

## Initial close vowel assimilation in Miyako-Ryukyuan

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In this paper, I will be looking at the examples of Proto-Ryukyuan (PR) close vowels \*i and \*u being partially or completely assimilated with neighboring consonants in Miyako-Ryukyuan.

The focus here has been narrowed to the word-initial settings, which so far do not seem to have been given an extensive treatment in the subject literature (although they are mentioned fragmentarily in Thorpe 1983, Bentley 2008 and Pellard 2009).

In these settings, PR \*i becomes a nasal homoorganic with the place of articulation of the following consonant if this consonant is a (generally voiced) obstruent or a nasal.

\*ideru > ndil (Tarama) ‘to go out’; \*ige > nzɭ (Nakachi) ‘thorn’; \*inatiki > nnatsɭks (Hirara), nnazɭtsɭ (Sarahama) ‘mallet’

If the subsequent consonant is a flap or an approximant, \*i and the consonant undergo a mutual assimilation to a sequence of two alveolar fricatives. This change clearly had an intermediate stage when \*i took the shape of the so-called apical or fricative vowel \*ɿ, the articulation of which is accompanied by a friction induced by the shifting of the blade of the tongue toward the alveolar ridge (for a detailed analysis of phonetic qualities of this vowel, cf. Aoi and Niinaga 2013): \*ir/j > \*zɿr/j > \*zɿz > zz.

\*ireru > zziz ‘to put in’; \*irana > zzara ‘sickle’; \*ijo > zzu ‘fish’ (all Hirara)

PR \*u assimilates with the following nasal undergoing the change \*u > m.

\*umaga > mmaga ‘grandchild’; \*umu > m: ‘sweet potato’ (both Hirara)

If followed by an alveolar consonant, or – in the rare cases in which such a sound sequence is indeed found – by a velar, \*u undergoes a desyllabification which depending on the regiolect and the specific word may be realized as the labio-dental fricative, labio-dental approximant, or unrounded close back vowel.

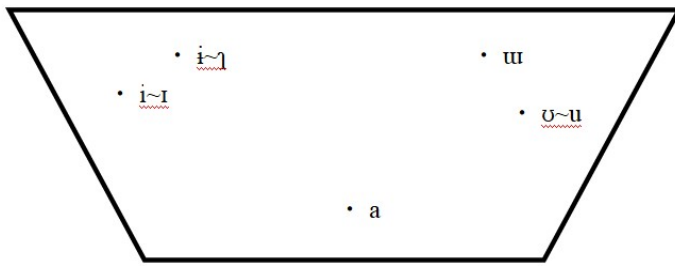
\*urajamu > vvja:m (Hirara), vrjam (alternating with urja:m) (Nakachi) ‘to envy’; \*uti > vtsɭ (Sawada), vtsɭ (alternating with utsɭ) (Hirara) ‘close, intimate’; \*ugimu > vgjam (Hirara) ‘harpoon’.

Not all of these changes, however, can be consistently observed in all Miyakoan regiolects. In fact, a large part of them applies only to specific regiolects or specific vocabulary items. The case of the \*u > v~v~u change is especially unstable, with the v~v~u sounds often realized as allophones of /u/ or, in some regiolects such as Ikema or Ueno, lost altogether.

What this appears to imply in the context of the historical study of Miyakoan is an unstable, unbalanced six-vowel system for Proto-Miyakoan (PM), with the original PR mid-vowels already mostly raised and the original close vowels centralized and/or pushed toward more consonantal realizations.

Furthermore, the evidence introduced in this paper and the PM six-vowel hypothesis supports an unambiguous (\*i or \*e, \*u or \*o) reconstruction of some of the otherwise controversial (as observed in Thorpe 1983, Bentley 2008 or Vovin 2010) PR items, such as \*enu > in ‘dog’ (not \*inu) or \*ura > vva ‘you’ (not \*ora; not excluding the possibility of \*bura).

Figure 1. PM vowel system



Word count: 489

## References

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