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# НИКОЛАЙ НЕВСКИЙ: ЖИЗНЬ И НАСЛЕДИЕ

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NIKOLAI NEVSKY'S  
NOTES ON THE MIYAKO DIALECTS  
AS A RYŪKYŪAN COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS  
RESEARCH TOOL

**1. Introduction**

This paper is devoted to one of Nikolai Nevsky's most outstanding achievements, meaning his trilingual Miyako-Japanese-Russian dictionary manuscript from the 1920s. I would like to focus on a component of the said dictionary which I consider to be of the utmost research value, namely the general Japonic lexical database that was lavishly featured by Nevsky in the manuscript. By means of exemplification and quotations from the dictionary, which is currently in the process of deciphering and editing by yours truly, it will be argued that the data gathered in this source could be effectively utilized in the comparative study of Ryūkyūan ethnolects, and perhaps even prove helpful with reconstructing some proto-Ryūkyūan or proto-Japonic lexical forms.

During his fourteen-year-long stay in Japan, Nevsky had visited the Miyakos three times: in 1922, 1926 and 1928. It was supposedly a part of his larger research program set out to embrace Japan's peripheral cultures and in so doing, to discover the key to the cultural and linguistic ancestry of the Japanese people(s); his earlier studies of the Ainu and 1927 expedition to examine the language and lifestyle of a Taiwan's (then a part of the Japanese Empire) indigenous people called Tsou seem to belong to the same research line. Aside from gathering the data on the Miyako ways of life, customs, rites, beliefs etc. (he wrote and published a few articles on these topics), and apart from collecting and scrutinizing traditional Miyako oral literature (along with translating some of the songs into standard Japanese, Russian or both, and writing commentaries upon

them<sup>1</sup>), Nevsky got engaged into an attempt of compiling an extensive Miyako-language wordlist. What would eventually have become a two-volume facsimile published in 2005 by the Hirara City Educational Committee under the title of *Miyako hōgen nōto* (宮古方言ノート) started off as a handwritten collection of ten *daigaku-nōto* format notebooks, roughly a hundred and twenty pages each. The entries in the manuscript are arranged in an alphabetic-like order (albeit it is more of a mixed Roman-Cyrillic order than an application of one particular alphabetic system) and there are also some signs in the contents of the manuscript indicating that Nevsky actually meant for it to be a future publication. However, the level of editing does not exceed an only tentative phase, and so *Miyako hōgen nōto* — or *Notes on the Miyako dialects*, as I choose to translate the title into English, remain in their vaguely arranged, hardly legible handwritten form until this very day. In order to compensate for this situation, this author decided to process digitally the contents of Nevsky's *Notes*, a pursuit which bears numerous fruits as far as the knowledge on the Miyakos and the Ryūkyūs in general is concerned, one of which being the aforementioned comparative linguistics data.

An average entry in the *Notes* looks like the example below (pointy brackets have been added by this author and include her English approximation of the original contents),

(i) **ka:z** (Ps) 借ル Занимать, брать в долг  
<Eng.: To borrow>

with the abbreviation (Ps) meaning 'Hirara', which indicates that the given lexeme was used in the area of the Hirara city (Hirara-chō or 平良町 in Nevsky's times), or that it belonged to the Hirara sub-variation of the Miyako language. This kind of geographical abbreviations was extensively applied by Nevsky throughout the whole manuscript, which made it possible to identify the precise regional origin of the recorded lexemes, and which, moreover, enabled Nevsky to display in the form of an optional commentary a wide range of non-Miyako lexemes considered to be cognates of the given entry. Thus, the above example in its complete version actually consists of the following data:

(ii) **ka:z** (Ps) 借ル Занимать, брать в долг  
[(Jap) karu/ kariru (Ya) karuŋ (キカ) haŋuŋ (クロ) haruŋ (カテ)

<sup>1</sup> Nevsky's research on the Miyako oral traditions can be found in the following volumes: Oka 1971, Nevsky 1998, or the Russian original of the latter edited by Gromkovskaya in 1978.

(イ ト) kaiŋ (ナゴ) kajŋ (イ エ) kajun (コハ) k'āruŋ (ナセ) (イ シ) karun (スミ) (トク) kar'un (アラ) k'āruŋ (イ シ) ko:ŋ]<sup>2</sup>.

The bracketed abbreviations used by Nevsky can be interpreted in the subsequent way:

a) (Jap) stands for 'Standard Japanese' (of Nevsky's times, i.e. Taishō/early Shōwa era);

b) (Ya) means either 'general Yaeyama' or 'unspecified Yaeyama', which supposedly indicates that either the given lexeme was used and/or understood throughout the whole Yaeyama island cluster, or that was is not exactly known which particular island or settlement of the Yaeyamas the given lexeme originated from;

c) (クロ) means Kuro, (コハ) means Kohama, (イシ) means Ishigaki and (アラ) means Aragusuku, all of which are the Yaeyama island cluster islands;

d) (カテ) means Kadena, (イ ト) means Itoman, (ナゴ) means Nago, i.e. cities of the Okinawa main island; (イ エ) is the island Ie of the Okinawa island cluster;

e) (キカ) is the island Kikai, (トク) is the island Tokuno, (ナセ) is the city of Naze and (スミ) is the Sumiyō settlement of the Amami Ōshima, all of which belong to the Amami island cluster.

A majority of entries in the *Notes on the Miyako dialects* seems to be likewise equipped in synchronic comparative data. Furthermore, in some entries Nevsky suggested the probable ancestors of the given

<sup>2</sup> Phonetic symbols applied by Nevsky which differ from the modern IPA guidelines (cp. IPA 1999) are thought to be best interpreted as follows.

Apostrophe <'> indicates palatalization with all consonants but for the alveolar fricatives and affricates.

Acute accent <> mark placed directly over either an alveolar fricative or an affricate consonant indicates its palatalization, cp. <ś>, <č>. When placed over a vowel, it indicates its slight narrowing, cp. <ó>.

Grave accent <> mark placed beside a consonant indicates its aspiration, cp. <k'>. When directly over a vowel, it indicates its slight lowering, cp. <è>, <ù>.

Cyrillic character <з> indicates voiced alveolar fricative which differs from its other allophone, indicated with the "normal" <z> character, in its distributional and phonotactical characteristics; contrary to <з>, <z> is moraic, may be syllabic, geminated, and occurs after voiced plosives and in the word-final position. Perhaps in the modern IPA notation the two could be distinguished in such a way that <з> would be marked as [z], and <z> would be marked as <z̥>, with the lowering diacritic directly below the sound symbol and reflecting this allophone's reported 'greater lip aperture' (Uemura 2003: 46). This proposal, however, needs further investigation before it can be applied to the description of the Miyako phonetics.

lexeme, displaying its possible cognates as found in some Old-Japanese or Old-Ryūkyūan sources, such as the *Man'yōshū*, *Omorosōshi* or *Konkōkenshū*. The quality and amount of such information stored in the *Notes* calls for its extensive application to the comparative study of Ryūkyūan languages, from the synchronic — meaning their description as they were back in the 1920s — as well as the diachronic point of view. In this paper I will focus on two aspects of comparative Ryūkyūan linguistics towards which the *Notes* could be utilized in this respect. One will pertain to verbal endings found in various Ryūkyūan languages as opposed to their mainland Japanese counterparts, and I will make an attempt to draw the regularities in the phonetic changes noticeable among the languages of interest. The other will trace the phonetic whereabouts of a certain vowel peculiar to the Miyako phonemic system, significantly ambiguous in its descriptions to be found so far in the literature on the subject.

Note: in order to discriminate between phonetics and writing conventions, while speech sounds are indicated by standard square brackets, such as [i], particular script characters, their sound value notwithstanding, will appear in pointy brackets, for example <ī>.

## 2. Correspondences in verbal endings

The following analysis will pertain to the phonologically final parts of non-past finite verbal forms, rather than to verbal endings in the morphological meaning of this term. In other words, the discussion will be focused on those parts of verbs which may sound different depending on the language variation they are used in, regardless of whether they form an actual ending or a stem of a verb from the morphosyntactic point of view.

The point of reference in all cases presented below will be standard Japanese non-past finite verbal forms and their ending syllables. In case of all verbs and ethnolects, if not indicated differently, the transcription will be identical to the one used by Nevsky in the manuscript of *Notes on the Miyako dialects*.

### 2.1. SJ -ruu verbs

Japanese -ruu verbs, whether they belong to the consonant or vowel inflection type, alter their forms in the Ryūkyūs in the way seen below.

Table 2.1

SJ	Miyako	Irabu/ Tarama	Yaeyama	Okinawa	meaning
<i>agerul/ aŋeru</i>	<i>agiz</i>	<i>agil</i>	<i>agiruŋ</i>	<i>agijuŋ</i>	‘to lift sth up’
<i>dekiru</i>	<i>diki:z</i>	<i>dikil</i>	<i>diki:ruŋ/ diki:ŋ</i>	— <sup>52</sup>	‘to be made, to be ready’
<i>odoru</i> (Old Japanese <i>wodorul/ wotoru</i> )	<i>buduz</i>	<i>budul</i>	<i>buduruŋ</i>	<i>wudujuŋ</i>	‘to dance’

Thus, the -ru syllable is taken place by -z on the Miyako main island, -l<sup>4</sup> in Irabu and Tarama language variations, -ruŋ/-ruŋ in Yaeyama and -juŋ in Okinawa.

## 2.2. SJ -su verbs

Standard Japanese -su verbs in Miyako language end in the syllable -sī ([i̯] indicates a slightly centralized front vowel — “more central than its counterpart in the Tōhōku dialects and less central than the parallel vowel in the Amamis”, to borrow Nevsky’s own words,<sup>5</sup> see further discussion in section 3), -sīŋ in Yaeyama-Ryūkyūan and -śuŋ or -suŋ in Okinawa-Ryūkyūan.

Table 2.2

SJ	Miyako	Yaeyama	Okinawa	meaning
<i>arawasus</i>	<i>ara:sī</i>	<i>ara:sīŋ</i>	<i>arawaśuŋ</i>	‘to show, to express’
<i>awasus</i>	<i>a:sī</i>	<i>a:sīŋ</i>	<i>a:śuŋ</i>	‘to put together’
<i>kuwasus</i>	<i>fa:sī</i>	<i>fa:sīŋ</i>	<i>kwa:suŋ</i>	‘to feed, to make sb eat’

## 2.3. SJ -mu

When Standard Japanese word-final syllable of a verb is -mu, Miyako-Ryūkyūan verbs are recorded by Nevsky with the word-final -m, while Yaeyama verbs end with -muŋ and Okinawa verbs with -muŋ.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> An Okinawan cognate of this verb was not found in the Notes.

<sup>4</sup> Reportedly a retroflex lateral approximant [l̠]. Cp. Nevsky 1998: 8.

<sup>5</sup> Oka, 1971: 94.

<sup>6</sup> The back-close vowel for Okinawan ethnolects usually seems to be indicated as unrounded [u], while in case of Yaeyama ethnolects notation differs from lexeme to lexeme.

Table 2.3

SJ	Miyako		Yaeyama	Okinawa	meaning
	Ikema	other			
<i>amu</i>	<i>am</i>		<i>amuŋ</i>	<i>amuŋ</i>	‘to knit, to plait’
<i>kumu</i>	<i>ŋm</i>	<i>fum</i>	<i>fumuŋ</i>	<i>kumuŋ</i>	‘to draw (water)’
<i>fumu</i>	<i>ŋm</i>	<i>fũm</i>	<i>fumuŋ</i>	<i>kumuŋ</i> (Nago)	‘to stomp, to tread upon’

## 2.4. SJ -ku

In case of Standard Japanese verbs with final syllable -ku, most of the Miyako language variations seem to replace the final -ku with -k<sup>s</sup>i, while in the Sawada ethnolect (perhaps representative of the Irabu island as a whole, but this hypothesis is yet to be confirmed) the final syllable may be -fu(:) or -ci (the reason for whose discrepancy needs to be further investigated), -kuŋ in Yaeyama and -cuŋ in Okinawa.

Table 2.4

SJ	Miyako-Sawada	Miyako-other	Yaeyama	Okinawa	meaning
<i>aruku</i>	<i>azk<sup>s</sup>i/ alk<sup>s</sup>i</i> (Tarama)	<i>alfu:</i>	<i>araguŋ</i> (Ishigaki)	<i>atcuŋ</i>	‘to walk’
<i>jaku</i>	<i>jak<sup>s</sup>i</i>	<i>jac<sup>s</sup>i</i>	<i>jakuŋ</i>	<i>jacuŋ</i>	‘to fry’
<i>kaku</i>	<i>kak<sup>s</sup>i</i>	<i>kac<sup>s</sup>i</i>	<i>kakuŋ/kak<sup>s</sup>i</i> (Ishigaki)	<i>hacuŋ</i> (Ie)	‘to write’
<i>naku</i>	<i>nak<sup>s</sup>i</i>	<i>nafu</i>	<i>nakuŋ</i>	<i>nacuŋ</i> (Yoron) <sup>56</sup>	‘to cry’

## 2.5. Other

Although so far there has not been enough examples of multiple Ryūkyūan language variations for other Standard Japanese verbal endings counterparts, with those few that actually are recorded (those are obviously Miyako-Ryūkyūan verbs for the most part) one can hypothesize about the inter-Ryūkyūan regularities and the resulting verbs which were not directly included by Nevsky in the *Notes*.

Perhaps the rounded or unrounded realization of this vowel in the Yaeyamas of 1920s was related primarily to some kind of idiolect allophony.

<sup>7</sup> For this lexeme no general Okinawan equivalent has been given, however, the proposed ending seems to be shared in the southern Amami language variations, such as Yoron or Okinoerabu.

2.5.1 Standard Japanese -ou = Miyako -u:

(*ikou* — *juku*: ‘to rest’)

2.5.2 Standard Japanese -au = Miyako -o:, Sawada -au<sup>8</sup>

(*arau/ aro*: — *aro*: — *arau* ‘to wash’)

2.5.3 Standard Japanese -gu/ -ŋu = Miyako -g<sup>z</sup>i; suggested ending for Yaeama -guŋ, Okinawa -zuŋ.

(*aogu* — *aug<sup>z</sup>i* ‘to look up’, *isogu* — *isug<sup>z</sup>i* ‘to hurry’)

2.5.4 Standard Japanese -nu = Miyako -niz.

(*sinu* — *siniz* ‘to die’; albeit presumably derived from the attributive form of the Old Japanese verb, i.e. *sinuru* — \**sinuz* — *siniz*)

2.5.5 Standard Japanese -cu = Miyako -cī.

(*macu* — *macī* ‘to wait’)

### 3. Comparing vowel distribution: the <i> vowel case

This section will be focused upon distributional qualities of one particular Miyako vowel, whose description so far has provided much controversy and ambiguity in the field of Miyako phonetics. This vowel has been called a central close vowel (Hokama 1977, Hayashi 2010), an apical close front vowel (Uemura 2003), or a close back unrounded vowel (Pellard 2010, albeit referring to the Ōgami-Miyako variation). There seems to be no common agreement among researchers when it comes to naming and interpreting this sound; Karimata (2011) suggests that the main discrepancy stems from differing points of view, as those who argue about the ‘centralness’ of the vowel lean upon the auditory bases, while the ‘apical front’ party form their assessment on the articulatory grounds.<sup>9</sup>

Nevsky used the symbol <i> for indicating this vowel, which even today could be interpreted as a ‘front vowel more central than [i] and less central than [i̠]’; on the other hand, bearing in mind the times when Nevsky compiled his dictionary and the phonetic symbols which were in use during the day, one should also consider the significant probability that by writing <i> Nevsky simply meant the sound that today would be marked by the symbol [i̠]. The latter hypothesis is further supported by the fact that Nevsky himself referred to this sound as a ‘mixed vowel’, as opposed to front and back vowels. However, as it was mentioned previously, Nevsky defined this [i̠] sound as an intermediate one between the Tōhōku ‘modi-

<sup>8</sup> That said, the 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 categories may also overlap, cp. SJ *warau/waro*: versus Tarama *baru*: ‘to laugh’.

<sup>9</sup> Karimata 2011: 196–197.

fied [i]’ and the Amami Ōshima [i] (he used exactly this symbol for denoting the Amami sound), identifying the latter with the Russian <ы> vowel.<sup>10</sup> All in all, it seems that Nevsky considered the Miyako <i> sound a near-front close vowel.

Distributional facts about the vowel [i] (author decides stick to this phonemic symbol as the reference to this vowel for the rest of this paper) are roughly the following:

— when after fricatives and affricates, it retains its “default”, close-central quality (cp. *mā-gi* ‘ugly’ in Hirara, Sawada and Sarahama, *kafuĉi* ‘vegetable garden’ in Hirara);

— when after voiceless plosives, due to the strong airflow characteristic of the Miyako language, a voiceless alveolar friction occurs between a consonant and the vowel; Nevsky marks this phenomenon with an upper index <s> character (cp. *k<sup>s</sup>imu* ‘liver’ in Hirara);

— similarly, when after voiced plosives, a voiced alveolar friction occurs, marked by Nevsky with the upper index <z> character (cp. *irab<sup>z</sup>i* ‘to choose’ in Hirara);

— when on its own as a single-sound syllable nucleus, the vowel loses its vocalic quality and becomes syllabic [z] (cp. *fūta:z* ‘two people’ in Hirara and Uechi);

— finally, in some language variations (Tarama, Irabu) and in some contexts, this vowel may occur after the bilabial nasal (cp. *miz* ‘new’ in Tarama and Sawada, *imiz* ‘taboo’ in Sawada).

Given the correspondences between the distribution of this vowel and the parallel usage of other vowels in Standard/ Old Japanese, as well as the inter-Miyako and inter-Ryukyuan correspondences shown in Nevsky’s dictionary, the following hypotheses can be brought forward.

a) In some cases, as it is with verbal endings, the Miyako [i] corresponds with the Standard Japanese [u], as in *arawasuu* — *ara:sī* or *kakuu* — *kak<sup>s</sup>ī*. However, in different cases [i] sometimes happens to act as an equivalent to the mainland Japanese [i], such as *mukaši* — *mkasī* ‘the past’.

From the so far gathered data it can be inferred that where there is [i] in Japanese, in Miyako [i] appears to counter the [i]-related palatalization. This assumption finds its proof in pairs of words such as *īsi* — *isī* ‘a stone’, *haši* — *pasī* ‘a bridge’, *jašiki* — *ja:sīk<sup>s</sup>ī* ‘a residence’, *īci* — *icī* ‘one’, *ĉito* — *p<sup>s</sup>ītu* ‘a man’.

On the other hand, when palatalization of a consonant in mainland Japanese is not related to the subsequent occurrence of [i], i.e. if the palatalized consonant is followed by [u] or [a], its Miyako equivalent

<sup>10</sup>Oka 1971: 94.

remains palatalized, while the vowel either remains the same (if it is open) or undergoes raising (if it is close); cp. Miyako *imša* ‘fisherman’ explained by Nevsky by Old Japanese morphemes *umi* ‘the sea’ + *ši* ‘doing’ + *ja* ‘someone’, i.e. *umi* + *šja*, Sawada *gūši* — Japanese *gošui* ‘ritual wine’.

b) If the aforementioned assumptions do not apply even though all the necessary phonemic conditions have been met, it might suggest that these “not-applying” words were quite recent loanwords borrowed directly from mainland Japanese the way they sounded, rather than being distant descendants to some Proto-Japonic lexical form shared by the ancestors of the present-day Miyako and Japanese speakers.

c) The vowel-derived [z] phoneme appears often in the word-final position after an actual vowel, thus preventing a V + ĩ type diphthongization. This explains how Standard Japanese -ruu verbs in Miyako end in -z (in Tarama and Irabu variations it is -l); -r- collapses by either disappearing completely or merging into the preceding vowel and consequently lengthening it, while the final -u changes into -ĩ and in turn into -z. Interestingly enough, Niinaga (2011: 42) mentions a peculiar phenomenon from the Yuwan variation of Amami-Ryūkyūan, called by him the “flap deletion rule”, in accordance with which [r] is always deleted should it appear before palatalization-provoking sounds, such as [i].<sup>11</sup> If one assumes that a similar rule (such as flap deletion before close vowels) applies to the Miyako language variations, the aforementioned phonemical evolution would be somehow explained. (However, in case of Irabu and Tarama one would have to consider “flap lateralization” rather than “flap deletion”, palatalization blocking processes notwithstanding.)

A few entries in Nevsky’s *Notes* provide suggestions as to what the possible evolution from [ĩ] to [z] may have looked like. First there could have been a slight voiced friction between another vowel and the subsequent [ĩ] which prevented the diphthongization, as seen in Hirara lexemes *mi:putuʔi* ‘blinding’, *bunaʔibikiʔi* ‘brothers and sisters’, *miʔiginai* ‘a new household’. It seems very probable that such words were a retention of an earlier phonetical development stage, which resulted in complete replacement of the word-final [ĩ] by the moraic [z].

d) The -mĩ- syllabic combination in Tarama and Irabu ethnolects could have originated because of the bilabial quality of the nasal [m], due to which there appeared a friction similar to that after [b]. However, perhaps because of the sonorant quality of [m], the friction may have eventually disappeared with only the basic vowel left after [m] — or rather, switched places so that it found itself after the vowel, as in Tarama *mĩs-cĩ* ‘three’

<sup>11</sup> Niinaga 2011: 36–37, 42.

or Sawada *miǝǝumi* ‘a bride’. In the *Notes* there are a few words recorded with both realizations shown as possible, like Sawada *im<sup>2</sup>i/ imiz* ‘taboo’, which may be thought of as confirming this evolution pattern. One could also consider this nasal + [i] combination as a hint for possible genetic affinity of Tarama and/or Irabu ethnolects with the Yaeyama-Ryūkyūan language, where such [m] + [i] combinations seem to appear on the regular and frequent basis.

#### 4. Endnote

The issues discussed in this paper are by far no attempt to provide a complex nor systematic presentation of all possible ways to apply Nevsky’s *Notes* into the field of comparative and diachronic Ryūkyūan linguistics. My intention was rather to estimate the possibilities stored in that 90-year-old manuscript by showing just a few aspects concerning the research in the said field, to answering whose questions the *Notes* may provide some significant and worthwhile clues.

There should be some emphasis put on the fact that not only was Nevsky probably the very first scholar ever to have put down the Miyako language in phonetic symbols instead of *kana* syllabaries, but also that his records, be it Miyako or any other ethnolect, provide an image of the Ryūkyūan languages from the era when they were still in a frequent everyday use, spoken by all generations and not as altered by the influence of Standard Japanese. It is easy to imagine how priceless the inter-Japonic contrastive data from those times and this kind of a professional source could be.

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**«МАТЕРИАЛЫ ДЛЯ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ГОВОРА ОСТРОВОВ  
МИЯКО» Н. А. НЕВСКОГО КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ  
ДЛЯ СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫХ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИХ  
ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ РЮКЮСКИХ ЯЗЫКОВ**

«Материалы для изучения говора островов Мияко» Н. А. Невского — это не просто многоязычный словарь, а очень ценный источник для целого ряда лингвистических дисциплин, имеющих отношение к рюкюанистике, одной из особенностей которого является огромная база лексических данных из целого ряда этнолектов как островов Рюкю, так и основной Японии. В данной статье выдвинуты предложения по возможным путям использования лингвистами «Материалов» Н. А. Невского в рюкюско-японских компаративных и диахронических исследованиях на примере анализа конечных глагольных форм в разных диалектах японского языка и фонемического положения загадочной гласной [i] в языке Мияко.