

1 **Introductory Lesson: Generalities of the Ainu Language**

Summary 1.1 The Ainu Language. – 1.2 The Rules of a Language. – 1.3 Linguistic Typology.

1.1 The Ainu Language

Ainu is a language of Far East Asia historically spoken in the territories of today's Russia and Japan that face the Southern Okhotsk Sea. Specifically, Ainu was spoken all through the Japanese island of Hokkaidō (also referred to as 'Ezo/Yezo' in old sources), in the southern part of Sakhalin island (called 'Karafuto' by Japanese people), in the Kuril Islands chain (called 'Chishima' by Japanese people), and in the southernmost tip of the Kamchatka peninsula. Although a number of hypotheses about Ainu's relation to other languages have been proposed (Dougherty 2019, 100), the language is presently classified as an isolate (see Lesson 18). There exist three main varieties of the language, that take their names from the regions where the language was spoken: Hokkaidō Ainu, Sakhalin Ainu, and Kuril Ainu. Both Kuril Ainu and Sakhalin Ainu are extinct, and Hokkaidō Ainu is classified as critically endangered by UNESCO.

1 • Introductory Lesson: Generalities of the Ainu Language



Figure 1
Ainu and its neighbour languages

1.2 The Rules of a Language

For any language we can have prescriptive rules and descriptive rules. How do they differ?

- Prescriptive rules tell us what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’, that is how the language *should* or *shouldn’t* be used for a correct and efficient communication. These rules define what is grammatical and what is ungrammatical.
- Descriptive rules tell us how the language *is actually* used by speakers, making no judgement on its being ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. They are based on empirical observations made of the language, that help analyse and describe its patterns.

In this course we will try to produce descriptive rules from the Ainu data we analyse.

Exercise 1

Are the following statements prescriptive or descriptive?

1. Some masculine nouns in Icelandic do not have the ending *-i* in the dative singular.
2. The English sentence *I don't say nothing* is wrong.
3. In written English one should avoid contracted verb forms such as *haven't* or *doesn't*.
4. In the English language used on social networks we see the tendency to not use the apostrophe in contracted verb forms (e.g. *dont* for *don't*).
5. The Italian sentence *a me la linguistica non mi piace* is wrong.

1.3 Linguistic Typology

Typology is a discipline of linguistics that studies the variation among languages, measuring its span, differences, and similarities. Typologists create 'groups' of linguistic features that bring languages together and that can be employed to make predictions about those languages.

There exist different types of typology, that refer to different areas of linguistics and are thus defined using different criteria. It follows that languages akin to each other with regards to one typology may differ with regards to another. There are two main typologies:

Morphological typology

- Synthesis index or "how many morphemes are there in one word?"

The answer to this question delineates a continuum at whose extremes we find isolating (or analytic) languages, with one or a few morphemes per word, and polysynthetic languages, with many morphemes per word.



Central Yup'ik (Eskimo-Aleut, USA) is an example of a polysynthetic language.

Tuntu-ssur-qatar-ni-ksaite-ngqiggte-uq.

reindeer-hunt-FUT-say-NEG-again-3SG.IND

'He had not yet said again that he was going to hunt reindeer.'

(Eliza Orr in Payne 2006, 190)

1 • Introductory Lesson: Generalities of the Ainu Language

- Fusivity index or “how many functions/meanings are there *simultaneously* in one morpheme?”

The answer to this question delineates a continuum at whose extremes we find agglutinative languages, with one meaning per morpheme, and fusional languages, with many meanings per morpheme.



Japanese (Japonic, Japan) and Russian (Slavic, Russia) are examples of an agglutinative and a fusional language respectively.

Mi-saser-u.

see-CAUS-N.PST

'To make see.'

Ja čita-ju knig-u.

I read-1S.PRES book-ACC.F.S

'I read a book.'

Syntactic typology

“What is the linear order of the verb and the direct object with respect to each other?”

The answer to this question distinguishes languages in two main groups: VO and OV. This syntactic order of constituents usually has systematic repercussions on the order of words within phrases and clauses within sentences.

VO languages usually have:

- prepositions
- auxiliary-verb
- main clause-relative clause
- verb-adverb
- ...

OV languages usually have:

- postpositions
- verb-auxiliary
- relative clause-main clause
- adverb-verb
- ...

1 • Introductory Lesson: Generalities of the Ainu Language

Exercise 2

Ainu (Isolate, Japan) (constructed examples)

Consider the following clauses and their translation. How much can you understand of the main characteristics of this language? What kind of observations concerning its typology can you make by looking at these examples?

<i>Seta apkas</i>	'A dog walks'
<i>Seta kam e</i>	'A dog eats meat'
<i>Kam k-e</i>	'I eat meat'
<i>Seta ku-nukar</i>	'I see a dog'
<i>Huci cise orun apkas</i>	'The old woman walks towards the house'
<i>Cape ci-nukar</i>	'We see a cat'
<i>Apkas-as</i>	'We walk'
<i>Pon cape</i>	'The small cat'
<i>Poro cise ku-nukar</i>	'I see a big house'
<i>Seta pon</i>	'The dog is small'
<i>Pon seta</i>	'The small dog'

Exercise 3

Nivkh (Isolate, Russia) (constructed examples)

Consider the following clauses and their translation. How much can you understand of the main characteristics of this language? What kind of observations concerning its typology can you make by looking at these examples?

Fill in the set with the missing translations. Then, on the basis of the morphosyntactic rules of the language you have deduced from these examples, form one grammatical and one ungrammatical sentence.

<i>ɲivxyu p^hrəc</i>	'The men come'
<i>umguyu itc</i>	'The women speak'
<i>ɲivxyu p^href ɲəɲɟ</i>	'The men look for their own house'
<i>c^haχ urɟ</i>	'The water is good'
<i>umgu ɲtefin c^hai taj</i>	'The woman drinks tea in my house'
<i>if ɲteftəχ p^hrəɟ</i>	'She comes towards my house'
<i>umgu liys ɲəɲɟ</i>	'The woman looks for the wolf'
<i>atak q^hotr k^huɟ</i>	'Grandfather kills a bear'
<i>ɲivxyu ɲatak q^hotr k^huyəftəχ vic</i>	'The men go to the place where my grandfather has just killed a bear'
<i>ɲivxyu c^hai tayətc</i>	'The men drink all the tea'
<i>umgu p^hrefteχ vij</i>	
	'The bears look for water'

Exercise 4

Yagua (Peba-Yaguan, Peru) (examples from Payne 2006, 204-5)

On the basis of the following examples determine whether this language is of the VO or OV type and whether it is of the SV or VS type. Justify your answer. Then list your observations on the order of the other constituents – given your generalisations on syntactic typology, is this constituent order expected or not (or you can't tell)? In the following exercise the asterisk marks ungrammatical examples.

1. a. Sa-munaa-dee Alchíco. 'Alchico's placenta.'
3SG-placenta-DIM Alchico
- b. Alchíco munaadee. 'Alchico's placenta.'
*Munaadee Alchíco, *Alchico samunaadee.
- c. Samunaadee 'His placenta.'
2. Jirya munaadee. 'This placenta.'
*Munaadee Jirya.
3. Tinkii munaadee. 'One placenta.'
*Munaadee tinkii.
4. Samunaadee kúútya. 'His placenta whispers.'
5. Sakúútya Alchíco munaadee. 'Alchico's placenta whispers.'
6. Jíryoonú súúy-anú sa-roori-myú Alchíco-níí.
bushmaster bite-PAST 3SG-house-LOC Alchico-3SG
'A bushmaster (snake) bit him in Alchico's house.'
*Jíryoonú sasúúyanuníí. ('A bushmaster he bit him.')
7. Sa-súúy-anú jíryoonú Alchíco roori-myú-níí.
3SG-bite-PAST bushmaster-3SG Alchico house-LOC-3SG
'A bushmaster (snake) bit him in Alchico's house.'
8. Sa-ą ráá-kyu. 'He will jump!'
3SG-FUT jump-POT
*Ráákyu saą, *Saráákyu saą, *Saráákyu ą.
9. Sa-niy suvú-tyaa jiiñu munátya sų-úmuteqesá
3SG-MALF fear-INTS this ancestor 3SG-behind
munaa játiy sa-ręę-níí.
placenta REL 3SG-jump-3SG
'This ancestor is really afraid behind the placenta that makes him jump.'
10. Ra-a jáá-charatá jiyu-dáy koodí-vyiimú.
1SG-FUT fall-might here-DAY snake-inside
'I might fall here inside a snake.'