

18 Revitalizing the Ainu Language: Perspectives and Attitudes

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18.1 Introduction

After the establishment of the Matsumae Han in Ezo (today's Hokkaidō) in 1604, the Ainu people was subjected to progressive prevarication and oppression by the Japanese. Oppression from the government, social inequity, and the political manipulation of the Ainu identity throughout the following three centuries resulted in permanent damages to Ainu culture. One aspect of the cultural heritage that was particularly affected is language.

Since the foundation of the Matsumae Han and the beginning of Japanese interactions with the Ainu, primarily aimed at establishing business relations, it was necessary to have interpreters to communicate. However, while understanding of the Ainu language was deemed essential for Japanese interpreters, the Ainu were forbidden from learning Japanese to any extent. The Matsumae Clan was in fact afraid that, had the Ainu learnt Japanese, they could have informed the central Tokugawa government of the atrocities that were being committed in Ezo and was therefore interested in maintaining the language barrier (Fukazawa 2019, 7). Establishing such language barrier between the Ainu and the Japanese eventually helped bring the Japanese language to the status of prestige language with

respect to Ainu, making this latter the weak language within that newly formed bilingual environment. Therefore, it can be seen how a decline process for the Ainu language was set up right at the start of Ainu-Japanese relations. With time, using the Ainu language was initially discouraged and eventually completely forbidden, at first as a vernacular language to be used in public then more thoroughly even within Ainu communities. The imposition to not speak the Ainu language, kindled by the continuous prejudice that the Ainu people had to face, made Ainu speakers give up their language almost entirely to the point where in many cases it was not passed on to new generations any longer as elders feared negative repercussion on their children and families. This process of language denial was by and large completed by the end of 1920, but some Ainu continued to learn the language in the family, reaching even high levels of proficiency.

18.2 Japan – A Monolingual Nation?

The notion that Japan is a ‘homogeneous’, ‘monoethnic’ and ‘monolingual’ nation became fixed in the post-war era (Fujita-Round 2019, 172), but in reality Japan has always been at the crossroads of cultural and linguistic exchange through its history. This misconception of Japan as a one-language country, that to much extent still remains in contemporary Japanese society, is mostly rooted in the modern era, namely in the imperialistic period of Japan’s history. In the decades leading to the establishment of the Japanese Empire of the 1920s-1930s, Japan annexed four territories: Hokkaidō (1869), the Ogasawara Islands (1872), the Ryukyuan Kingdom (i.e. today’s Okinawa province) (1879), Taiwan (1895), and the Korean peninsula (1910). These territories were inhabited by people speaking languages different from Japanese, whom the government made an effort to assimilate among Japanese.

As Morris-Suzuki (1998, 27) notes, imposing Japanese as the national language at all institutional levels during the Meiji period represented the central element of the assimilation process. Especially for the speakers of Ainu and the Ryukyuan languages, who were subjected to assimilation more directly and thoroughly, a forced education imparted only in Japanese slowly resulted in a language shift from the native language to Japanese by the end of the nineteenth century. Importantly, although as a result of this Ainu and Ryukyuan people became in fact bilingual, they were never visibly acknowledged as such. The history of Ainu and Ryukyuan languages illustrates how not recognising bilingualism as a reality has contributed to creating the myth of Japan being a monolingual nation and helps us better understand the difficulties of establishing bilingual education systems in today’s Japan.

18.3 Bilingual Education in Japan

Post-war attitudes towards bilingual education in Japan can be seen as a direct result of the assimilation policies of the Meiji period. The case of *kikokushijo* or 'returnee children' provides a good example. Starting from the 1960s, an increasing number of children began to arrive in Japan from abroad. These were children of Japanese people who had previously moved abroad for business and whose families were then returning to live in Japan. Having been born and raised in a foreign country, these children obviously behaved and spoke differently from Japanese children who were born and raised in Japan, which took the school system by surprise and for the very first time called for a new approach to education. As it concerned exactly the education of *kikokushijo* children, besides other measures the government gave a series of subsidies for opening special entrance quotas in schools and universities that were aimed at giving support to these children who needed to be re-entered in Japanese society. That is, *kokushijo* children were treated as a minority, in need of public support, who had to be somehow re-Japanised after their long absence from Japan (Fujita-Round 2019, 177-8). Again the reality of bilingualism was essentially denied. Only in the 1970s did the attitude towards bilingual education change and the presence of bilingual people, for whom Japanese may have been either a first or second language, started to be acknowledged more openly. Nevertheless, still today Japanese institutions seem to be slower to adjust to this change of perspective, and in most cases the view that second language learning and bilingualism is of a temporary nature persists. As a reason for this, Kanno (2008) points out on the one hand the teachers' perception of Japanese L2 learners as people who at some point will return to their home countries which somehow allows them to be less invested in their bilingual education. On the other hand, parental attitudes towards children's education are also specifically found to negatively influence the perception of the importance of receiving a bilingual education. Also because of a lack of transparency of the Japanese legislation, parents and children tend to underestimate the value of growing up bilingually and of knowing the language of their country of residency. Other than a substantial change on the Japanese government's part, aimed at addressing bilingualism as a primary aspect of Japanese society, individual attitudes can also make a difference in how a new language can and should be acquired.

18.4 Counting Ainu and Ainu Speakers

This brief introduction to the history of Ainu language in modern times serves to highlight a number of issues that are central when considering the vitality of the language in today's Japan and the efforts towards the revitalisation of Ainu. First, there is the question of how many Ainu are there in contemporary Japan. As Okazaki (2019, 355) points out, the answer to this question is not an easy one and estimates of the number of Ainu vary sharply. Among the reasons for variations in counting Ainu people there is the fact that the polls and censuses carried out to date differ in their scope (for instance, Ainu residing outside of Hokkaidō are never or rarely included). However, one main factor that influences the counting and that easily results in a biased perception of the extension of the Ainu community is that many Ainu people still do not feel comfortable with showing their Ainu identity and therefore do not participate in polls and censuses (Kitahara 2011). As it regards language specifically, there is one more layer of difficulty when it comes to counting speakers of Ainu. Although most native speakers of Ainu have passed away and there are now very few people who acquired the language in the family, there still is a significant number of younger Ainu who can use the language at varying levels of proficiency. This means that the actual number of speakers present in Japan is far more than the alarming figure (5 people) released by UNESCO in 2009. This reality calls for a distinction between 'native' speakers (i.e. those who have learnt the language from a relative and used it as one of their first languages) and 'active' speakers (i.e. those who have a passive and/or active understanding of the language they have learnt as a second language later in their life and can use it to different extents), which is an aspect of language vitality most important for revitalisation (Okuda 2010).

18.5 What is There to Revitalise?

When it comes to revitalisation there are contrasting opinions even within the Ainu community. Among those who wish for the Ainu culture to be revitalised the majority (53.1%) believes that language is the most important aspect of the Ainu heritage to be preserved for the future. Nevertheless, Ainu ceremonies and dances were also named as cultural heritage that should be given priority. Furthermore, when asked about their Ainu language proficiency and about whether they would consider taking Ainu language lessons, only the 7.2% has said to be able to speak either well or sufficiently well to have a simple conversation and, even more importantly, only the 9.7% showed an interest in learning the language (Fukazawa 2019, 20).

The marginal interest in the Ainu language as a valuable part of the Ainu cultural heritage that could find its place in modern Japanese society has a lot to do with the general public's perspective towards it. As Sawai (1998) notes, the firm conviction that Japan is a monolingual nation and that Ainu is a minority language with not many speakers left has propagated the idea of Ainu as a dying language, too small and with too little space (or no space at all) in contemporary Japan for anyone to spend time for its revitalisation. That is, continuously portraying Ainu as a moribund language through the years has turned into a factual reality and has slowly convinced many members of the Ainu community that any revitalisation effort would be made in vain.

18.6 The Steps of Language Revitalisation

The following excerpts are taken from Kitahara (2012), a paper where the author, as a member of the Ainu community, touches upon a number of issues to be addressed when thinking of revitalising the Ainu language and provides his point of view. Starting from Kitahara's considerations discuss each of the following points.

1. Which 'Ainu language' should be revitalised? Though the Saru dialect of Southern Hokkaidō is often tacitly taken as some kind of standard language, Ainu has no real standard variety (Fukazawa 2019, 15-16) and dialectal differences can be striking especially between the Hokkaidō and Sakhalin varieties. Moreover, Ainu has never developed the vocabulary to express concepts and denote things that exist in contemporary society.

Chiba daigaku un Nakagawa Hiroshi nispa yeehe ene an hi. "Kotan pismo itah katu sinnay ciki, nah wa an kotan un itah neyahka okore nuu easkay pahno wantehci anah pirikahaa. Siisam neyahka, Tokyo kotan un kuru, Osaka un itah kii eaykah yahka, nuu easkay tah nee. Taaha neeno an anah pirika nanko" nah yee. Tani neanpe tah yeeruy pirika anpe nee kuni anramu. (279)

As Nakagawa Hiroshi from Chiba University says: "[Considering] there are dialectal differences, it is good that people learn [the language] enough to understand the variety of whatever village. Even in Japan, a person from Tokyo indeed understands the [Japanese] dialect of Osaka, even if they do not know it. It would be good if [we could] reach this goal". As of today, I believe this would be the best thing.

Husko ohta isam ike tani aneywanke asiri itah temana anyee kun pe hetaneya. Siisam utah neanpe sianno wooyaan huuresiisam itah nuhci ike siisam itah ne karahci anpe. Nee wahkayki aynu utah neanpe yeyekota an itah kii ruuhe ka isam kusu, siisam neeno asiriitah kara ka hankii. Nee kusu tane aynu itah wante utah an teh itah kii kusu nah eramuokay yahka, husko itah pateh nee anah, anpene itah hayta anpe. Nee teh itah ankara rusuy koroka, itahkara neanpe sianno itah wante utah nee anah easkay koroka, tani sonno hokampa. (286)

How is one to express the new words that once did not exist but that are now used? The Japanese heard a lot of words from the Europeans and translated them into their language. However, the Ainu [who] did not even use their mother tongue [could] not create new words like the Japanese. For this reason, even if people now know Ainu and intend to use it, they really lack the terminology [to express themselves] if [they rely] only on the words that already exist. [People have] the will to make up [new] words, but creating neologisms [would] be possible if there were someone who really knew the language, so this is very difficult now.

2. As a way to ensure an effective language acquisition, language education is often based on standardised teaching. What language materials (if any) should be used to teach Ainu? How should they be structured? How can the adoption of the same teaching materials and methods for everyone (not) satisfy the needs and motivation of individual learners?

Etutaani kotan omoto koro pe nee kusu, yaykotan un itah anecaakasnokara rusuy wakayki, nupurukampi neanpe Saru kotan un itah neewa Chitose kotan un itah pateh koro. Itakirenkakampi neyke, Horobetsu un itah naa koro wakayki, taa itah ahkari an itah neanpe itahhunta ponno ponno pateh anih nee. Nee kusu asinno anecaakasnokara ohta, Hattori Shirō kara “ainugo hōgen jiten” (1964) [...] ohta an yaykotan un itah hunara ike PC onne ahunkehci ike imerukorocinunkekampi karahci. Taa pateh neyke, itah hayta kusu, tutanno, wooyaan husko oruspe annuu ike PC onne anahunke ike, opokinno itah anweekaarirehci. (pp. 280-1)

[The attendants to the courses] were people native of different parts of Hokkaidō, so they wished to learn the dialect of their village, but we had only dictionaries of the Saru and Chitose dialects. As for grammars, there was also one for the Horobetsu dialect but the amount of vocabulary was in fact smaller than that [available] for the other dialects. Therefore, while being taught from the beginning, [the students] looked for the words from their dialect in “A dialect dictionary of Ainu” by Hattori Shirō [...], entered them in a computer and created a database. Only by doing this [some] words were [still] missing, so then many old stories were listened to, [words] were included in the PC [database], and [new] terms were added little by little.

Yaunkur utar usa usa okay kusu utar yaynu hi ka usinnayno an. Husko itak ponno patek eraman rusuy kur ka oka, kestoankor husko itak ani ukoysoytak rusuy kur ka oka. Kes cup an kor sine to ta patek husko itak seyseyorowa aepakasnu rusuy sekor an kur ka oka, kestoankor 3 cikan husko itak eukoysoytak rusuy kur ka okay. Usa utar oka kusu ki rusuy pe ka usa kuni p ne na. (167)

Ainu people are different so their opinions also vary. There are people who want to learn just a little bit of [their] native language, people who want to converse in Ainu every day, and there are also people who say they want to be taught by an Ainu teacher at least one day a month [and] converse in Ainu for three hours a day. Because there are different people, [their] needs must be diverse too.

Nah an pe neanpe, ikorouncise neya daigaku ohta sicaakasnoyara utah neanpe easkay wahkayki, oya utah neanpe anpene eaykah anpe nee. 2010paa oro AIEA asinno kampsos kara kusu nah yehci ike, paa pisno “nyūmonshū” “shokyūshū” “chūkyūchū” upis ree kampsos, kotan pisno kara kuni urenkarehci. Neewahkayki, etoko wano ankara anpe ka isam ike, anpene kara koyaykus pe neeno aneramuan. Anoka neyke kunine ani kampsos kara aynu anewartanne koroka, kiyanne itah urenkare kuru utah okore montapihci kusu, sine itah urenkare kuru ka sahno ankara kusu karahci. Tah kusu temana ka ankii koyaykus nah aneramuokay kusu, antokoy ne sukuh itah urenkare kuru aneutehkara ike anahunke ike, temana ankara anah pirika nah an pe aneukoramkorohci. (Kitahara 2012, 281-2)

This method works for people who learn [Ainu during classes] in a museum or at university, but it is really difficult for other people. [Since] 2010 the Organisation for the Revitalisation of Ainu has decided to release new publications [for each Ainu dialect] and, every year, it has published three [volumes] “absolute beginner level”, “beginner level”, and “intermediate level” [for three different dialects]. However, there was no source already available and this was believed to be an utterly impossible work. I teamed up with the people making the volumes, but older people experienced in Ainu were all busy so it was decided to proceed without a single expert of the language. Because I thought that such project was undoable, I asked a young person I know and included them [in the group] and we discussed how to produce a good publication.

3. What should be the aim of language revitalisation? How should it be possible to use the language after having learnt it?

Tah neanpe yeeruye paase ike yeeruye hokampa oruspe nee kuni anramu. Repunmosiri orun oruspe annu wahkayki, ramma itah ecaakasnokara easkay yahka, nee itah sahno ukoytah easkay pe nee kusu, kii kun pe isam manu. Nee teh itah wante yahka, okaketa neera ka monrayke ne kii ka eaykah anpe yeeruye wen sirihi nee. (290)

I think this is a more important and more complex matter. Hearing of [analogous] cases from abroad, studying [a language] is always possible but there seems to be no chance to use it because it is in fact possible to communicate without that language. And even if one knows the language, the fact that it cannot be introduced after [one has learnt it] in the workplace seems even worse.

Nee teh, eh yahka, hoskino anyee pe ani, oya utara ohta yee ka hankii. Tah kusu aynuitah neanpe aynu utuhta pateh kii. Koroka, cise soyta aynu unukara hi anpene ponno pateh an. (297)

So even if they join [Ainu language courses], as I said before, they do not tell it to other people and for this reason they use the Ainu language only among members of the community. But the chances of meeting [other] Ainu outside of the household remain slim.

4. When should one start learning Ainu? Is there a recommended age to ensure proper language acquisition?

Sianno haciko ohta neanpe henke ahci tura ekihi nee koroka, icaakasnocise ohta ahun ohta otuye. Nee teh yaytuymaaste ike, ramurenkayne sinenehpone neera an pe ka kii easkay pahno poro koh, aynu weeakaari ohta oman kuru ka an koroka, pookoro koh poo eyaynuachte kusu suy otuye hemaka. Ene teh, neera an yahka eyaycaakasno kuru neanpe sianno yuhke ramu koro kuru nee ike, porosereke poo reske hemaka teh, monrayki hemaka teh eh. (297)

[Children] come [to Ainu language courses] at a very young age with [their] grandparents, but when they enter school they drop out [of classes]. Then, once the situation changes and they become old enough to decide for themselves, there are also people who re-join Ainu meetings, but as soon as they have children, they look after them and end up leaving again. That is, a person who [commits to] learning [Ainu] despite [their obligations] is a person with a strong will and, when they are done raising [their] children, the majority of them retires and returns [to meetings and courses].

18.7 Teaching and Learning Ainu as a Second Language

Read the following quote from Fujita-Round (2019) where the author reasons on some important challenges concerning the future of bilingual education in Japan. In light of these considerations, read the excerpts below taken from Tangiku (2019) who writes about language education for the specific case of Ainu. How should the needs of Ainu speakers and the vitality status of the Ainu language be acknowledged in order to achieve a fruitful revitalisation within an apparently monolingual society?

The difficulty of implementing bilingual education partly comes from the sheer length of time needed to acquire language(s). Moreover, the actual language learning process is individually different, in the context of the society in which the speaker lives. Depending on the speaker's age, bilingual education involves the speaker's language acquisition, language learning, language maintenance and language loss. In some cases, this depends on the position of

a language in a society where bilingual education is involved in language endangerment, language death and language revitalisation. Bilingual education cannot be separated from the constant language dynamism of the speaker's life and social reality. Together with the individual difficulty, how to contextualise bilingualism and multilingualism into "bilingual education" will be a challenge for the twenty-first century. (Fujita-Round 2019, 180)

1. With the intent of revitalising the Ainu language, educators have adopted some teaching methods from other countries where minority and indigenous languages have been or are being revived successfully. Considering what has been said about perspectives and attitudes of the speakers towards the Ainu language (see Lesson 16), do you think these teaching methods are applicable for Ainu? Are there any aspects, specific to the Ainu case, that should be addressed when drawing from experiences of revitalisation in other countries?

USA otta ka, Canada otta ka, Hawai'i otta ka, teetawanoankur utar, husko itak oyra okere wa easir, kanna suy kor rusuy utar, yayepakasnu wa tane husko itak eukoysoytak kor oka. Husko itak kanna suy asiknure hi "itaksiknure" "itakmososo" sekor aye p ne na. Husko sinrici kor itak kanna suy yaykata ka konrusuy sekor sanihi utar yaynu. Tane makanak itak asiknure yakun, mososo yakun pirka ya ka aeraman ruwe ne wa oya mositta usa usa husko itak asiknure hawean. (166-7)

In the USA, in Canada, and in Hawai'i, indigenous people forgot [their] native language and really [those] people who want to revive it learn it on their own and eventually [can] converse using it. Bringing back the native language is called "language revitalisation" [or] "language reawakening". The descendants of [Ainu] ancestors wish to bring back the language with their own strength. Today it is known how to revitalise [or] reawaken a language effectively and it seems that in different countries native languages are [being] restored.

Sonno Aynu itak aeaskay rusuy yakun "sinen or wa sinen eun" ani aeraman kuni p ne na. Kanpinuyekur utar neyakka Aynu itak eraman huci utar orowa "sinen or wa sinen eun" ani ayayepakasnu rok pe ne ruwe tapan. Tane oka kanpinuye utar yaykata "sinen or wa sinen eun" ani Aynu itak eraman a korka, pewreutar epakasnu hi ta "sinen or wa sinen eun" anisomokino, ramma kane gakko otta neno, Aynu itak eraman rusuy utar sine uske ta uekarpare hi kuoyamokte kor kuan. Kanpinuye utar yaynu hi ene an hi. [...] "Sinen or wa sinen eun" ani Aynu itak aeepakasnu wa tane eraman Yaunkur ka oka. Ponno patek ne yakka oka. (pp. 168-9)

If one really wants to be able to [speak] Ainu, they should learn it through [the method of] "one-to-one". Even linguists have been studying Ainu from elderly ladies who knew the language with this method. However, today's linguists, [who] have learnt Ainu themselves with the "one-to-one" method, when teaching to younger people do not employ the [same] method [and] always [hold lessons] in schools [where] people who want to learn are gathered [all] in one place. I think this is odd. [...] There are also people who have been taught with the "one-to-one" method and now know the language. Though they are a few, there are [some].

2. Besides creating a safe space where Ainu speakers can actively use the language they have learnt in everyday life, revitalisation should also think of finding a place for Ainu speakers to apply their knowledge productively and creatively outside the community and within society. Where to start? Who should be involved in this?

Aynu itak ne yakka itak ne ruwe tapan. Sisam itak Huresisam itak ka uneno itak ne ruwe tapan. Kamuyyukar aye kusu, yukar aye kusu, inomi aye patek kusu akor itak ka somo ne. Kestoankor tan itak eukoysoytakan kuni p ne ruwe ne. Nep ne yakka aye easkay. Anime (moymoykenoka) otta aye itaki ne yakka aynu itak ani aye easkay. (170)

Ainu is a language. A language equal to Japanese and Western languages. It is not a language just for reciting the *yukars*, traditional folklore, and prayers. It is a language to be spoken every day – one can express anything [with it]. Even dialogues in anime can be said in Ainu.

Ne wa oka moymoykenoka ta aynu itak utar, haw kar utar, sisam ne yakka arikikino aynu itak hawehe nu wa, ponno ponno yakka aynu itak ka eraman wa kusu ne no pirkano aynu itak ye hi ruwe tapan. (171)

The people who dubbed [the dialogues and] spoke Ainu were Japanese but they worked hard, listened to the language and [eventually] they even understood a little Ainu. This way they in fact [managed to] dub [the anime] in Ainu well.