushoku* company, worked for Japanese soldiers	had Japanese visitors a couple of times, has a Japanese friend who lives in Yap

In the following chapter, I analyze their Japanese in terms of the two aspects below:

1) proficiency level

2) grammatical aspects, especially particle usage and predicate forms

4. Discussion

4-1. Proficiency level

There are statements in earlier research that elderly Yap people maintained Japanese well or elderly Yap people still speak Japanese fluently. My subjects certainly could understand and communicate in Japanese during my interview. But these comments are subjective judgments, and we need to articulate the criteria or base to assess how well Yap people speak Japanese.

There is a test called the ACTFL OPI (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Oral Proficiency Interview) used to rate the foreign language learner's oral proficiency level. My interviews were not conducted under OPI protocol[11]; however, I find their criteria to be very useful when discussing spoken language ability.

Table 2: ACTFL OPI criteria

Proficiency level	Global Tasks and Functions	Context/ Content	Accuracy	Text Type
Superior	Discuss topics extensively, support opinions and hypothesize. Deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation.	Most formal and informal settings/ Wide range of general interest topics and some special fields of interest and expertise.	No pattern of errors in basic structures. Errors virtually never interfere with communication or distract the native speaker from the message.	Extended discourse
Advanced	Narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication.	Most informal and some formal settings/ Topics of personal and general interest.	Understood without difficulty by speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.	Paragraphs
Intermediate	Create with language, initiate, maintain, and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions.	Some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations/ Predictable, familiar topics related to daily activities.	Understood, with some repetition, by speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.	Discrete sentences
Novice	Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists and phrases.	Most common informal settings/ Most common aspects of daily life.	May be difficult to understand, even for speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers.	Individual words and phrases

cited from ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual

In my previous interviews of elderly Taiwanese[12], there were superior level subjects who could talk about social interests using upper level vocabulary and hypothetical situations without critical errors or lack of words to interfere with communication. Such subjects read Japanese novels, newspapers, and wrote in Japanese. It was not difficult to find such subjects in Taiwan. In contrast, Yap subjects could create with language, narrate and describe daily activities; however, their Japanese sometimes lacked grammatical items or words, and needed a listener's presumption to make their stories understandable. In that sense, my Yap subjects were deemed to be ranked around the intermediate level. There was one subject whom everyone mentioned had high competence in Japanese when she was young. She could narrate and describe stories of her own accord in the interview, although she had difficulties understanding my questions because of her weak hearing. However, her topics were limited to her personal information and memories and were told with a limited vocabulary. There were some sentences which were hard to understand because of grammatical errors and the lack of words as seen below.

(1) KAI: ... Nihon-jidai wa=, Nihon-jidai wa=, Nihon-jin no
                 Japan-period   TOP   Japan-period   TOP   Japanese-people of
             o-tomodachi ga imashi-ta ka/?
                 friends   SUB have-Past   Q
             'During the Japanese period, during the Japanese period, (did you) have Japanese friends?'

    GIL: a= takusan iru.
             DM   plenty   have
             'Yeah, (I) have plenty.'

    KAI: a hontoni.
             DM   really
             'Oh really.'

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GIL:        <P>u[n</P>].
                 yes
            'Yes.'.
KAI:          [<P>hu]==n</P>.
                        DM
GIL:    →   <P>ta=kusan iru</P>.. (TSK).. Nihon-jin no, soshite, ano,
                 plenty      have              Japan-period of    and      DM
            a=,..   aru=,.. (TSK) ano fuufu to,.. jibun-tachi no kodomo,
            DM        one            that couple and    own-PL     GEN  child
            to,.. isshoni=, ano a%, watashi ga oboe-toru%, oboete-i-te,
            and     together   DM       I   SUB  remember-ing    remember-ing-and
            soshite, ano hito ga yoku,.. a=,.. isshoni kurashite-i-ta.
               and    that person SUB often   DM      together   live-ing-Past
            '(I) have plenty of (Japanese friends).. Japanese, and well, well, with one couple and their own children together, I am
            remembering, and that person was often living together.'
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Many elderly Yapese who received *kogakko* education certainly have the ability to communicate in Japanese even now, however, there was no one who could be ranked higher than the intermediate level among the five subjects.

I conjecture that one of the main reasons for their limited language competence comes from the shortness of the school education. Similar to Yui's (2002:242) statement, some of my subjects mentioned that they learned Japanese through a job. Those who had contact with Japanese after they grown up had a relatively better command of Japanese, in the sense that they could use polite forms or created longer sentences as seen in the example (2) below.

```
(2) MIK:        .. sensoo, sensoo no ato ni wa=,.. watashi-tachi ano= ritoo no
                      war      war    of after at TOP           I-PL       DM  outer:island of
           →    hito, ritoo-- ritoo tte ano=,.. <E>autora airando</E>.
                people outer:island outer:island QUO DM            outer      island
                'The war, after the war, we rito people, rito is,.. an outer island.'
     KAI:       un.
                DM
     MIK:       .. ma=, watashi-tachi=, ano ma, boku-ra no shima ni=,..
                    DM      I-PL          DM  DM    I-PL   GEN  island DIR
           →    kaette-it-ta-n desu.
                return-go-PAST-NOM   COP
                'Well, we, well, went back to our island.'
     KAI:       hu=n.. de kaet-te=, ie no shigoto o suru-[n desu ka]?
                     DM   then return-and house of  work  OBJ do-NOM   COP  Q
                'Well..  Then (after you) went back, did you do house work?'
     MIK:                                                      [soo desu].
                                                                right  COP
                'Right.'
     KAI        <P>he[2=</P>2].
                       DM
     MIK:          [2wa2]tashi= ato ni wa ano=, sono= sensoo no ato ni wa
                         I           after at TOP DM       that     war   of after at TOP
                moo sono toki= ma=,... nijuu,... nijuuyon-sai.
                already that  time   DM      twenty          twenty:four-years:old
                'I after (that), after that war, (I) was already twenty, twenty four years old at that time.'
     KAI:       <P>u=n</P>.
                    DM
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MIK:    →    .. de watashi ano=, funa-nori shite-i-ta-n desu.
             then    I     DM      sailor       do-ing-PAST-NOM  COP
             'Then I was acting as a sailor.'
KAI:         <P>u=n</P>.
             DM
MIK:    →    de=, Ni%, Nihon made it-ta-n desu.
             then          Japan  till  go-PAST-NOM COP
             'Then, (I) went to Japan.'
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This subject paraphrases the word *rito*, and uses the sentence final element *n desu* in the polite form and the conjunction *de*, which makes the conversation sound more natural and smooth.

The same situation was observed in Taiwan: their competence in Japanese was strongly affected by how long and how often they had contact with the Japanese language after graduating from *kogakko*. Superior level speakers all received an education in college or at a women's high school. I claim that acquiring a good command of Japanese requires not only long-term contact with the Japanese people, but also a volume of input from reading and listening, which must contain a variety of high-level vocabulary and complicated structures. In Yap, ordinary people had limited input from magazines, books, and radio during the Japanese period and after 1945 unlike Taiwan, where they even had input from media such as NHK broadcasts and videos after 1945.

4-2. Grammatical deviations and errors

4-2-1. Overview

Next observe the grammatical aspects of their Japanese. Table 3 presents an overview of the deviations and errors in the data. There are ten types of deviations and errors in their Japanese (particle usage will be discussed separately).

Table 3: Deviations and Errors

deviation & error ID	incomprehensible/ un-natural sentence	word	inflection	causative	potential	passive	lack of morpheme	tense	aspect	ko/so/a
MON	10	23	2	1	11			31		
MIK	3	16					1	17	2	
EL	9	33	5		7			30	1	
GIL	7	15				1	2	11		1
IG	5	15			1	1		15	1	2

Deviation, in this paper, refers to an element that is not a purely grammatical error but is unnatural for a native Japanese speaker. The 'incomprehensible/unnatural sentence'

is not caused by a grammatical mistake or by just one wrong word, but means the entire clause is hard to understand or unnatural for a native Japanese speaker as in example (3) and (4). The 'word' type is an instance where the speaker chose the wrong word (but with a close meaning to the correct word) or remembered the word's definition incorrectly like in example (5).

(3) IG: ano=, sensoo no tame de ne=.
             DM   war   of   because COP SF
             'Well, because of the war.'

    KAI: <P>hai</P>.
             DM

    IG: → **benkyoo ga= moo,.. tarinaku narimashi-ta** @[@].
             study   SUB anymore short:of   become-PAST
             '(My) studies were cut short.'

(4) KAI: de=,.. ima wa=, Nihon-go moo tsukai-masen ka/?
             then   now TOP   Japanese-language anymore use-NEG   Q
             'Then, (you) do not use the Japanese language anymore?'

    MON: o, un, tsuka-e-nai.
             DM yes   use-POT-NEG
             'Well, yes, (I) cannot use.'

    KAI: <P>u[=n</P>].
             DM

    MON: →   [ni%], zasshi, ano= **Nihon no=, o o=, zasshi nanka= yon-**
                        magazine   DM   Japan of DM DM   magazine like   read-
              dara, tsuka-eru.
              if   use-POT
             'If (I) read a magazine, a Japanese magazine or something, (I) can use.'

(5) MIK: → san-nensee de,.. sensoo ga **ki-te,** yame-ta-n desu. gakkoo o
             third:year:student   COP   war SUB come-and quit-PAST-NOM COP   school OBJ
             yame-ta-n desu.
             quit-PAST-NOM COP
             '(When I was) a third year student, the war came, and (I) quit. I quit school.'

As Table 3 shows, the most frequently occurring deviations & error types were word choice and tense. The tense error mainly occurred when the speaker used the present form in describing a past event. The tense error in Japanese does not affect understanding very much as was seen in the example (1) *iru*. On the other hand, 'incomprehensible /un-natural sentence' and 'word' type deviations and errors require more effort in order to understand the speaker's meaning. In that sense, those deviations and errors are a more critical interference to communication. I will discuss further details of this matter in a different paper. In this paper I explore particle usage and the predicate form.

4-2-2. Particle usage

Acquisition of particles is said to be one of the most difficult items for Japanese language

learners to learn, and there are numerous research papers examining the acquisition order of particles (Rusell 1980, Doi & Yoshioka 1990, Yagi 1992, 1994, 1996, Sakota 2002, etc.). Doi and Yoshioka (1990) claim that the particle acquisition order is 'wa→ga→o'. Yagi (1996) suggests that it is 'wa→o→ga' or 'o→wa→ga'. I examined Yapese's Japanese to see if there were any patterns of errors in the particle usages or tendencies suggesting particle acquisition order. Table 4 shows frequency and percentage of correct usage, ellipsis, and errors in particle usage.

Table 4: The particle usage: correct usage (+), ellipsis (ø), error (-)

particle ID		wa	o	sub-ga	obj-ga	e	de	ni	mo	no	made	kara	to	yori	niwa	others
MON	+	40 (87.0)	5 (18.5)	38 (84.4)	6 (85.7)	4 (80.0)	16 (88.9)	24 (100)	17 (100)	69 (100)	1 (100)		8 (100)		1 (100)	made-wa (1), ni-mo (3)
	ø	6 (13.0)	22 (81.5)	4 (8.9)	1 (14.3)	1 (20.0)										
	-			3 (6.7)			2 (11.1)									
MIK	+	50 (79.4)	6 (60.0)	6 (50.0)			13 (92.9)	12 (92.3)	9 (100)	36 (100)	3 (100)	8 (88.9)	8 (100)	2 (100)	15 (93.8)	
	ø	12 (19.0)	4 (40.0)	5 (41.7)	2 (100)	6 (100)		1 (7.7)								
	-	1 (1.6)		1 (8.3)			1 (7.1)					1 (11.1)			1 (6.3)	
EL	+	99 (97.1)	25 (73.5)	40 (90.9)	2 (66.7)	4 (50.0)	11 (84.6)	75 (97.4)	28 (93.3)	127 (100)	8 (100)	6 (100)	18 (100)		2 (100)	made-wa (1), ni-mo (2),
	ø	3 (2.9)	9 (26.5)	2 (4.5)	1 (33.3)	4 (50.0)		1 (1.3)								
	-			2 (4.5)			2 (15.4)	1 (1.3)	2 (6.7)							
GIL	+	54 (88.5)	27 (75.0)	26 (89.7)	8 (72.7)	1 (16.7)	14 (93.3)	38 (100)	23 (100)	61 (98.4)	1 (100)	3 (100)	12 (100)		2 (100)	de-wa (4), sae (3), to-wa (2), shika (1), de-mo (1)
	ø	7 (11.5)	7 (19.4)	2 (6.9)	3 (27.3)	4 (66.7)										
	-		2 (5.6)	1 (3.4)		1 (16.7)	1 (6.7)			1 (1.6)						
IG	+	35 (83.3)	25 (47.2)	3 (30.0)	3 (37.5)	2 (28.6)	5 (83.3	30 (90.9)	19 (100)	63 (98.4)		1 (50.0)	8 (88.9)		2 (100)	de-mo (1)
	ø	7 (16.7)	27 (50.9)	7 (70.0)	5 (62.5)	5 (71.4)	3 (9.1)									
	-		1 (1.9)				1 (16.7)			1 (1.6)		1 (50.0)	1 (11.1)			

 *Upper number indicates frequency and the number in a parenthesis indicates percentage (%)

In spite of the argument that acquisition of Japanese particle is one of the hardships in learning Japanese, the result reveals that the subjects use particles fairly well. Frequency of error is low and a pattern of errors was not seen. When the correction rate was low, the subjects choose ellipsis (except one case of *kara* by Eg). The subject IG had a tendency to omit particles, however, other subjects used particles correctly rather than omitting them or making errors in their use. The same result was seen in Kai's (2007, 2008) observation of elderly Taiwanese. These two results from different colonies suggests that particles must be learned in the early stages of Japanese acquisition and are stored solidly in long term memory in contrast to other grammatical items like tense or semantics of lexicon.

4-2-3. Predicate form

Next observe the predicate form. In Japanese, there are two speech styles: plain form and polite form. Generally speaking the former is used for conversations in casual relationships and also in formal writing. The latter is used in conversations with superior persons and in formal situations. The next table shows the predicate form of the subjects' Japanese.

Table 5: Predicate Form

ID	Sex	plain form							polite form						
		N & Adj	+ MDL	+ SFE	verb	+ MDL	+ SFE	Total (%)	N & Adj	+ MDL	+ SFE	verb	+ MDL	+ SFE	Total (%)
MON	F	54			112		13	179 (98.4%)	0			3			3 (1.6%)
MIK	M	61		1	15		1	78 (38.6%)	56		3	30		35	124 (61.4%)
EL	F	73	1	11	118	1	15	219 (95.6%)	2		1	4		3	10 (4.4%)
GIL	F	35		3	74	2	12	126 (91.3%)	0			7		4	11 (8%)
IG	M	31			4		1	36 (26.1%)	13		5	66		18	102 (73.9%)

*MDL = modality like *rashi, kamoshirenai.* SFE = sentence final elements like *yo, ne, kara.*

There is something noticeable in the Yap subjects' Japanese, which was not seen in studies of Taiwanese Japanese. That is the written style used in conversation. One example is a noun predicate attached to the copula *da* and *de-aru* as seen in examples (6) and (7). Example (8) shows the plain form plus the conjunction *ga*. Example (9) is a plain form without any sentence final elements. Note that the subjects EL and GIL are female, which make their utterances sound more odd.

(6) EL: ie ano=, ano hito-tachi wa gott%, gakkoo no=,.. shitt%,.. ano=
                no DM   those people-PL   TOP   school   of   DM
      →   seeto **da**. a sotsugyoshi-te ne,
              student   COP   DM   graduate-and   FP
            'No, those people were school students. (They) had graduated (from school) and,

      KAI: <P>hai</P>.
                  DM

      EL: ano= risaachi ka nanka no= shigoto o shi-te, koko ni ki-te,
               DM   research   or something of   job   OBJ do-and   here LOC come-and
            were doing a research job or something, and (then)came here, and then,

(7) GIL: ... atash%, atashi wa, (TSK) ano=,.. jo%, <#>shoosu</#> no,
                          I   TOP   of
      →   kyuuchoo **de-at-ta**.
              class:president   COP-PAST
            'I was a class president of ## '.

(8) GIL: → .. nanika tsukan-de, tatsu no wa dekiru **ga**,.. <PP>a</PP>, jibun
                    something grab-and   stand:up NOM TOP   can   but   myself
            de tat-te,.. u de%, deki-nai.
             by   stand:up   can-NEG
            'I can stand up (if) I grab something, but I cannot stand up by myself.'

(9) EL: (TSK) Masaru-san wa hontoni ii% ii hito dat-ta.
                                    TOP   really   nice person   COP-PAST
              'Masaru was a really nice person.'

    KAI: u[2n2].
                DM

    EL: →   [2na2]gai aida watakushi no toko ni **i-ta**. (H) hontoni=, ano
                  long   time   I   GEN   place LOC stay-PAST   really   DM
              Yappu no koto wa, umaku yut-ta yo.
                      of thing TOP   well   say-PAST FP
              '(He) stayed at my place for long time. (He) was really good at talking about (or speaking?)Yap.'

Three subjects used the plain form in more than 90% of the data. Interestingly the two male subjects used more polite forms than the female subjects. Examples of which are in (2)(3)(5).

Kokugo dokuhon employed polite forms, so why do the subjects use the plain form? Previous research has pointed out the phenomena of the plain form by Yap people (Shibatani 1995a) and by Japanese language learners (Nakajima 1999, Mimaki 2007), but there is no reason or theory to answer why. I propose two explanations for this. One is because the plain form is the unmarked form of Japanese. The subordinate clauses with *te, to, node, noni, tara, nara, kara, keredo, shi* in the list of Minami (1974) and the relative clause, do not require a polite form *desu/masu* even when a main clause is a polite form. Casual conversation and written Japanese use plain forms. The plain form is used more than the polite form. In that sense, the plain form is the unmarked form and I assume that the non-native Japanese language speakers easily fall into using it if they are not trained to maintain a speech style or to monitor their own speech style[13].

Another possible explanation is deficient exposure with the polite form. When Yap people learned Japanese, they were children. Children do not have many opportunities to use or to be spoken to in a polite form. Even between adults, casual relationships use the plain form. The environments of the three female subjects were comprised of casual relationships (assisting a nurse, working for a Japanese family). On the other hand, both of the two male subjects had worked for Japanese soldiers. One possible conjecture is that they may have learned Japanese polite forms because the military has a strict hierarchy. Songs are another source of influence. According to my subjects, they sang Japanese songs to remember the Japanese language after 1945. There was one subject who kept saying that she could not speak Japanese well anymore. Instead, she recited Japanese songs to me one after another[14]. In that period there was not a large variety of entertainment available, so songs sank deeper into people's minds. The songs are composed in the plain form. Those factors are deemed to be the reasons for the subjects' use of the plain form.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the Japanese language spoken by elderly Yapese in terms of their proficiency level and grammatical characteristics, especially their use of particles and predicate forms.

The subjects have the ability to communicate in Japanese even now. However, their oral proficiency level is around the intermediate level. It would be true that elderly Yapese could speak Japanese better before 1945 than now, but it is unlikely to be the case that a superior level speaker became an intermediate level speaker.

Their particle usage did not show many errors. The frequency of correct usage was higher than the frequency of ellipsis. This result suggests that particles are learned at an early stage in the acquisition process. As for the predicate form, their Japanese demonstrated many plain forms. Taking into account their historical and educational background, I submit that their usage of the plain form is due to their lack of complete acquisition of the polite form, not from attrition. I speculate that this is caused by limited exposure to the Japanese language during the Japanese administration period and after 1945.

Appendix

1) The *kogakko* enrollment rate in 1927 and 1931 (Yanaihara 1935: 392-393)

	1927	1931
Saipan	64.27%	82.32%
Yap	51.27%	66.93%
Palau	86.77%	93.61%
Chuuk	14.25%	31.21%
Pohnpei	67.27%	91.61%
Jaluit	34.85%	40.07%
total	**43.61%**	**56.63%**

The survey targeted children from eight to fourteen years old who were eligible to enter school. The percentage is based on the number of children who graduated or were studying in *kogakko* at the time of the survey.

Transcription symbols:

-	morpheme boundary	[ ]		overlap
.	Final of intonation unit[15]	... (N)		Long Pause (Seconds)
,	Continuing of intonation unit	...		Medium Pause
?	Appeal	..		Short Pause
--	Truncated intonation unit	(0)		Latching
%	Truncated word	@		Laughter
\	Falling pitch	<@>	</@>	while laughing
/	Rising pitch	<E>	</E>	English
=	Lengthening	<#>	</#>	Indecipherable word or phrase
#	Indecipherable Syllable	(COUGH)		cough
		(TSK)		utterance of a click of the tongue

Grammatical symbols:

SUB	subject case marker	DM	discourse marker like '*hun*', '*un*', '*a*'.
OBJ	object case marker	FP	final particle like '*yo*', '*ne*'
TOP	topic marker	Q	question word
LOC	locative case marker	TAG	tag question
DIR	directive case marker	CAUS	causative
INS	instrumental case marker	POT	potential
COP	copula like '*desu*'	NOM	nominalizer
NEG	negative	ADV	adverbializer
PAST	past	BEN	benefactive
QUO	quotation	HON	honorific
		GEN	genitive

Notes

1. Miyawaki (1995) presents interviews of 41 subjects from Saipan, Tinian, Pohnpei, Truk (current Chuuk), and Satawan (currently a part of Chuuk and Mortlock Islands).

2. Yui provides the state of affairs of Japanese education in the South Seas Islands during the Japanese administration period.

3. Shibuya (1995a) lists unnatural usage of Japanese spoken by Yapese. Shibuya (1995b) investigates the types of potential form used by five elderly Yapese.

4. The term 'bilingual' is, in a narrow definition, often reserved for those with native or native-like proficiency in two languages. In its broadest definition, the bilingual is anyone who uses two languages. It is not clear in which sense Matsumoto (2000) and Yui (2000) used this term.

5. Uehara (1940: 61-66) shows the immigrant population in 1936 by prefecture. Most of the immigrants were living in Saipan.

6. Life expectancy was short and infant mortality was high. One quarter of all infants died before two years of age on average from 1929 to 1931. Yap was one of the worst of the islands in this regard (Yanaihara 1935: 63-65).

7. Palau reached almost 100%. See the appendix for the enrollment rate in the South Seas Islands in 1927 and 1931.

8. Mainly this is due to their financial situation. In contrast, Taiwan had a college-level education and there were people who went to Japan to study.

9. Discussions of Kokugo dokuhon used in the South Seas Islands are seen in Fukuda 1989: 221, Kawamura 1994: 11-40, Miyawaki 1995: 59-60, Seki and Hirataka 1997: 92-93, Yui 1998a: 88-91.

10. Note that the subjects are all above 80 years old and had difficulties answering when their birthday was. I had to ask their ages and birth years several times. Two of them answered using English, which is not their mother language. Their memory about the event year and age was not certain: they said that they do not remember well, and some used different ages during their stories. Therefore their birth year and age should be used only as a reference.

11. In OPI test, the tester organizes and builds up questions in order to elicit ratable samples from the subject. In my interviews, since my subjects are all aged, I spent more time and waited for their utterances to let them speak at their own speed and to speak as much as they could.

12. See Kai (2007, 2008).

13. I also conducted interviews of elderly Palau people in 2010. Some Palauan subjects also used the plain form.

14. There was one subject in Guam who studied Japanese for two years in order to be a Japanese teacher prior to 1945. She could hardly communicate in Japanese now, but she sang Japanese songs one after another. I met many Taiwanese subjects who liked to sing Japanese songs, too.

15. According to Chafe (2000), intonation unit (IU) is a speech unit that has an association with a coherent intonation contour. The criteria of delimitation of an IU are (1) pause, (2) final syllable lengthening or slow speech rate at the end of an IU, (3) fast speech rate at the beginning of the next IU, (4) pitch reset.

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