This talk explores the relationship between the diverse direct object marking paradigm of an endangered Southern Ryukyuan language and the cross-linguistic phenomena of markedness hierarchies and differential object marking. Differential object marking (DOM) is a well-explored topic within literature concerning case ellipsis and information structure (Tsutsui 1984, Masunaga 1988, Yatabe 1999, etc.). It traditionally refers to the acceptability of the presence or absence of a case particle on the object of a sentence, and has been found to arise from the need to maximally differentiate subject and object. Strong evidence for this phenomenon is displayed in Sika Yaeyaman, and has not been adequately described for this language in past research. Sika Yaeyaman is a Japonic language native to Ishigaki Island in the Yaeyama region of Okinawa, Japan.

In Sika (pronounced [ʃika] or [sɨka]), grammatical object canonically appears with the accusative case marker (zero, =Ø), but there are also several marked choices for the objects of transitive verbs (Miyara 1995, Miyagi 2003). Table 1 shows the prevalence of the accusative case marker and three additional choices for marking, in two data sets comprised of naturalistic dialogues. The data for 2016-2018 are based on the present author’s own fieldwork. This talk will focus specifically on the last two in the list, =ju and =ba.

Table 1. Prevalence of Sika direct object markers in two data sets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marking</th>
<th>1968 Data</th>
<th>2016-2018 Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>=Ø (zero)</td>
<td>34 (59.7%)</td>
<td>125 (73.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>8 (14%)</td>
<td>12 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=ju</td>
<td>7 (12.3%)</td>
<td>23 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=ba</td>
<td>8 (14%)</td>
<td>9 (5.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57 examples</td>
<td>169 examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The concept of the markedness hierarchy is key to understanding the distribution of these object markers with respect to their function. Aissen (2003) shows that the markedness hierarchies of person, animacy, definiteness, and specificity influence the marking that a subject or object may take in a variety of languages, including Hebrew, Catalan, and Japanese. She notes that prototypical “unmarked” direct objects tend toward the inanimate, indefinite, and non-specific, while unusual, marked objects tend toward the opposite end of those scales. The following delineates two markedness scales that are relevant to my argument.

Figure 1. The animacy and definiteness scales (Aissen 2003: 437, cf. Silverstein 1976)

a. Animacy hierarchy: Human > Animate > Inanimate
b. Definiteness hierarchy: Personal pronoun > Proper noun > Definite NP > Indefinite Specific NP > Non-specific NP

When a direct object (O) ranks high on these scales, it appears to require an atypical or “marked” form of marking, because such objects are the ones most likely to be confused with subjects if left unmarked. Sika object marking appears to follow this cross-linguistically attested trend as well. In very general terms, overt particles =ju and =ba mark Os high in animacy and definiteness, which are in contrastive focus and highly differentiated. What was found specifically is that these two overt clitics appear to derive from markers that formerly had other uses, and have been re-purposed to mark direct object. The following provides specific examples that illustrate this phenomenon.
The marker =ju has been utilized to provide focus to a variety of case-marked noun phrases (NPs) including adverbial adjuncts and extended arguments. It does this within imperative and hortative constructions, where the grammatical focus marker =du cannot appear. This usage often appears tied to the phenomenon of contrastive focus, where the marked NP is being highlighted out of a selection of others in nearby clauses. Content under this type of focus implies the negation of at least one alternative proposition in a set of relevant alternatives (Molnár 2006, Vermeulen 2009). This is evidence that =ju is providing focus to the direct object uuki ‘washing tub’ in the following example sentence.

(1) aai bakecoo aran-kuni uuki=Ø=ju nc-as-i
   no bucket.TOP COP.NEG-NEG.SEQ washing.tub=ACC=FOC2 fill-CAUS1-IMP1
   ‘No, fill (the) washing tub, not (the) bucket!’

In other examples, the markedness scales of animacy and definiteness appear to play a large role. In a 1968 field recording of natural conversations, all of the direct objects that were also human beings appeared with this marking. In present-day recordings, demonstrative pronouns such as kuri ‘this one’ and uri ‘that one’ also appear with =ju in direct object position. Without additional NPs in negated sister clauses to provide contrast to these objects, these occurrences are difficult to construe as exemplifying contrastive focus, or indeed, focus marking at all.

(2) uja-numee=ju jurukub-as-joor-asimi-da soo=naa
   parent-PL=JU rejoice-CAUS1-HON-CAUS2-PST NMLZ=DSC
   ‘(We) made our parents happy, didn’t (we)?’ Shibata (1972)

What we are likely seeing here is a phenomenon characteristic of DOM in which content that is highly differentiated and uncharacteristic of canonical direct O receives specific marking to greater distinguish it from subject. Notice that human beings are at the top of the animacy hierarchy, and demonstratives are high in definiteness.

Concerning the marker =ba, evidence from Miyagi (2003) on its appearance on high-animacy Os is bolstered by recent field data. When conducting tests on its acceptability, a speaker provided the following contrasting examples in which a man leaves something lying on the ground. The marker felt most appropriate when the O placed on the ground was a child. If the O was an inanimate object such as an egg, =ba would only be acceptable here provided that it was a very special, one-of-a-kind egg. This indicates a strong relationship with definiteness in O, as well.

(3a) unu pîtoo=joo faa=ba ziï=nanga cïki-tte=du
    that person.TOP=DSC child=BA ground=ALL2 set-SEQ2=FOC1
    kama=kai ha-tta soo
    over.there=ALL1 go-PST NMLZ
    ‘That person, (they) set (the) child on (the) ground and went over there.’

(3b) unu pîtoo=joo tunaga=Ø/%ba ziï=nanga cïki-tte
    that person.TOP=DSC egg=ACC /?BA ground=ALL2 set-SEQ2
    kama=kai ha-tta
    over.there=ALL1 go-PST
    ‘That person, (they) set (the) egg on (the) ground and went over there.’

In conclusion, =ju and =ba display tendencies to encode pragmatic information based on native speaker intuitions about the definiteness and animacy of O. These findings are significant to the research on markedness hierarchies, because they shed light on a system that extends beyond the simple presence or lack of a case particle seen in traditional DOM. They are also valuable to
Ryukyuan studies, as they suggest that Yaeyaman boasts one of the most nuanced and intricate direct object marking systems in this branch of the Japonic language family.

Works Cited (Abridged):


Yatabe, Shūichi. 1999. Particle ellipsis and focus projection in Japanese In Language, Information, Text, Vol. 6 pp. 79-104 Department of Language and Information Sciences, University of Tokyo.