Ryukyuan - is it a dialect of Japanese or an independent language?

Yasuko Madsen

Ryukyuan is an endangered language spoken in the Ryukyu Islands, which is situated at the southernmost part of the Japanese archipelago. Once there was an independent kingdom that ruled most of the Ryukyu Islands from the 15th to the 19th century, but today it is a prefecture of Japan (Okinawa). Culturally, Ryukyu Island is strongly influenced by China and Southeast Asia, but linguistically, Ryukyuan is similar to Japanese. Ryukyuan and Japanese are not mutually intelligible, but they can be easily converted if you learn phonological rules. Furthermore, there is a great similarity in grammar, lexicon, and prosody between the two. In this talk, I will introduce the cultural and linguistic characteristics of Ryukyuan.