

## Article

# Uchinaaguchi Learning through Indigenous Critical Pedagogy: Why Do Some People in Yomitan Not Know Yomitan Mountain?

Yumiko Ohara \* and Seira Machida

College of Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai'i at Hilo, Hilo, HI 96720, USA

\* Correspondence: yumikoo@hawaii.edu

**Abstract:** Since the 1970s, Yomitan Village in Okinawa has been at the forefront of community-led efforts of language preservation by documenting its folklore as a part of a larger goal to restore its language and culture. This has resulted in the documentation of over 5000 stories recounted in a local variety of Uchinaaguchi by over 700 community members from all parts of the village. The first aim of this article is to outline the vast folklore data that has been accumulated as well as the language-related materials that have been created from the data. Secondly, it explores conceptual frameworks for the teaching of endangered languages through an Indigenous critical pedagogy that incorporates three perspectives, namely, critical pedagogy hybridity and the third space, and decolonization. Furthermore, we suggest some ways to utilize these stories to teach the language and culture of the community and at the same time demonstrate how the accumulated narratives can be used to illuminate the crucial relationship among history, politics, and knowledge.

**Keywords:** Yomitan Village; Uchinaaguchi; shimakutuba; language revitalization; folklore; Indigenous critical pedagogy; decolonization



**Citation:** Ohara, Yumiko, and Seira Machida. 2023. Uchinaaguchi Learning through Indigenous Critical Pedagogy: Why Do Some People in Yomitan Not Know Yomitan Mountain? *Languages* 8: 17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8010017>

Academic Editor: Patrick Heinrich

Received: 18 April 2022

Revised: 6 September 2022

Accepted: 7 December 2022

Published: 3 January 2023



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## 1. Introduction

Ryukyuan people have been officially recognized as Indigenous people of Japan by various international organizations including Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, Minority Rights Groups International, Cultural Survival, the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group for Sustainable Development, the Association of the Indigenous Peoples in the Ryukyus, as well as the United Nations. Nonetheless, there is one crucial entity that denies the indigeneity of Ryukyuan people, that is, the Japanese government (Chibana 2018; Hammine 2019; Yokota 2015). Through colonization, the Japanese government, by employing forced assimilation policies, worked to eradicate the cultures, customs, traditions, languages, as well as identities of Ryukyuan people. While successful in many ways, these eradication efforts also yielded some failures (cf. Oguma 2014). This article explores one such failure of the government attempts, more precisely, community efforts to preserve and document their traditional stories in order to restore their language and culture. The article also suggests some ways to utilize these stories to teach the language and culture of the community and demonstrate how the accumulated narratives can be used to illuminate the crucial relationship between history and knowledge through a critical pedagogical perspective. It elucidates conceptual frameworks in the teaching of endangered languages which aim to produce speakers with functional cultural knowledge.

As a site of exploration, we selected Yomitan Village which is located in Nakagami in the central part of Okinawa and is where one of the authors, Seira Machida, was born, raised, and currently resides. The other author, Yumiko Ohara, has been working with the people in the community since 2017. In Omoro sōshi, the oldest compilation of poetry in Okinawa which contains poetry from the 12 to the 17 century, some references to the region

as Yontamoza and Yontamuza are evident. In 1908, the name of the area as Yomitanzan ‘Yomitan mountain’ in Japanese became official. In 1946, the village was renamed Yomitan in Japanese ([Yomitan Village Homepage n.d.](#)). According to the [Yomitan Village History Editorial Office \(1995\)](#), the compilation of folklore began in 1973. The documented folklore is not only a significant resource for oral tradition but also an irreplaceable resource for the future of the language. With an aim to effectively utilize this resource toward the larger goal of language and cultural revitalization, our exploration of Indigenous critical pedagogy incorporates three perspectives, namely critical pedagogy ([Freire \[1970\] 2009](#)), hybridity and the third space ([Bhabha 1994](#)), and decolonization ([Laenui 2000](#)). In the next section, each of these approaches in relation to Indigenous language teaching and learning and storytelling are discussed.

## 2. Indigenous Languages, Folklore, Critical Pedagogy, and Decolonization

The United Nations designated 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages and 2022 to 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. To kick off the UN International Decade of Indigenous Languages, the Festival of Indigenous Languages was organized by the Endangered Languages Project from 14 to 18 January 2022. Dr. Lorna Wanosta’a7 Williams, Lil’watul from British Columbia, Canada, in the opening keynote speech, made two points relevant to the current article. The first point was that all presentations will be in the form of stories due to the significance of stories in Indigenous cultures. She further asserted that in language revitalization movements, communities must take the lead. We believe these two points are significant for (1) framing how Indigenous folklore is seen, depicted, and utilized as well as (2) underscoring the importance of a community engagement in revitalization efforts. An Indigenous-led, land-based program has been undertaken by various communities including the Misipawistik Cree Nation ([Cherpako 2019](#)), the graduate program on Indigenous health in Ontario ([Mashford-Pringle and Stewart 2019](#)), and Indigenous land-based pedagogy and decolonization ([Wildcat et al. 2014](#)). Furthermore, research indicates a direct connection between land and the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples ([Mashford-Pringle and Stewart 2019](#)).

### 2.1. Indigenous Language Learning and Teaching

A recent surge of research in the areas of Indigenous languages has seemingly indicated that the learning and teaching of Indigenous languages are fundamentally different from majority, foreign, and heritage language teaching and learning. For instance, Leanna Hinton, one of the most prolific scholars and activists in the field of Indigenous language revitalization, argues that the primary goal of programs promoting endangered languages is to “save language from extinction; bring it back into use” ([Hinton 2011](#), p. 309). Research on learning Indigenous languages postulates that having knowledge of one’s Indigenous community language positively correlates with psychological and physical wellbeing ([Chandler and Lalonde 1998](#); [Hallett et al. 2007](#); [Kunnas 2003](#); [Walsh 2018](#)). Considering these special aims and effects, we describe certain approaches to Indigenous language teaching below.

### 2.2. Critical Pedagogy

While maintaining that the fundamental goal of education is to seek social justice, critical pedagogy has developed and branched out into various components including Indigenous social justice pedagogy ([Shirley 2017](#)), Indigenous pedagogy ([Biermann and Townsend-Cross 2008](#)), and red pedagogy ([Grande 2004](#)). Instead of employing one of these more recent approaches, we will utilize perspectives of Paulo Freire, who is considered the founder of critical pedagogy and whose work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([Freire \[1970\] 2009](#)), is still relevant to the situations today. We will focus on the alternative he proposes to “regular” education. Freire sees “regular” education through the metaphor of “banking,” that is, knowledge is simply transferred unidirectionally, from a teacher who is assumed to know everything to students who are assumed to know nothing. The transferred knowledge does not change but it simply moves from a teacher to students just like

someone depositing money into a bank account. Instead, Freire proposes problem-posing education through which everyone including students and teachers teach each other. In problem-posing education, people begin to see their own perception of the social reality by developing “critical consciousness” and start to act on the taken-for-granted social order in order to transform it. Thus, “[t]he students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher.” (Freire 2005, p. 81). Whereas banking education socializes students not to question, problem-posing education “involves a constant unveiling of reality . . . The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.” (Freire 2005, p. 81). Critical pedagogy is based on the postulation that while education is one of the major institutions for the maintenance of a social order, it is through education that one can acquire “critical consciousness” to challenge the state of oppression. This article incorporates this perspective into our exploration of lesson ideas based on stories produced and documented by people in Yomitan Village.

### 2.3. Decolonization and Stories

Historically, linguists have been known for working to advance their own careers and at the same time to further their academic fields without necessarily contributing to the communities where languages are situated (cf. Leonard 2017). In recent decades, though there has been critical reflection in academia concerning the harm caused by linguistics and linguists to Indigenous communities, with methods and research discussed in terms of how they “even replicate colonialism itself” (Gaby and Woods 2020, p. e269). Using stories created by Indigenous people themselves to study the language and culture is one way to counter the situation created by colonization. McCarty et al. (2018), for instance, asserts that story is a way to reclaim their language and culture while Kroskrity (2012) argues that stories by many Native Americans are not simply an entertainment or verbal art but are actually instrumental for cultivating “culturally relevant tribal and social identities” (Kroskrity 2012, p. 4) and “create discursive webs linking places, place names, words of ancestors, and moral lessons” (Kroskrity 2012, p. 5).

We take decolonization as a type of critical approach to the contemporary social order where language assumes a central role (Thiong’o 1986). In an examination of the current situation in Okinawa Prefecture, Hammine (2021) defines decolonization as a process to overcome the negative values stemming from past history which are encoded in the current language by denying those negative values and creating new ones. Laenui (2000) specifies phases of colonization and decolonization based on thoughts of two men, Virgilio Enriques from the Phillipines and Poka Laenui from Hawai‘i, and asserts that “Colonization and decolonization are social processes even more than they are political processes” (Laenui 2000, p. 150). Particularly relevant point to the current article are the five phases of decolonization postulated: 1. rediscovery and recovery; 2. mourning; 3. dreaming; 4. commitment; and 5. action. The first phase is defined as “This phase of rediscovery of one’s history and recovery of one’s culture, language, identity, etc. and is fundamental to the movement of decolonization.” (Laenui 2000, p. 153). A central aim of this article is to suggest some lesson ideas concerning this first phase of rediscovery and recovery.

### 2.4. Hybridity and the Third Space

Going beyond binary concerns not only gender identity but also other social categories. In order to capture the reality of present social structures and to recover one’s culture, language, identity, etc., there have been some innovative approaches advocated which go beyond binary oppositions such as colonizer vs. colonized and Indigenous vs. migrant. For the purpose of transcending this binary perspective, we incorporate hybridity and the third space (Bhabha 1994), concepts which challenge us to surpass our worldview beyond binary oppositional categories. Meredith (1998) elucidates the hybrid third space by emphasizing it as a way to avoid the pitfalls of polarity and to be more in line with the

postcolonial reality concerning the relationship between Māori and Pākehā ‘New Zealander of European descent’ in Aotearoa<sup>1</sup>. It is in the third space that complex identities, cultural multiplicity, as well as transcultural forms are created. To be sure, this approach is not to forego or undermine the horrific damage caused by colonial forces all over the world or the importance of identity, but rather to transcend fixed and essentialized binary oppositions. Postcolonial interactions create hybridity and the third space. This third space is constantly in the making with revision and remaking continuously taking place.

### 3. Language Documentation in Yomitan Village

Following the recent surge of interest in Indigenous-led and community-based language projects, this section illuminates such an endeavor in Yomitan. More specifically, we attempt to present an overview of all of the materials related to the local language that have been compiled by community members.

#### 3.1. History of the Project

The project to document the local variety of Uchinaaguchi, referred to as shimakutuba, spoken in Yomitan began after the WWII and is still continuing to this day. The major organization undertaking the project is the Yomitan Village History Editorial Office (Sonshi henshūshitsu) of the Cultural Development Division (Bunka shinkōka) which is a subordinate organization of the Board of Education (Kyōiku i'inkai) of the village. The language materials collected can be classified into three categories: 1. interview audios; 2. collection of folktales; and 3. linguistic materials. The first category, interviews, is the primary data on which categories 2 and 3 are based. To collect and document folktales, interviews were conducted in all 22 local sections of the village and variations of the language in each local section were preserved in the collection. In addition, the village has been compiling information on the history of the village and conducted interviews with the villagers. Many of the interviewees for these surveys were native speakers of shimakutuba who were in their 1970s and 1980s. Since the interviewees spoke in the shimakutuba variety unique to their local section, the assistance of Yūgao no Kai, a volunteer group, played a significant role because often times they themselves were the speakers of the varieties or at least were familiar with them. Yūgao no Kai consisted of homemakers, teachers, civil servants, and students, etc. and represented a wide range of age groups from the 20s to 60s (Yomitan Village Board of Education 2014). Together these thousands of hours of interviews have been transcribed and, although some are not publicly available, they can be important resources for revitalization efforts. This section mainly discusses category 2. collection of folktales and category 3. linguistic materials.

It is not an overstatement to say that Gishō Nakama was the person who initiated the documentation of folktales in Yomitan. In fact, he began collecting them in the late 1960s while teaching at Yomitan high school where he was assigned after graduating from university. The official project by the village began in 1973 and the History and Folklore Museum (Rekishi minzoku shiryōkan) was established in 1974 with Nakama himself serving as the first director (Yomitan Village History Editorial Office 1995). The collection of folklores was essentially a project which was community initiated, driven, supplemented, and completed by people in Yomitan Village as the telling and documenting of the stories were done collaboratively through the cooperation of various groups including the Yomitan History and Folklore Museum, Folk Narrative Research Group of Okinawa, Okinawa International University, Yomitan Yūgao no Kai, Okinawa Folktale Group, Tokai University Women's Junior College, Ritsumeikan University, the Yomitan Village Board of Education, Yomitan Village Senior Group, and the mayors as well as community members from each town. The first official collection of folktales in Yomitan began in 1973 and the extent of the documentation is nothing less than impressive, collecting 5011 episodes from 746 speakers from all sections of the village. Yomitan Village History Editorial Office (1995) states that three main factors accounted for the success of the project, close cooperation from all involved, enthusiastic support from the community, and the conducting of a post-interview

supplementary investigation to ensure the quality, accuracy, and completeness of the data. It was the History and Folklore Museum and the Yomitan Yūgao no Kai that transcribed, conducted the post-interview research, and translated the interviews into Japanese.

### 3.2. Published Materials

Table 1 below shows shimakutuba-related materials published by Yomitan Village. Items 1 to 15 comprise a series of folklore compilation by sections of the village. As can be seen from the table, the editing of this collection took more than 26 years given that the first volume in the series *Yomitan Village Compilation of Folk Tales 1 Iramina* was published in 1979 and the final volume *Yomitan Village Compilation of Folk Tales 15 Toguchi, Hija, Hijabashi* was published in 2003. These compilations not only have folktales but are also full of information about each section of the village, including geographical information, population, number of houses, last names of residents, dietary habits, clothing, marriage rituals, water sources, various maps of each section alongside a list of people who retold the stories in the volumes. From item 17 *Yuntanza mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.1* to item 26 *Yuntanza mungatai No.5*, DVDs were created based on the folktale documentation. Illustrations depicting different scenes were added to the folktales collected so that they could be better utilized by the general public. Items 1-15 and 17 to 26 are the items classified as the folktale materials above. Item 16 is a collection of vocabulary used in the stories. Items 27, 28 and 29 are booklets to illustrate the usage of shimakutuba. These are the items which were classified as linguistic materials above.

There are a few significant characteristics of this project. First, the interview data captured actual language usage over all local sections of the village. As mentioned above, in addition to the stories, the interviews include the lives of villagers in prewar and postwar era. The majority of the interviews were conducted in shimakutuba of Yomitan which were later translated into Japanese and contain a vast number of speakers who were born before the WWII. As noted above, the project was initiated and carried out mainly by the community members in the village and contains irreplaceable and valuable materials rooted in the land. In particular, some of the interviews relay how Yomitan Village was the first place where the US military landed on Okinawa Island during the World War II, many lives of the villagers were lost, and their land was taken away. Although people in the village suffered extreme agony, the fact that such materials have been collected indicates both the strength of the people as well as their unyielding desire and commitment to transmit their own stories to future generations. The language-related materials collected in this way are not only useful for understanding shimakutuba, but also for understanding the history, culture, traditions, cultural values, customs, rituals, and social structures of the local environment. Especially, given that the intergenerational transmission of the language in its sociocultural and geographic ecology has been disrupted, the decision to utilize these materials or not is entrusted to the following generations. The next section presents a few lesson ideas developed using one of the folklore tales collected.

**Table 1.** List of books related to shimakutuba by Yomitan Village.

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Published Entity</b>	<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>Number of Pages</b>	<b>Digitized</b>	<b>Purchasable</b>	<b>Accessible Online</b>
1	Compilation of folktales 1 Iramina	History and Folklore Museum	1979	372	yes	yes	yes
2	Collection of folktales 2 Kina	History and Folklore Museum	1980	327	yes	yes	yes
3	Collection of folktales 3 Nagahama	History and Folklore Museum	1981	323	yes	yes	yes
4	Collection of folktales 4 Senaha	History and Folklore Museum	1982	316	yes	yes	yes
5	Collection of folktales 5 Gima	History and Folklore Museum	1983	319	yes	yes	yes
6	Collection of folktales 3 Uza	History and Folklore Museum	1984	327	yes	yes	yes
7	Collection of folktales 7 Tokeshi	History and Folklore Museum	1985	227	yes	yes	yes
8	Collection of folktales 8 Takashiho	History and Folklore Museum	1986	228	yes	yes	yes
9	Collection of folktales 9 Namihira	History and Folklore Museum	1989	251	yes	yes	yes
10	Collection of folktales 10 Zakimi	History and Folklore Museum	1990	300	yes	yes	yes
11	Collection of folktales 11 Sobe	History and Folklore Museum	1992	313	yes	yes	yes
12	Collection of folktales 12 Uechi/Oyashi/Toya	History and Folklore Museum	1994	340	yes	yes	yes
13	Collection of folktales 13 Ōki/Makibaru/Nagata	History and Folklore Museum	1996	350	yes	yes	yes
14	Collection of folktales 14 Ōwan/Furugen	History and Folklore Museum	1999	351	yes	yes	yes
15	Collection of folktales 15 Toguchi/Hija/Hijabashi	History and Folklore Museum	2003	341	yes	yes	yes
16	Shimakutuba Kanasasuru Kai Collection of words 1 Yomitan Village history research material (No.45) Yomitan Village history research material No.41	Yomitan History Editorial Office	2013	56	no	no	no *
17	Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.1	History and Folklore Museum	2014	48 + CD	no	no	no *
18	Folktales that has been handed down in Yomitan Village Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.1" DVD	History and Folklore Museum	2014	DVD	yes	no	no *
19	Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.2	History and Folklore Museum	2015	47 + CD	no	no	no *

Table 1. Cont.

Title	Published Entity	Date of Publication	Number of Pages	Digitized	Purchasable	Accessible Online
20 Folktales that has been handed down in Yomitan Village Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.2" DVD	History and Folklore Museum	2015	DVD	yes	no	no *
21 Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.3	History and Folklore Museum	2016	53 + CD	no	no	no *
22 Folktales that has been handed down in Yomitan Village Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.3" DVD	History and Folklore Museum	2016	DVD	yes	no	no *
23 Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.4	History and Folklore Museum	2017	49 + CD	no	no	no *
24 Folktales that has been handed down in Yomitan Village Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.4" DVD	History and Folklore Museum	2017	DVD	yes	no	no *
25 Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.5	History and Folklore Museum	2018	54 + CD	no	no	no *
26 Folktales that has been handed down in Yomitan Village Yuntanza Mungatai 'Yomitan stories' No.5" DVD	History and Folklore Museum	2018	DVD	yes	no	no *
27 Let's talk, use Shimakutuba Yuntanja Kutuba 'Yomitan language'	Culture, Tourism and Sports Department	2019	47	yes	no	yes
28 Shimakutuba in Yomitan Village 'Growth of a child'	Yomitan History Editorial Office	2019	32	yes	yes	yes
29 Shimakutuba in Yomitan Village 2 'Health care as told by a grandmother'	Yomitan History Editorial Office	2020	32	yes	yes	yes

\* Indicates that the item is available at the Yomitan Village library and can be viewed there.

#### 4. Some Lesson Ideas Using One of the Compiled Stories

In this section, we explore some ways that one of the stories, titled “Chinaa Takahanjaa and the defeat of feeree” and retold by Uto Matsuda,<sup>2</sup> may be utilized to acquire knowledge about Yomitan and its language. This story was chosen because it is about two places, Feeree Rock and Chinaa banju ‘guardhouse’, that are still in existence today and that people can still actually visit in Yomitan. In addition, the online availability of the original audio recording as well as animation videos of the story were another reason for selecting this story from a practical pedagogical perspective.<sup>3</sup> What follows is the text of the story<sup>4</sup>.

Chinaa Takahanjaa, “a, ‘utashin diru baanaa?” Maa karaga chooraa wakaran kutu yaa, “takooyama nu yamashishi ‘ururuku na yamashishi Chinaa Takahanjaa ga ashidi mudui”, ‘uri ru yan di.

Takooyama nu yama nkai, ‘unmaa takooyama ndichi ‘umichicchinu, kuhinaanaa sooru kii nu kanshi ‘uchaarita kutu, michie kanshi ‘usurattooru baatee, ‘unu michie. ‘Usuratta kutu, ‘unu michi nu kanshi sakutu, ‘anuu nuuyatin kamiti chuuru chuo, kakeejaa saani tuitan diru baa tee.

‘An, tuitan dishi ga, kunu Takahanjaa ga, Chinaa shinkantaa ‘nkai ‘unjyaani, “‘Anshi, Yanbaru nkai ‘ichuru chu, kanshi shimitee naran mun” dichi.

Inagu nkai michinaka kara shina kamirachi, taara nkai ‘itti shina kamirachaani. ‘Unu shina kamiti ‘acchiini, ‘unu nusuroo kii nu ‘iikara kakeejaa shi, ‘unu shinaa mucchoo kutu chikara ‘uyubaran sheeyaa. ‘Unu nusuroo jii ‘nkai ‘utiyaani, ‘unniini kachimitan di.

English equivalent

It was said that in order to let people know the reason for Chinaa Takahanjaa to be walking there, he would be singing while walking “Mountain boars ‘bandits’ of Takoo mountain, don’t be surprised, mountain boars ‘bandits’. Chinaa Takahanjaa has played and going home now”.

Takoo mountain was a dangerous place with huge trees covering the way. It was said that because it was such a place, a thief would rob the baggage of a passer-by using a hanging pole.

So Chinaa Takahanjaa went to the people of Chinaa and discussed the matter by saying “We cannot have people coming and going to Yanbaru encounter such a horrible experience”. So a plan to have a woman carry a bale full of sand on her head and then walk the way was arranged. A bandit not knowing what was going on, attempted to get her bale from the top of a tree using a hanging pole but the bale was way too heavy to be lifted up by a hanging pole. Instead of getting the bale, the bandit fell from the tree. It was said that this was how Chinaa Takahanjaa was able to catch a bandit.

Certainly, a story can be explored in numerous ways; however, we focused on the following six aspects that seem to fit the nature of the story: linguistics, cultural values, geography, history, political science, and music and theatrical arts and suggested some discussion points and questions to be considered for each of these aspects. These aspects are independent of each other and therefore any single aspect or combination of them can be chosen according to the objective of a given class and its learners. We made these points general enough to be incorporated into classes from the elementary school to the high school level as well for classes for adults with minimal modifications. In the perspective of critical pedagogy, as discussed in Section 2 above, the process of seeking ways to arrive at multiple ideas, representations, and perceptions is more important than reaching fixed and previously determined answers. Thus in line with the problem-posing approach, the discussion points and research questions suggested are mostly open-ended ones through which students and teachers can explore together possible outcomes. For most of the aspects explored, the suggestion “ask your family members, relatives, and neighbors if

they know about the topic at hand” was included in order to increase and/or provide the students a chance to interact with their family, relatives and people in their community.

#### 4.1. Linguistics

Concerning linguistic aspects, we consider: 1. phonology; 2. vocabulary; 3. short expressions; 4. discourse particles; 5. grammar; and 6. knowledge of the language.

##### 4.1.1. Phonology

Below in Table 2, the phonological correspondences between the Yomitan variety (shimakutuba) of Uchinaaguchi and Japanese are provided based on terms from the story (‘indicates a glottal stop).

**Table 2.** Phonological correspondences between the Yomitan variety of Uchinaaguchi and Japanese from the story.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	Japanese
Chinaa ‘name of a place in Yomitan’	Kina
shina ‘sand’	sunā
‘uri	sore
uyubun ‘to get affected’	oyobu

It might be useful especially if the learners possess knowledge about Japanese to introduce the fact that although five vowels, /i/, /e/, /a/, /u/, /o/ occur in Uchinaaguchi, /e/ and /o/ are rare. Some examples are provided in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Example words showing phonological correspondences.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	Japanese
funi ‘boat, ship’	fune
utu ‘sound/’	oto

In addition, an explanation about palatalization might be useful. Phonological correspondences between the Yomitan variety of Uchinaaguchi and Japanese found in vocabulary items from the story are presented below in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Palatalization and phonological correspondences.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	Japanese
ch	k
ch	t
j	g
j	d

Table 5 below shows some words include palatalization.

**Table 5.** Example words showing palatalization.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	Japanese
kuji ‘nail’	kugi
shicha ‘below’	shita

##### 4.1.2. Vocabulary

Here, vocabulary items from the story and their English equivalents are given in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Vocabulary from the story.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	English
maa	where
inagu	woman
nusuru	thief
‘unu —	that —
kakeejaa	hanging pole
taara	bale

Since the story includes the demonstrative ‘unu, it might be a good idea to introduce the deictic system at this point. Table 7 below shows the entire deictic reference system (Nishioka and Nakahara 2006) with English equivalents.

**Table 7.** Distance oriented deictic system of Uchinaaguchi.

	Proximal	Medial	Distal
thing, person	kuri ‘this thing’	‘uri ‘that thing’	‘ari ‘that thing over there’
pre-noun adjectival	kunu ‘this —’	‘unu ‘that —’	‘anu ‘that — over there’
place	kuma ‘here’	‘nma ‘there’	‘ama ‘over there’

#### 4.1.3. Short Expressions

Short expressions are useful in both understanding and participating in discourse. What follows is a list of short expressions used in the story and their English equivalents in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Short expressions from the story.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	English
maa kara ga chooraa wakarankutuyaa	because where it came from is not obvious
ururukuna	don’t be surprised
chuuru choo	people who walk by
nuuyatin kamiti	put everything on the head
uri ru yan di	that was the case
utiyaani	(it) felt down
tuitan diru baa tee	it was said that they were stealing
unniini kachimitan di	we were told that was the moment (he) caught it

One of the short expressions, chuuru choo ‘people who come by’ uses an attributive form of the verb chuun. It might be helpful here to go over the predicate forms and attributive forms of some basic verbs, to write, to read, and to come as shown in Table 9 below.

**Table 9.** Predicate form and attributive form.

Predicate Form	Attributive Form
kachun ‘to write’	kachuru
yumun ‘to read’	yumuru
chuun ‘to come’	chuuru

#### 4.1.4. Discourse Particles

Because we are using a story, some discourse particles are employed. We list two particles with similar meanings and functions as they are used in the story in Table 10 below.

**Table 10.** Discourse particles.

an	at that time
anshi	at that time (a local variety of an)

#### 4.1.5. Grammar

The following structure, ashidi mudui ‘played and is going home’ indicates a sequence of two actions; while the first one is completed, the second one takes place. A verb in the first phrase takes a form that is referred to in Japanese as the -te form and the ti/di/chi form in Uchinaaguchi. Table 11 below illustrates these forms together with the predicate.

**Table 11.** Uchinaaguchi Predicate form and -te form.

Predicate Form	te (ti/di/chi) Form
ashibun ‘to play’	ashidi
‘an ‘to exist’	‘ati
yumun ‘to read’	yudi
kachun ‘to write’	kachi

Table 12 below indicates the predicate form and the te form of the Japanese equivalents of the verbs listed in Table 11.

**Table 12.** Japanese predicate form and -te form.

Predicate Form	Te Form
asobu ‘to play’	asonde
aru ‘to exist’	atte
yomu ‘to read’	yonde
kaku ‘to write’	kaite

As can be seen from the above forms, for some words there is a tendency that the -ti/di/chi form in Uchinaaguchi is one mora shorter than the Japanese te-form (Uchima and Nohara 2006). For example, the -ti/di/chi form of yumun is yudi, two morae, but the -te form of yomu, yonde, has three morae.

#### 4.1.6. Postpositional Particles

Saa and ‘shi are postpositional particles indicating ‘by means of’ and Table 13 shows how these two phrases they were used in the story.

**Table 13.** Postpositional particles from the story.

Yomitan Variety of Uchinaaguchi	English
kakeejaa saa ni	by means of a hanging pole
kakeejaa ‘shii	by means of a hanging pole

#### 4.1.7. Language Knowledge

It is often observed that many people aged 70 and higher speak shimakutuba fluently and people who are older than around 50 can understand it well even if they do not think they speak it well (Heinrich 2007). Thus it is reasonable to expect that many students will have family members, relatives, or neighbors that speak or understand the language. Here are some of the possible questions to start an individual or group research project about language knowledge.

- Do you understand the story? Maybe you understand some parts of the story?
- Who do you think understands this story? Ask your family members, relatives, and neighbors if they understand the story.
- Are there any social characteristics (age, gender, location, etc.) that correlate with this linguistic knowledge?
- Why do some people understand while others do not? Explore some possible reasons for why this is the case.

- e. Do you think this knowledge is important? Why or why not?

The examination of various aspects of Uchinaaguchi and Japanese as suggested here may yield a number of outcomes. One possibility is that it might urge some students and teachers to question the labels (e.g., dialect vs. language) attached to these linguistic varieties and the origins of such labels. It might prompt them to re-examine the commonly held notion that Japanese is a language and Uchinaaguchi is a dialect of Japanese as well as the social meanings attached to such statuses. Some might even want to further research the reasons for the intergenerational gap concerning the knowledge of these two languages. All of these outcomes would enhance their understanding and deepen their perception concerning linguistic varieties and their social meanings.

#### 4.2. Cultural Perceptions

By cultural perception, we mean the common sense understanding of presupposed aspects of the story. A question such as “what are some of the ideas expressed in the story?” can be posed to begin a discussion. For example, we can explore the following points about what is considered clever from an Uchinaa perspective.

- a. According to the story, when a problem arises, how do you approach it?
- b. How is cleverness depicted in this story?
- c. What are the relationships between cleverness and community wellbeing?
- d. What are some functions of the song at the beginning?
- e. Ask your family members, relatives, and neighbors if they know this story or something related to the story.

Different cultures emphasize divergent ideas and at the same time they define and value similar ideas differently according to their cultural notions. Examining plots of stories are one way to probe the ideas, definitions, and values of a certain culture. Examining ideas represented in this story can deepen the understanding of the cultural values of the Ryukyus. In turn, it can also assist in understanding the diverse nature of the perceptions that serve as the foundation for developing critical consciousness.

#### 4.3. Geography

Geography is another area of further inquiry. There are a few place names mentioned in the story, namely Takooyama, Chinaa, and Yanbaru and questions such as the followings can be asked at the start of a research project.

- a. Where is Takooyama located? Have you been to Takooyama before?
- b. Where is Feeree Rock? Have you been to Feeree Rock before?
- c. Where is Yanbaru? How far is Yanbaru from Chinaa?
- d. Ask your family member, relatives, and neighbors about Takooyama and Feeree Rock.

Studying Takooyama, Feeree Rock, Chinaa, and Yanbaru is one way to learn about local geography and this can serve as a basis for learning more about some of the aspects discussed below, namely, history and political science. Studying local places may bring a broader perspective by highlighting that each place has its own history and cultural meanings, and it may therefore assist in uncovering other issues.

#### 4.4. History

History is definitely a significant area to be explored in the story. Chinaa banju appears in the story and therefore may be of interest. Relatedly, majiri or shima was one of the administrative divisions used in the Ryukyu Kingdom (Kamata and Saiki 2009) and can be researched. The following are some possible questions to promote thinking about historical aspects of the story.

- a. Where is Chinaa banju and what was its function?
- b. What is Chinaa banju’s current function?
- c. What is majiri?

- d. How does majiri compare to the current administrative divisions?
- e. Ask your family member, relatives, and neighbors about Chinaa banju and majiri.

Researching about the local place Chinaa banju as well as the administrative divisions of the Ryukyu Kingdom, majiri, will inevitably lead to studying about historical changes in the governing body of that area. Further, it may also prompt learners to seek understanding of possible factors for this change. Chinaa banju is a good place to study the local history of Yomitan since it houses historical artifacts and very knowledgeable cultural guides ready to assist such exploration. Researching history is one of the best ways to re-examine one's understanding of places, events, and ideas, etc.

#### 4.5. Political Science

Political aspects of the story may be of interest to some learners and teachers. The following questions can serve as a starting point for discussion as well as for research projects.

- a. Did you know the highest point in Yomitan Village is Yomitan mountain?
- b. How can we get to Yomitan mountain?
- c. Why can we not get any further than Takooyama when climbing Yomitan mountain?
- d. Although geographically significant, why do we not hear much about Yomitan mountain?
- e. Ask your family member, relatives, and neighbors if they have been to Yomitan mountain and what do they know about the place.

Here are some websites that might be useful during such classroom activities.

The homepage of Yomitan Village concerning geography:

<https://www.vill.yomitan.okinawa.jp/sections/finance2/post-357.html> (accessed on 4 February 2021).

Note, for instance, that the homepage explains that Yomitan mountain, which is 200 m above sea level, is the highest point of the village. The map with the highest point is included on the homepage of Yomitan Village and can be accessed at the website below.

<https://www.vill.yomitan.okinawa.jp/sections/finance2/post-1837.html> (accessed on 4 February 2021).

It may be useful to compare the map above to the map of US military base facilities in Yomitan Village:

<https://www.vill.yomitan.okinawa.jp/sections/finance2/post-208.html> (accessed on 4 February 2021).

Some further questions to be considered:

- a. When did these sections of Yomitan Village become a part of the US military facility?
- b. Why do you think these sections of Yomitan Village became a part of the military facility?
- c. Did the area that became a part of the military facility remain the same throughout history or did it change (expanded or reduced)?

The discussion points and research questions suggested are directly related to the title of this article, why do some people in Yomitan not know Yomitan mountain? These questions are designed to address the political nature of the question which concerns the land issues and land control among Okinawa, Japan and the US. Seemingly simple questions have the potential to make learners reconsider their common sense understanding of their surroundings.

#### 4.6. Music and Theatrical Arts

One special characteristic about "Chinaa Takahanjaa and the defeat of feeree" is that various art forms have been created based on the story including songs and theatrical shows. These songs and shows can lead to further discussions and serve as topics of research projects. The following is one of these songs in Uchinaaguchi with its English equivalent.

Takooyama feeree tindoo

Chinaa banju ni tumaranayaa

inagu nu tirumun banji ni tumayumi

isuji shima kakaraa

English equivalent

It is said that a feeree appears in Takoo mountain

So we will stay overnight at Chinaa guardhouse

If you are a woman, you should not stay overnight at the guardhouse

It would be better to hurry and return to your village

The following questions can serve as a starting point for discussion as well as for research projects.

- a. Find some other songs about Takooyama
- b. Find some other art forms about Takooyama
- c. Ask your family member, relatives, and neighbors if they know any songs or art forms about Takooyama

Music and theater are considered important aspects of many cultures, especially in the Ryukyus. By analyzing these popular aspects of the culture concerning these local sites, we gain deeper cultural understanding since it forces us to examine our own values and perception of how the world works, which in turn serves as the foundation to develop critical consciousness.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *The Special Nature of the Yomitan Documentation Project*

Yomitan Village has been on the cutting edge of documentation efforts from the 1970s in terms of community initiative and involvement. Given that these efforts have been driven by people in the community through their work with government agencies, the community has been able to keep ancestral knowledge where it belongs in the hands of community members as opposed to being under the control of people in academia. This means that rights to intellectual property have been protected and control over the knowledge documented has been retained. Based on over 50 years of documenting their own language and collecting over 5000 stories, Yomitan Village has published 29 Uchinaaguchi related books and materials thus far. The documentation efforts and the nature of the published materials based on the interview data clearly indicate the objectives of the project, namely, to transmit the historical, cultural, and linguistic knowledge to future generations. Many of the materials have been digitized and are accessible to the public and are obtainable by anyone who might be interested. The methods employed in documenting and publishing the materials are in line with suggested guidelines based on careful consideration of decades of misuse of the intellectual property of Indigenous people (Battiste and Henderson 2000; Gaby and Woods 2020). The project is situated in the local sections of the village and represents the ideas and the work of residents and households. Even the narrators of the stories come from the community. We believe that if community organizations such as Yūgao no Kai with shimakutuba speakers were not heavily involved in the project, the collection could not have accumulated over 5000 stories. In the preface of the first publication of the folklore collection, the then mayor of the village, Tokushin Yamauchi, stated that folklore is a cultural heritage transmitted through generations of the people in the village and functions as a tool to preserve conversations with ancestors. It serves as a guiding light and a source of encouragement for people today. He expresses the wish of the people who were involved in the project that these stories be incorporated into education at school, in the home, as well as at the societal level (Yomitan Village History and Folklore Museum 1978). Answering this call, this article offers suggestions about how one of the

stories compiled, a story about a place near Yuntanja ‘Yomitan mountain’ in Shimakutuba, can be used in an educational setting.

It is clear that the story can be examined in a number of ways as we took the story in six different directions; linguistics, cultural values, geography, history, political science, and music and theatrical arts. These discussion points were created to begin questioning what is presented as true and to seek alternative meanings and realities. In other words, the discussion points are fully in line with critical pedagogy. It is hoped that the students and teachers will come to see that there are multiple perspectives especially on controversial issues and, by acknowledging the potentially multiple representations and perspectives, they will see that the world is not composed of static visions and epistemologies but that they are always in flux and thus can be transformed. Similar examples are abundant in various locations of the world; Indigenous story telling has been used with various objectives; to reclaim ancestral language and identity (McCarty et al. 2018), as a force for social change (Biermann and Townsend-Cross 2008), to resist the Eurocentric objectively (Sium and Ritskes 2013), and to foster Indigenous identity (Kroskrity 2012).

### 5.2. Indigenous Critical Pedagogy, Hybridity, and the Third Space

Yomitan was designated in 2014 as the village in Japan with the largest influx of people from the mainland Japan as well as from foreign countries. This situation of Yomitan strongly suggests, then, the necessity of moving beyond rigid dichotomies such as old residents vs. newcomers, native speakers vs. new speakers, as well as teachers vs. students when interpreting language, culture, and history. Learning the culture and history of the village through language is beneficial for any learners regardless of whether they have ancestral ties to the land. As asserted by Biermann and Townsend-Cross (2008, p. 146), “It is our contention that Indigenous pedagogy, properly analysed, explored and theorised on the basis of indigenous values, philosophies and methodologies, has great potential to effect positive educational change for all learners.” The aim is to utilize and expand the potential of everyone including not only students who are long-time residents but also people who newly moved into the area.

In Section 2, it was indicated that Indigenous language learning differs from majority, foreign, and heritage language learning in terms of learner motivation (Hinton 2011) and also effects of learning such as positive associations between knowledge of their language and physical and mental wellbeing (Chandler and Lalonde 1998; Hallett et al. 2007; Kunnas 2003; Walsh 2018). One of the reasons for this correlation is that reclamation of the ancestral language and culture “promotes the healing of multigenerational traumas rooted in a history of colonization” (Hovey et al. 2014, p. 35). The decolonization process can be greatly benefited by critical pedagogical perspectives based on the premise of challenging oppression with the fundamental objective to emancipate marginalized groups.

### 5.3. Decolonization

We are witnessing more and more work on the intimate relationship between Indigenous language reclamation and decolonization (McCarty et al. 2018). The very first step toward decolonization is to recognize colonization through the on-going process of achieving “critical consciousness” (Freire 2005). In order to cultivate critical consciousness, we need to develop the ability to recognize that there are alternative interpretations besides our assumptions that might seem natural. Thus, we first need to develop the ability to recognize that our own assumptions are mostly based on the socialization process that serves as the basis of our common sense understanding of the world (cf. Fairclough 2001). Providing discussion points and research questions about local places and examining their histories will expose seemingly hidden historical and political events and meanings. Instead of continuing to rely on common sense versions of reality such as blaming ourselves (e.g., that our languages are not equipped to function successfully in today’s world), we may be able to see that there are other interpretations (e.g., social and political structures are organized so that powerful linguistic varieties maintain power while keeping oppressed

linguistic varieties in a state of oppression). By examining changing political, social, and historical meanings represented by these local places, one will see that there are multiple meanings beside the meanings represented in the major social institutions including education and the media. The sample discussion points and research questions are in line with a problem-posing education and are designed to facilitate students and teachers to develop critical consciousness (Freire 2005). With the renewed sense of the world order, one is in a position to choose to take action to challenge the status quo. Thus, it can be argued that the objectives of critical pedagogy and phases of decolonization as articulated by Laenui (2000) are fundamentally similar.

As the title of this article intimates, many people and especially younger generations in Yomitan Village do not know the highest geographical point in the village. Why is that the case? What might be a reason for this generational gap in local knowledge? There are many similar questions that can and should be raised since to reclaim one's ancestral language is to reclaim the knowledge, history, and relationship with the environment that is embedded in the language. Language reclamation without these components might only be adequate if one sees language simply as a linguistic system, i.e., its structures and rules; however, it would be partial and inadequate if one sees language as something that creates and represents our identities, a way to perceive and understand ourselves and our relation with the outer world, a vehicle for intergenerationally transmitting knowledge and skills, and as an element to develop and convey a sense of belonging. Simply put, language is where we develop our sense of ourselves and connect to our heritage and culture. An attempt to reclaim or revitalize language without these components is not only deficient but insufficient and ineffective. Thus, when Taff et al. (2018) asserted that the relearning of languages is healing generations of ancestral wounds caused by colonization and that "language is medicine" (p. 862) regarding the positive effects of using ancestral language on health, they are not just talking about syntactic or phonological aspects but they are talking about "language—the cultural knowledge embedded in the language, the fibers that held the people together" (p. 872).

We are convinced that revitalization of an indigenous language needs to be for the Indigenous people, and it needs to be led by Indigenous people (Wanosta'a7 Williams 2022), a point that is evident from successful cases of revitalization and the renormalization of the Māori and Hawaiian languages. Decolonization is a significant part of the reclamation and revitalization of an Indigenous language. To be sure, the question we used in the title as to why do some people in Yomitan not know about Yomitan mountain is a serious question that raises many important issues. We wanted to use the story about Chinaa banju occurring near Yomitan mountain to illustrate that one story can be used to provoke various significant historical, cultural, and political issues and is particularly suited for education with a critical pedagogical perspective with decolonization as one of its purposes. In turn, we believe that exploration of these issues would assist learners to develop "critical consciousness" (Freire 2005) and prepare them to be curious and be ready to critically analyze the seemingly common sense understanding of the world and the contradictions that constitute it.

Similar questions to the question, why do some people in Yomitan not know Yomitan mountain? can be raised for many geographical locations, for example, while Diamond Head is one of most famous landmarks of Hawai'i, why does its Hawaiian name Lē'ahi and its heiau 'temple' dedicated to the god of the wind, La'amao, remain largely unknown to the residents of Hawai'i as well as the millions of people who visit there? The answer to these and similar questions might be provided through a decolonization of the mind (Thiong'o 1986). In his book, *Decolonisation of the Mind*, Ngūgi wa Thiong'o's argument centers on the role language plays in the lives of people, "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe." (Thiong'o 1986, p. 4). In Section 2 above, Laenui (2000) was used to illustrate five phases of decolonization namely 1. rediscovery and recovery, 2. mourning, 3. dreaming, 4. commitment, and

5. Action, and this article is our attempt to assist with the first phase of regaining one's culture, language, and identity by examining history. In order to fully decolonize, it is necessary to progress into later phases; however, without the first phase, one cannot go any further. Thus, the first phase, rediscovery and recovery, is the most challenging and significant and suggested discussion points, research questions, and similarly oriented questions can be used to assist and advance these processes. The discussion and research topics presented concerning the six aspects of the story are closely linked to one of the main aims of the current article, that is, to develop critical consciousness and to decolonize the mind.

## 6. Conclusions

While this article used only one of over 5000 stories that were compiled by Yomitan Village, we do not claim that we exhausted all possible discussion points of the story nor do we claim that our suggestions are the best ways to explore them. What we wanted to do was to explore some conceptual frameworks and to pave a way forward to actually utilize the stories to teach the language, culture, and history of the community with the larger goal of revitalizing the language. To be sure, reversing the course of language transmission is not an easy task. Concerning the problems faced by revitalization and documentation efforts, Anderson (2014, p. 5) raises the following crucial question "how does one generate public interest in collections of Ryukyuan-medium folk stories if most of local people understand little of their local language?" Indeed, this is a common sentiment among people who are working to restore and revitalize an Indigenous language. At the same time though, it is true that acquiring the language is one of the keys to unlocking the wealth of knowledge woven into these stories. People who diligently worked to document these folklore stories did so with the intense hope that future generations will use and learn from what they have accumulated. Furthermore, as we attempted to show in this article, the intense hope has been bequeathed by the people of the past to those of the present in Yomitan Village. With a renewed desire on the part of the community and ample materials gathered, we assert that critical intervention seeking a social justice focused on the linguistic and cultural rights of people will not have to stay as a wish but can become a reality in the very near future.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, Y.O.; methodology, Y.O.; data curation, S.M.; writing—original draft preparation, Y.O. and S.M.; writing—review and editing, Y.O. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Publicly available datasets were analyzed in this study. This data can be found here: [<https://www.vill.yomitan.okinawa.jp/>].

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aotearoa is a Māori word used to refer to their country; the English equivalent is New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup> The following web site provides the audio and text by Uto Matsuda which is based on the original recording of the folklore documentation project. Audio and text from the original recording retold by Uto Matsuda who was born in 1901. <https://yomitan-sonsi.jp/story/171/> (accessed on 3 February 2021).

<sup>3</sup> The web addresses for the animated video with the original recording by Uto Matsuda and the animated video with a narrator's voice are listed below. An animated video on "Chinaa Takahanjaa and the defeat of feeree" from Yomitan Village Shimakutuba Mungatai using the original recording. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMI4-Swvyns> (accessed on 3 February 2021). An animated video on "Chinaa Takahanjaa and feeree of Takoo mountain" from Yomitan Village Shimakutuba Mungatai using a narrator's voice. <https://www.vill.yomitan.okinawa.jp/sections/culture/post-2237.html> (accessed on 3 February 2021).

<sup>4</sup> The method of notation used is based on Ogawa (2015).

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