HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	Aynu itak : on the road to Ainu language revitalization
Author(s)	Martin, Kylie
Citation	メディア・コミュニケーション研究, 60, 57-93
Issue Date	2011-08-11
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/47031
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	MSC60_005.pdf

Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP

Aynu itak
—— on the road to Ainu language revitalization ——

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1. Overview of Ainu sociolinguistic environment

The Ainu people are the indigenous inhabitants of Hokkaido (the northern-most island of Japan), the southern part of Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and the Tohoku region of Honshu. The Ainu language is a 'language isolate', meaning it has no genetic affiliation with Japanese or any other language (Shibatani 1990). Three main dialects of the Ainu language have been identified. These are the Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and Kurile dialects with Hokkaido dialect speakers having the largest number of speakers. Considerable differences in lexicon, phonology and morpho-syntax exist between these dialects (Nakagawa & Okuda 2007). The Hokkaido dialect can be further divided into subdialects: northern, central, eastern, southern and southwestern. They differ mainly in the choices of lexical items. Ainu is a language with a rich oral literary tradition including the epic sagas called *yukar*. Today, this language can also be written using either the Roman alphabet (mainly by linguists), or a specialized version of the Japanese *katakana* script to represent the different sounds of Ainu.

The origins of the Ainu people have been widely debated over the last 100 years. Ainu may be the descendants of the Stone Age Jomon communities who lived throughout the Japanese archipelago, or as Morris-Suzuki (1998) argues, the Ainu could be later immigrants with stronger genealogical ties to other Northern aboriginal peoples such as the Uilta and Nivkh of Sakhalin. Whatever their genealogical roots, the Ainu have lived in what is now northern Japan for many centuries and have been viewed as Indigenous People of Japan by the international community at least since the 1990s. The Japanese national government officially recognized the Ainu as Indigenous People in June 2008.

Official recognition by the Japanese government has been met by both pessimistic and optimistic responses from within the Ainu communities. Those with negative views have stated that it is merely symbolic, with no clearly defined benefits for addressing the

problems of social and economic marginalization and discrimination. It has also been argued that no official apology was given for past wrongs committed against the Ainu, including forced land acquisition, cultural repression and forced assimilation. However, other people with a more optimistic perspective have noted that such recognition could foster an increased sense of pride within the Ainu communities. This, in turn, could result in a greater desire to learn and maintain the Ainu culture and language practices.[1]

As a result of the historical processes and pressures of colonization by Japanese, there has been a huge decline in the maintenance of Ainu cultural practices, knowledge and language. Since the assimilation policies of the Meiji Era (1868–1912), the decrease in the usage of the Ainu language in the public domain has accelerated, leading to widespread language shift in Ainu communities towards Japanese. This has resulted in the language not being transmitted to the younger generation. In the 21st century, the Ainu language is viewed as an endangered language, meaning that it is used by only a handful of first language speakers within limited communicative contexts. However, Ainu communities throughout Hokkaido and other parts of Japan and beyond are now finding their voices and overcoming the social stigma of being 'Ainu' to embrace, maintain and in some instances reclaim their ancestral customs and language within a contemporary context.[2]

In this paper, an ecological linguistic perspective is adopted to analyze those historical, political and socio-economic circumstances which have resulted in the Ainu language becoming endangered within the Japanese nation; in particular the current negative attitudes Ainu people have towards their Ainu heritage. Under this framework, the local interactions between Ainu individuals and their environment as well as their connection to wider socio-political ideologies and settings within the Japanese state, will be explored. A case study of an Ainu sociolinguistic micro-system within the ecology will then be discussed to provide an example of how local interactions in a small town in Hokkaido are connected to the broader dynamics of the larger Ainu sociolinguistic ecology in Japan.

2. Overview of research methodology

The primary data mentioned in this paper is based on ethnographic research initially

1 See lewallen's article (2008) in *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* for further discussion on this official recognition (http://www.japanfocus.org/-ann_elise-lewallen/2971)

2 See Minami (2009) for discussion of the social stigma of being Ainu in Japanese society.

conducted from July 2005 until June 2006. This research was then updated from November 2009 to early 2010. Under an ecological linguistic framework based on Mühlhäusler (1996) and Mufwene (2002, 2004), the methodology included taped semi-structured and informal interviews with Ainu individuals and groups; taped semi-structured interviews with non-Ainu individuals (*Wajin* 'Japanese') involved in Ainu-related activities; taped semi-structured interviews with Ainu language teachers and Ainu language students in the Ainu language classes; attendance at Ainu language classes throughout Hokkaido and in Tokyo; attendance at and participation in Ainu events organized by Ainu communities; informal observations; and collection of Ainu-related written materials at places visited as well as photographing the space or physical layout under investigation (see also Haugen 1966; Baker 1992). This qualitative approach was designed to collect data related to linguistic and non-linguistic factors at the individual, local, wider community and societal levels to document Ainu language learning and usage within the Ainu sociolinguistic ecologies.[3]

3. Ethnolinguistic diversity and language shift at a global level

The plight of Ainu as an endangered language is mirrored in many other countries as the ethnolinguistic diversity of the world continues to diminish at an alarming rate. A pessimistic estimation is that up to 90% of the world's 6900 languages will disappear over the next 100 years (Krauss 1992; Crystal 2000; Romaine 2007). As a result of past colonization and contemporary globalization processes, the continued ethnolinguistic vitality of small language communities has come under imminent threat. In the 21st century, the global economy promotes the "symbolic capital" of the dominant world languages such as English (Bourdieu 1991), while forcing the vitality of indigenous languages to decline. Romaine (2002) argues that large-scale pressures and processes associated with colonization and globalization are the main causes for language shift and loss in small language communities. She observes that:

> Fewer than 4 per cent of the world's languages have any kind of official status in the countries where they are spoken. The fact that most languages are unwritten, not recognized officially, restricted to local community and home functions, and spoken by

3 Refer to section 3.1 for discussion of Mühlhäusler's conditions (1992, 1996, 2003), which were used as a basis for this qualitative research design.

very small groups of people reflects the balance of power in the global linguistic market place (2002: 194).

These large-scale pressures and processes directly affect the contexts available to small language communities for using their ancestral language. Impending language shift of small languages can occur when traditional language usage contexts become restricted and are taken over by another language, usually the dominant language used at a broader societal level. Fishman (2001) suggests that a language becomes 'endangered' mainly as a result of the shrinkage and/or disappearance of its functions and domains of use in daily life, including informal intergenerational communication and transmission. Public domains of use include use in the media, formal education system, political system, and legal system, whereas private domains of use are those within the family such as inter-familial communication, interactions with friends and private religious practices. If these public domains of use continually disappear without new contexts of use replacing the old ones, then the active use of the language by its speakers decreases, and its vitality in the modern context is questionable.

In an ecological framework, the study of 'language' involves the complexities in the lives of its speakers (Mufwene 2002). This is particularly important when describing and analyzing language shift in relation to language revitalization. Language shift needs to be viewed within the context of a given language community in which the myriad of factors, including linguistic and non-linguistic, are considered. This range of factors is crucial to best understand the conditions that contribute to the revitalization of indigenous languages.

Hornberger (2006: 280) defines 'language revitalization' as the "recuperating and reconstructing [of] something which is at least partially lost, rather than maintaining and strengthening what already exists". Hornberger further argues that indigenous language revitalization focuses on the positive reclamation of language usage and practices in spite of "seemingly insurmountable odds against survival of the languages in questions", and that language revitalization, in contrast to language maintenance of minority languages, can be regarded as "a counter-hegemonic social movement" which arises out of the local sociolinguistic communities themselves at the grassroots level (see Alexander 2003; Fishman 2001).

3. 1. An ecological perspective on indigenous language revitalization

For the revitalization of indigenous languages, the ethnolinguistic diversity of the world needs to be regarded as a resource and not a problem. The use of an 'ecology of language' metaphor is useful to understand the intricate processes and pressures affecting

small language communities and their efforts to maintain and/or revitalize their endangered ancestral languages. An ecological framework of indigenous language revitalization is based upon the 'ecology of language' metaphor which developed during the early 1970s (see Haugen 1972). The ecological metaphor is helpful in enabling linguists to focus on a wide range of different aspects affecting a language community.

Hornberger (2006: 280) suggests that there are three themes which characterize an ecological approach to indigenous language revitalization —

1. language evolution;
2. language environment; and
3. language endangerment.

The language evolution theme relates to understanding languages in terms of "living species, [which] evolve, grow, change, live, and die over time in relation to other languages" (Hornberger 2006: 280). For the second theme of language environment, languages are seen to be connected with and supported by their surrounding environment, which involves linguistic and non-linguistic factors such as socio-economic, educational, political, cultural, and demographic. The final theme of language endangerment relates to the concept that just as biological species can become endangered and extinct, so too can languages within a given ecology. This theme not only focuses on documenting and understanding language loss over time, but also on ways of overcoming and revitalizing the overall ecology to maintain diversity, especially in the context of indigenous language revitalization.

A language ecology is a complex system in which mutual interactions exist at different levels including individual, local community, wider community, national and global. The revitalization of an endangered language is deeply rooted within local relationships, practices, knowledge systems and geographical places. These local interactions between the individuals and their immediate environment form the foundation of the micro-system of an ecology. This sociolinguistic micro-system also exists within a larger ecosystem. These local interactions are then connected to the wider socio-political ideologies and settings which often occur in the dominant language of the general public of a nation.

Mufwene (2002: 177) warns that language shift, which is seen as the main reason for language endangerment, is an "adaptive response [by the speakers] to changes in a particular culture" and that "linguistic changes echo cultural changes". Therefore, in relation to language endangerment and revitalization, language shift away from the ancestral language to another needs to be understood as an attitudinal and behavioral

response of its speakers. This language shift develops as a result of changes in the socio-economic ecology of the ancestral language. If these socio-economic changes are not addressed and overcome in favor of the ancestral language, language shift may continue to occur to the point of language death. In other words, if the speakers perceive greater benefit to themselves and the group in shifting away from the use of the ancestral language in certain domains of modern society, the decline of that language is likely to occur.

Mufwene (2002: 163) further suggests that the phrase "language vitality" needs to be adopted in an ecological framework. The phrase focuses more on those factors which favor "particular languages at the expense of others" and "the changing socio-economic conditions to which speakers respond adaptively for their survival". This is connected to Bourdieu's (1991) notion of "linguistic capital" which includes the concepts of competition and selection in the linguistic market within society for the survival of language diversity. Such a view of ethnolinguistic vitality helps to address the socio-economic costs and benefits of maintaining a language to its speakers in relation to other languages in the ecology.

Mühlhäusler (1996) has suggested a number of conditions which need to be considered when documenting the complexities of a language ecology. These factors are interconnected with the large-scale historical, social and political processes and pressures within a given society. While his focus is more on language planning and maintenance policies, his approach is still useful in the documentation of a language ecology itself. In such an ecological framework, the central focus should be on the range of linguistic and non-linguistic factors which have affected and continue to affect the nature of the ecology in sustaining ethnolinguistic diversity (Mühlhäusler 2003: 235).

Based on Mühlhäusler (1992, 1996, 2003), the following conditions should be addressed to fully understand the complexities involved in language endangerment and revitalization. These are:

- the position, vitality, and status of forms of communication in the language ecology;
- people's attitudes concerning their language and other languages (even whether they want to be 'researched');
- contexts of language learning and usage; and
- whether and how the language is transmitted to a new generation (intergenerational interaction).

Mufwene (2002, 2004) also indicates that the actual and perceived socio-economic costs

and benefits of using a language to its speakers is a further area which is vital in mapping the language vitality of the endangered language.

4. Ecological perspective on Ainu language revitalization

For this paper, the adoption of an ecological framework allows for a sophisticated understanding of those linguistic and non-linguistic factors involved in Ainu language shift at different levels of society within the larger Ainu sociolinguistic ecology.[4] To date, very little, if any, research has been published using an ecological perspective as proposed by Mufwene (2002, 2004) and Mühlhäusler (1996, 2003) to analyze the Ainu sociolinguistic environment.

The following four factors and conditions have been identified which need to be addressed in order to understand the local Ainu sociolinguistic microsystem:

- the Ainu language's position and status in relation to Japanese and other forms of communication within Japan (e.g. English);
- research, teaching and contexts of Ainu language use;
- Ainu and Japanese attitudes towards the speakers of the languages; and
- the extent to which Ainu is being transmitted to the new generation.

The large-scale historical and social circumstances, including policies of past and present Japanese governments and historical events, also need to be examined to understand how they have impacted on individual Ainu people's sense of pride in their Ainu heritage as this directly relates to their desire to learn the language and actual language usage (see Mufwene 2002, 2004).

5. Historical changes in the sociolinguistic ecology of the Ainu language

The Ainu people have been influenced by a myriad of outside pressures and processes which have negatively affected the continued maintenance of traditional customs and practices. Colonization by Japanese and its legacies represent the most dramatic example of large-scale processes which have disrupted the intergenerational transmission of the Ainu language for over 200 years. The assimilation policies of the Meiji Era led to widespread language shift away from the use of Ainu as a language of everyday communi-

4 See Fishman (2001) for a comparison with the Reversing Language Shift (RLS) framework.

cation and to the adoption of Japanese in all public domains. The Ainu became a minority group in their own traditional lands and were no longer recognized as a distinct ethnic group in any official census report in Japan.

5. 1. Large-scale historical processes and pressures affecting Ainu people

At the national level, the interactions between the Ainu communities and non-Ainu communities that is the broader ethnic 'Japanese' (*Wajin*) community, form the background for the current threat to the Ainu language. Historically, the interactions between the Ainu and Wajin have been characterized by violence, peaceful indifference, greed, exploitation, discrimination, misunderstanding, and more recently, the potential for growing understanding and respect. The following relates to some of the governmental policies and major historical occurrences since the first Ainu/Wajin contact.

The earliest Japanese written records indicate that there were "both hostile and friendly encounters with non-Japanese native peoples to the North" from the 8th century (Levin 2001: 421). From the 1200s onwards, Japanese documents began to refer to cultural exchanges with the people of the northern island (called Ezogashima by the Japanese) (Levin 2001), and "by the fifteenth century, Wajin trading settlements were dotted around the southern tip of Ezogashima and engaged in trade with powerful Ainu leaders in the vicinity" (Siddle 1996: 28–29). During this era until the Edo period (1603–1867), Ainu people continued to practice their own culture, use their language in everyday life, and trade with their neighbours including the Nivkh in Sakhalin, Russians, Chinese and Japanese (Walker 2001).

By the Edo period, the Ainu were regarded as aliens and "outside of the nation's formal social status hierarchy" under the Tokugawa Shogunate (Howell 1994: 71). During this era, the Japanese language, cultural traditions, clothing, and work were prohibited to the Ainu to ensure the purity of the Japanese ethnicity (Minami 2009). This did not mean that the Ainu were able to escape from the influence of these Wajin colonizers in their traditional territories. The Ainu were subjected to land confiscations, and contact with unfamiliar diseases and widespread mistreatment led to a dramatic decrease in the population. During this time, the usage of the Ainu language in rituals, ceremonies and daily routines became more and more restricted as traditional Ainu lifestyles were slowly changing and being changed (Walker 2001).

5. 2. Assimilation during the Meiji Era

After 1868, the assimilationist policies of the Meiji government resulted in a period of drastic change in the practice of the Ainu language. Thirty years after the 1869 establishment of the Colonization Commission (*Kaitakushi*), the enactment of the Former Aborigine Protection Law (*kyu-dojin-hogo-ho*) in 1899 abolished all Ainu legal rights to their traditional lands and the right to practice their own cultural and linguistic heritage.[5] The Meiji regime instigated an aggressive policy for the colonization of the northern islands out of a desire to exploit the territory for its natural resources and as a need to legitimize Japanese rule over the island in the face of Russian expansion (Siddle 1996).[6]

From 1899, the policies of the Meiji government attempted to erase the 'ethnic difference' of Ainu people in relation to Wajin, and to assimilate these indigenous people into the national identity as being 'Japanese' (Kojima 2002). Ainu became situated as a distinct lower class (peasant) of Wajin (part of the *Yamato Minzoku*, 'Yamato people'), and not an ethnically distinct group. The phrase *horobiyuku minzoku* ('dying race') began to be widely used by scholars and policymakers to describe the Ainu (Siddle 1996), and the Ainu were erased from the official historical account of Japan in school textbooks as a living ethnic group (see Ogawa 1993).

During this era, the transmission of Ainu to the next generation was severely disrupted. If its usage was continued, the Ainu language came to be a form of communication used in severely restricted contexts within individual family units.

5. 3. Post World War II era — growing Ainu self-awareness

The post World War II era was a time of growing self-awareness amongst Ainu communities and their struggle for the reclamation of their rights as a recognized Indigenous People within the Japanese nation-state. From the 1960s, a small minority of Ainu people started to re-craft an identity for themselves outside of the public discourse of a homogenous nation, referring to themselves as *Ainu Minzoku* ('the Ainu People'). Levin (2001: 441) writes that:

As Japanese government officials brushed the Ainu people into history's dustbin, voices

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5 See Siddle (1996) and Levin (2001) for a detailed analysis of the laws enacted during the Meiji Era specifically related to the Ainu, and the consequences of these on the maintenance of Ainu cultural and language practices.

6 See Harrison (2008) and Minami (2009) for discussion on Japanese-Russian territorial disputes and how these affected Ainu communities.

from within the Ainu community emerged and began to articulate a very different message. These new voices proclaimed the Ainu to be an indigenous people, a people that would not only survive but that would survive vigorously and would make claims to economic, political, and cultural rights in Japan and in the eyes of the world.

However, at a national level, a multicultural country with Ainu as a part of the broader national identity has not been part of the public discourse on nation-building ideologies which emphasize the homogeneity of the Japanese people and their language. Since 1947, the popular discourse of Japan as an ethnically homogeneous society has become widespread. This discourse of Japan as a uni-race nation is connected with the principle of *jus sanguinus* ('nationality by descent') in the Constitution. Together, these concepts have led to the direct link being made between nationality and ethnicity (Yamato people) by the general public in Japanese society (lewallen 2006). In 1986, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone declared that Japan was an ethnically homogeneous nation using the rhetoric of the deeply rooted myth of *tan'itsu-minzoku kokka* ('uni-race nation').[7] This geohistorical concept was widely promoted by the Meiji government for the purpose of unifying the diverse regional populations that existed during the Tokugawa period (Minami 2009: 136).

In 1993, Giichi Nomura from the Hokkaido Ainu Association (HAA) (est. 1930)[8] stood in front of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York and delivered a speech for the 'International Year of the Indigenous Peoples' on "the ravaging, the marginalization and discrimination suffered by the Ainu in Japan and concluded with words of thanks in Ainu" (Maher 2001: 325). Such a perception of history, presented to a global audience, contradicted the narrative of Japanese homogeneity and the settlement of the northern virgin lands of Hokkaido (Siddle 1997).

In 1997, the Meiji Era 'Former Aborigines Act' was finally replaced by the 'New Ainu Law' known in Japanese as the *Ainu Shinpō*.[9] The purpose of this new law was to "establish a meaningful place for the Ainu in Japanese civil society" (Levin 2001: 443). Under this new law, the Ainu language is treated as a defining characteristic of Ainu

7 Gottlieb (2008: 1) also cites the 2005 statement of the Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Aso Taro who proclaimed Japan as the only country to have "one nation, one civilization, one language, one culture and one race".

8 The *Utari Kyōkai* officially changed their name to *Ainu Kyōkai* in 2008.

9 The full name of the new law is 'An Act for the Promotion of Ainu Culture, the Dissemination of Knowledge of Ainu Traditions, and an Educational Campaign'. This is the first major policy on multiculturalism established by the Japanese government.

culture, which is of importance in terms of gaining funding for Ainu language classes.

5. 4. Lack of recognition and discrimination in the 21st century

The failure up until 2008 to recognize Ainu as a living indigenous group within Japan in the public discourse on national identity has led to a legacy of marginalization and discrimination against Ainu people. Recent studies by Minami (2009) and lewallen (2006) have reported the negative impact that the denial of the existence of Ainu within contemporary Japan has had on Ainu people's own sense of pride in their ancestral culture. Aylward (2007, 2009) and Battiste (2000) have described how assimilation policies are a form of "cognitive imperialism" in which the public's consciousness is manipulated in the dominant language and culture to create the myth of the erasure of indigenous cultures (Aylward 2007: 2). Adrienne Rich argues that "[w]hen someone with the authority of teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing" (quoted in Battiste 2000: 198).

This history of cognitive imperialism has dramatically affected Ainu people's own sense of self, especially given the strong emphasis on assimilation and sameness in Japanese society. The lack of pride some Ainu people currently feel for their culture is directly connected to the dominant society's lack of awareness of the Ainu culture and lack of acknowledgement of the associated discrimination. Ainu people suggest that only after non-Ainu Japanese people acknowledge and accept the existence of Ainu as a distinct and indigenous group in contemporary society will a greater sense of pride amongst Ainu people develop. This, in turn, would have a direct influence on the desire to learn the language and its subsequent usage.[10] For as Romaine (2007: 1) argues the acknowledgement of past and present wrongs committed since the beginning of the period of colonization and understanding the consequences of those wrongs are the first steps to overcoming language endangerment. This can be achieved through the development of a more positive and informed attitude towards the endangered language group. Only once Ainu people feel that it is acceptable to be different in mainstream Japanese society will this sense of pride in being Ainu lead to a renewed desire to learn the language and the

10 Personal communication with Ainu language teacher in Shiraoi (2006). This is also supported by a number of other Ainu language teachers around Hokkaido (Mukawa, Samani and Sapporo) and other self-identified Ainu case studies in the Kanto region who expressed similar opinions (2006 and February 2010).

associated cultural practices.

5. 5. Population of Ainu people

In the most recent Hokkaido government survey in 2006,[11] the Ainu population was said to be around 24,000 (in a current population for the whole of Hokkaido of about 5.6 million). However, this number represents only those listed as members of the Ainu community of whom approximately 4, 500 people are self-identified members of the Hokkaido Ainu Association (lewallen 2006: 300). The actual number of the Ainu population is impossible to determine as Ainu people are not distinguished from mainstream Japanese in the national census (Maher and Yashiro 1995) and fears of discrimination often mean that people do not publicly self-identify as 'Ainu'. A figure of 300,000 Ainu people has also been suggested as its possible population, based on blood ancestry including great-grandparents and grandparents with Ainu blood (personal communication, Hokkaido Ainu Association, 2006). At the moment, there is no one single definition used by any Japanese government agency for ascertaining Ainu ethnicity. Those people who self-identify as Ainu and can trace their Ainu heritage, are a minority. The fear of discrimination has led to some people of Ainu heritage keeping their ancestry hidden from their children and grandchildren so as to not burden them. Minami (2009: 150) describes some of the views of Ainu people surrounding the concealment of their Ainu identity:

> Numbers of Ainu people I met told me that in their childhood they did not want to grow up to be the 'Ainu'...many Ainu parents even declared that they intended to end their lineage as the Ainu at their generation, hence told children to be 'ordinary' (Japanese). Staying as 'Ainu' was first legally prohibited, and then was habitually and emotionally avoided in order to adapt to the harsh realities of social situations. However, many of those who 'bent' their identities, which often meant becoming 'invisible', waited for a time they could 'bend back'.

For some Ainu people, the time to reassert and reclaim their Ainu identity came with the emergence of the Nibutani Ainu leader Shigeru Kayano.[12] For some Ainu, Kayano

11 For more details on statistics from 2006 see http://www.ainu-assn.or.jp/english/eabout03.html.

12 Shigeru Kayano was an Ainu elder who established the first Ainu language school in Nibutani in 1983. He served on the Biratori Town Council (of which Nibutani is part of) for several terms and also served as the first Ainu parliamentarian in the Japanese National Diet. He wrote and oversaw the publication of over 50 books of Ainu language and culture as well as a number of pamphlets, brochures and other works (Anderson & Iwasaki-Goodman 2001: 55). Shigeru Kayano passed away on 6 May, 2006.

was a voice for a re-awakening of an Ainu identity in contemporary Japanese society. His establishment of the first Ainu language school in 1983 can be seen as instrumental in the movement for reclaiming the Ainu language and fostering a desire among Ainu people to relearn their ancestral language.

6. Contemporary Ainu language situation

The above discussion of some of the main historical events and policies clarifies the negative (and positive) factors which have affected the position, vitality and status of the Ainu language in Japan as well as those large-scale factors which have influenced the formation of Ainu and Japanese attitudes towards the Ainu sociolinguistic communities, including the language. It provides a historical perspective for the shift away from the ancestral Ainu language towards Japanese.

In the following discussion, the beginning of the Ainu language revitalization movement is outlined. There is a diverse range of Ainu language speakers, varying from near fluency in Ainu to second language learners attending beginner Ainu language classes. The number of actual Ainu language speakers is a highly contested topic, and it depends on how an individual's ability is defined. In recent years, there has been an increasing trend towards developing new contexts of Ainu usage in contemporary society such as on the radio and in Ainu language classrooms throughout Hokkaido, and in parts of Honshu. However, the Ainu language is still not taught as part of mainstream education in Japan. It is taught in Ainu community centers and at HAA branch offices in Hokkaido, but for a variety of reasons, actual attendance of Ainu people in these Ainu language classes still remains low.

6. 1. Ainu language speakers

The classification by DeChicchis (1995: 110) of Ainu language speakers into four categories is a good starting point for discussing the current vitality of the language. These categories are:

- archival Ainu speakers,
- old Ainu-Japanese bilinguals,
- token Ainu speakers; and
- second language learners of Ainu.

For the first group, the language usage of archival Ainu speakers forms the basis for

the Ainu language textbooks, linguistic analysis and for resources used in the current Ainu language programmes. The works of Japanese linguist Kindaichi (1882–1971) and Ainu linguist Chiri (1909–1961) draw on the speech of these archival Ainu speakers who were seen to use "*proper* Ainu utterances in order to describe the *traditional* or *correct* language" (Kirikae 1997: 161). The data collected in the 1970s and 1980s from Ainu people belonging to the generation following Kindaichi's and Chiri's language recordings can also be included in this first group (Kirikae 1997). This group represents those Ainu language speakers who have already passed away.

Today, the number of 'old Ainu-Japanese bilinguals', the second group, is very small with maybe only a handful remaining of the older generation throughout Hokkaido (personal communication, Hokkaido Ainu Association, 2006). They would have grown up hearing Ainu used by their parents and grandparents in their daily lives. For them, Ainu would have been used in the home environment and its usage would have been encouraged. These speakers would have used Ainu in their childhood and into their young adult lives (Maher 2001). However, this group now only uses Ainu in limited private domains. Japanese has become their main language of communication.

The third group, 'token Ainu speakers', do not regard themselves as speakers of Ainu. They are from the generation of speakers who grew up in an environment of blatant discrimination against Ainu people where the support systems of the Ainu sociolinguistic community were no longer in place (for example, traditional fishing and farming practices, teaching of the Ainu language to the younger generation, use of the Ainu language in the home). These people would not have openly acknowledged their Ainu ethnicity in the past, but probably have receptive knowledge of Ainu. They may have grown up in a household where either the grandparents or parents spoke Ainu.

The final group represents mainly the younger generation of Ainu who want to learn about the Ainu language and culture. These people form the majority of people attending Ainu language programmes and/or those enrolled in university courses with a focus on Ainu Studies (for example at Tomakomai Komazawa University). Their first language is Japanese.

However, while DeChicchis's (1995: 110) categorization assists in identifying the general level and language proficiency of Ainu speakers, each group contains people of varying degrees of language competency, a range of age groups and a broad variety of life experiences.

6. 2. Ainu as an endangered language

Over the past century, the Ainu language has undergone major changes in its usage, leading a number of anthropologists, linguists and scholars of Ainu studies to describe the language as being in a state of decline or in danger of imminent death (e.g. Ishida 1910; Goto 1934; Philippi 1979; Shibatani 1990). However, as was stated on many occasions by Ainu people interviewed during this research, while currently active knowledge and use of the language may be low, it still remains in the hearts of the Ainu themselves and forms an integral part of their identities and daily lives. It finds its expression in their crafts, music, interaction with others, in code-switching between Ainu and Japanese, joking in Ainu, and their attitudes and perceptions in everyday activities. There is a willingness to learn the language and use the language in new contexts. An increasing number of second language learners of Ainu are also attending language and culture classes throughout Hokkaido and the Kanto region.

The exact number of Ainu language speakers is an issue of debate amongst and between Ainu people and linguists. Given the difficulty in defining Ainu ethnicity and establishing accurate population numbers, the exact numbers of Ainu language speakers is also nearly impossible to determine. The Ainu language is no longer used as a language of everyday communication, but the number of Ainu second language learners has been steadily increasing (personal communication, Kazuyuki Tanimoto, former head of the FRPAC, 2006). Kayano (1993: 365) estimated that maybe 10% of the Ainu population (about 2400–2500 people) can understand basic Ainu words and phrases when spoken.

Kirikae (1997) argues that today there are a number of Ainu people who were bilingual in Ainu and Japanese until a certain age, but then their Ainu language development was interrupted or even stopped and their linguistic abilities became part of their passive knowledge. Many of these people began to regard themselves as monolingual Japanese speakers. However, with encouragement their latent linguistic knowledge can become part of their active knowledge. Kirikae's arguments are also supported by the present ethnographic research in Hokkaido and Tokyo in 2005 to 2006. When first asked whether they knew or spoke Ainu, a number of people answered in the negative. However, in interviews and informal discussions they demonstrated the ability to identify and understand a number of lexical items and grammatical structures with the appropriate pragmatic competency in contexts relating to traditional Ainu customs, rituals, dance, music, story-telling and cooking. Thus, Anderson & Iwasaki-Goodman (2001) make the point that it is a difficult task to identify the level of Ainu language fluency and thus, an accurate

figure of Ainu speakers at first glance.

6. 3. Contexts of contemporary language usage

While there has been a dramatic decline in the number of active speakers of Ainu, this needs to be seen in the context of the resurgence of ethnolinguistic vitality among the second language learners of Ainu. Maher in 1993 suggested that in order to understand the Ainu sociolinguistic ecologies the focus should change from being on "Will the Ainu language survive?" to "What's going on?" now. The answer to this question is 'much is happening'. Here are three examples.

First, the Ainu language is being used in its numerous forms, in both traditional and new contemporary rituals and ceremonies (*kamuy-nomi*); in singing and dance performances (for example, by Oki, Ainu Art Project, Ainu Rebels[13]); in learning and understanding the designs and techniques involved in carving, contemporary painting and embroidery; in learning musical instruments (e.g. tonkori[14], mukkuri); cooking; in language classes; and in the production of research materials and teaching materials.

The second example relates more to the usage of Ainu words and phrases by mainstream Japanese society for the promotion of a distinctly Hokkaido identity rather than to Ainu language revitalization *per se*. This Ainu usage is restricted to mainly new names for shopping centres and Hokkaido sports teams to create a uniquely Hokkaido image in contrast to mainland Honshu culture. Examples include *Rera* ('wind') for an outlet shopping complex in Minami Chitose (near New Chitose Airport) and Pewre ('young') for a shopping centre in Chitose. *Rera Kamuy* ('God of Wind') has also been used to name the Sapporo basketball team. This adoption of Ainu words by mainstream society could be seen as the first step to accepting Ainu as being part of the Hokkaido

13 Oki is an Ainu musician who plays the tonkori, and has performed at music festivals around the world. He often performs with his own Oki Dub Ainu Band. Oki's music is a mix of traditional Ainu music, reggae, African rhythms and electronica (see http://www.tonkori.com/profile/index_e.php). The Ainu Art Project was established by Yuki Koji and is a network of Ainu people who are artists, performing Ainu songs and dances, telling traditional Ainu stories and creating original Ainu art works (see http://www.myspace.com/1000376392). The Ainu Rebels were a group of Ainu in their 20s and 30s who dance and sing in Ainu. They were based in Tokyo and combined traditional Ainu music with hip hop and electronic music. Their most recent music *e katuhu pirka* ('We are beautiful'), is an original song with lyrics by Mina Sakai. (see http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=284853760669&id=7378590239).

14 *Tonkori* is a plucked stringed instrument, which originated in Sakhalin. It is now widely played by Ainu people in Hokkaido and Honshu.

identity in Japan. In these examples, Ainu is seen as something 'cool' (see Maher 2005). This concept of 'cool' can be used as a tool to gain social acceptance by non-Ainu Japanese and to further foster a sense of pride in being Ainu. However, it remains to be seen whether this shallow awareness of Ainu culture translates into genuine recognition of this part of Japan's multicultural makeup.

The third example of contemporary Ainu usage is the broadcasting of the Ainu language radio program on STV Radio in Hokkaido. This program began in 1987, and now involves both the HAA and FRPAC (Sapporo). The broadcast is a beginner's language class that introduces basic words, concepts and phrases in the Ainu language. In 2010, it was first broadcast early on Sunday mornings (7:05–7:20am) for 15 minutes then repeated late on Saturday night (11:15pm).[15] The hosting of the radio programme rotates amongst the Ainu communities in which Ainu language classes are also held (14 Ainu communities in Hokkaido). The accompanying language texts are written in Ainu (using the specialized form of katakana and the Roman alphabet) with Japanese translations.

6. 4. Ainu language classes

From an ecological perspective, the actual teaching of the Ainu language and culture also acts as an indicator in determining the current well-being of the language and its transmission to the next generation (see Mühlhäusler 1996, 2000). There are a number of Ainu language classes held throughout Hokkaido and parts of Honshu (Kanto and Kansai regions). In 2010, Ainu language classes were held in 14 different locations throughout Hokkaido at Ainu community centers or HAA branch offices.[16] These classes have been developed in response to the needs and wants of the local people (Anderson & Iwasaki-Goodman 2001). The locations of these classes are Nibutani (also with children's classes), Asahikawa, Urakawa, Kushiro, Shiraoi, Chitose, Shizunai, Mukawa, Obihiro, Shiranuka, Noboribetsu, Tomakomai, Samani, and Sapporo. Each community chooses its own class content and class materials. Ainu language teachers are often members of the local Ainu community where the language class is held. Both Ainu and non-Ainu people are often welcomed to attend. Some classes are dominated by Ainu people, while in others the majority are non-Ainu. Exact numbers of students attending these classes are not readily

15 For further information on the radio program see http://www.frpac.or.jp/eng/e_itm/project02_2.html.

16 Other Ainu language classes exist which are hosted by private community members and do not receive funding from any level of the Japanese government.

accessible, but it has been estimated that at least 400 students take these classes each year (personal communication, Hokkaido Ainu Association, 2010). Class numbers have been steadily increasing each year.

Most classes write the Ainu language in a modified version of the Japanese katakana script. One reason is that this script is more familiar to the students than the Roman script, given that their first language is Japanese.[17] These language classes are typically held on a fortnightly or monthly basis, although, in some cases on a weekly basis. They are usually in the evenings.

At an official level, the Foundation for the Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (FRPAC) has also developed 'parent-child Ainu language classes' in a number of towns including Sapporo, Chitose, Asahikawa, Nibutani. The FRPAC was established under the *Ainu Shinpō* ('New Ainu law') and has offices in Sapporo and Tokyo.[18] The 'parent-child' classes are designed to foster intergenerational communication and knowledge transfer from the older generation to the younger (personal communication, FRPAC, 2006). They are often intensive courses running over 6 to 8 weeks with at least 2 classes per week. They are designed to create a new context for language usage and provide a place for cultural exchange. Advanced classes in the Ainu language are also offered in Tokyo. These advanced classes have only recently started in Tokyo and the younger generation (in their 20s and 30s) make up the majority of the student populace.

It needs to be stated that the focus of these 14 language classes is to nurture a sense of cultural empowerment. Their main purpose is not simply to develop a high-level of proficiency in the Ainu language itself. The classes are a way of re-gaining the knowledge of Ainu culture, customs and rituals. Once students develop a strong sense of pride in their Ainu identity, they should then be able to develop linguistic competency in their ancestral language (personal communication, FRPAC and Hokkaido Ainu Association, 2006). A number of the teachers of the 14 classes have a limited knowledge of the Ainu language which thus affects the contents and purpose of these language classes. In some communities, the Ainu language teacher's knowledge may only consist of key words and phrases

17 The Roman alphabet is often preferred by linguists as it better represents the traditional sound system of Ainu.

18 The operational fund for the FRPAC is from subsidies given by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and the Hokkaido Government. Endowment was also given by 56 municipalities in Hokkaido with Ainu residents (http://www.frpac.or.jp/eng/e_prf/profile02.html).

related to traditional rituals, stories and cultural practices. In such classes, the audio recordings of the 'archival' or 'old Ainu-Japanese bilinguals' reciting traditional *yukar* or *uwepeker*[19] form the basis of class discussions and language learning.

6. 5. Preservation, documentation and revitalization of the Ainu language

The HAA and the FRPAC have been involved in preserving and documenting the Ainu language through conducting their own projects or providing funding and/or support to researchers. Over the years, researchers associated with the HAA have been engaged in recording and documenting the language of the older generation and their oral histories in the different Ainu communities throughout Hokkaido. Other associated projects have included compiling vocabulary lists of the sub-dialects of Ainu and place name research.

To begin revitalizing the language, the FRPAC has developed intensive training courses for Ainu people wanting to teach the Ainu language. These are taught by established linguists and respected members of the Ainu community. These courses are taught 3 times per year.[20] The FRPAC also hosts and sponsors the Ainu speech contest (named *itak an ro* in Ainu, 'Let's speak Ainu!') which is held in a Hokkaido town (mostly recently in Sapporo, 2010) on an annual basis, usually in November. For many, this contest provides a strong motivation to continue learning the language and attending classes. Participation in this speech contest has steadily increased each year. It has grown from being a half-a-day event to a full day event with at least 50 contestants in 2010.

Furthermore, there is a variety of Ainu language textbooks and resources for the learning of this language. These include: *Akor Itak* ('Our language') with an accompanying video by the HAA, which utilises the different sub-dialects of Ainu (1994); *Yasashii Ainugo* ('Easy Ainu') (1, 2, 3) first published in 1989 by the Biratori Nibutani Ainu Language Classroom; *Ekusupuresu Ainugo* ('Express Ainu') by Hiroshi Nakagawa (2004); *Upaskuma* ('Wisdom of the Ainu') (1 & 2) in Ainu, Japanese and English with an accompanying CD voiced by Mutsuko Nakamoto in collaboration with the Katayama Institute of Linguistic and Cultural Research (2001); and *Kanna Kamuy turesi* ('the Thunder god's younger sister') produced by the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi (2003). At an official governmental level, the FRPAC has also published a number of children's books based on traditional Ainu stories written in Ainu, Japanese and English to assist in Ainu cultural transmission and language

19 *uwepeker* in Ainu is a traditional folktale.

20 See http://www.frpac.or.jp/eng/e_itm/project02_1.html.

learning. There are also numerous recordings with accompanying texts of the *yukar* and *uwepeker* (for example. *Kamuy-yukar* narrated by Nabe Shirasawa and Mutsuko Nakamoto (1995)).

At present, there has not been a systematic approach to the development and introduction of new lexical items into modern Ainu. This means that the Ainu language in its current form cannot be used to meet the demands of everyday life for the Ainu in the 21st century. This is a major obstacle for the revitalization of the language and will need to be addressed by Ainu community members together with linguists for the continued transmission of this endangered language.

6. 6. Formal education and the Ainu language

Part of determining the status of the Ainu language within Japan is whether it is taught in the formal education, namely at schools (elementary, junior high, or senior high) or at colleges and universities. At present, the Ainu language is not taught as a subject in any secondary school in Japan. Besides Japanese, the language which is prioritised in the education system is the English language. English is considered an important language and tool of communication due to its socio-economic and political status as an international language (see Gottlieb 2008). Students are provided with compulsory English language classes from junior high school (from age 11 or 12 years). From April 2011, compulsory English classes as part of *Gaikokugo Katsudo*[21] ('Foreign Language Activities') will also be introduced to all 5th and 6th grade students.

In Biratori (Hokkaido), there is a unique example of the inclusion of the Ainu culture and language into the 'Foreign Language Activities' at the local elementary school. English and Ainu will be taught as part of these activities in the curriculum from April 2011.

In some universities in Hokkaido and Honshu, Ainu is taught along with subjects on Ainu culture. In Hokkaido, such universities as Hokkaido University (Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies), Sapporo University, Hokkai-Gakuen University (Sapporo), and Tomakomai Komazawa University (Tomakomai) offer courses in Ainu studies with an optional language focus. In the Kanto region, a few universities have offered or currently offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the Ainu language and culture. Exam-

21 For an English translation of purpose of these activities refer to http://gifujets.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/eigo-note-guidebook-en.pdf.

ples include Waseda University, which began offering Ainu language studies at undergraduate level in 1975 (Maher 2001); Chiba University which currently offers undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the Ainu language (and culture); and the International Christian University, which has provided supervision for higher degree students.

6. 7. Attendance at Ainu language classes

Anderson & Iwasaki-Goodman (2001) indicate that the attendance of Ainu people at the Ainu language schools is often quite low, and cite discrimination as the main cause. The reason they provide is that while the Hokkaido government has stated that the problem of discrimination is being addressed and is less of a problem at the present time,[22] a number of people of Ainu ethnicity are still self-conscious of the possibility of prejudice and discrimination. This is especially the case for those children who are going through the mainstream education system. However, the reasons for the low rate of attendance of Ainu people in these Ainu language classes are highly complex. During discussions with Ainu language teachers and students in both mid-2005 and early 2010, a number of factors besides discrimination were voiced. These included having busy work schedules; language class timetables (usually in the evenings on weekdays); low perceived socio-economic benefit in learning Ainu; the content of classes; the teaching abilities, and styles of language teachers; the relevance of the content to daily lives; and the presence of non-Ainu people in classes.

The myriad of reasons for not attending language classes illustrates the dynamic and complex nature of a sociolinguistic ecology. Within a microsystem, individuals' interactions with their local environment may vary greatly, even though they have been influenced by similar, if not the same, large-scale historical and socio-political circumstances within Japanese society. Mufwene's concept of "language vitality" is highly relevant here as there is often little perceived socio-economic benefit in learning the Ainu language. Learning this ancestral language relates more to self-empowerment, re-learning cultural knowledge and interacting with friends and family than for any financial gain.

Given the often low socio-economic status of Ainu people, many more Ainu people have begun to learn Ainu art and crafts as the production of these art forms can provide financial gain and a livelihood based on Ainu cultural practices. This includes learning

22 See the statistics of the 2006 Hokkaido survey for more details at http://www.ainu-assn.or.jp/english/eabout03.html

and producing traditional wood-carving, embroidery, painting, and dancing and singing for tourist performances as well as for Ainu-only events. These all represent cultural practices which provide a monetary incentive and can lead to an improvement in their economic situation.

7. Case study of *Town Utari*

The following case study represents an example of a local Ainu sociolinguistic environment in Hokkaido. In this microsystem, the complexities of the linguistic and non-linguistic factors affecting language learning, can be examined within the context of the broader large-scale historical and social circumstances mentioned above. The town in this case study has been given the pseudonym 'Town Utari' to maintain its anonymity. *Utari* means 'friend, comrade' in the Ainu language.[23]

Taped semi-structured and/or informal discussions[24] were conducted in July and August 2005 with:

- the Ainu language teacher;
- members of the Ainu language class;
- the representative of the local branch of the HAA;[25]
- the volunteer tourist representative for the local community; and
- local non-Ainu residents in the town.

The ethnographic research design also included participation in an Ainu language class; participant observation of Ainu class participants; and informal discussions with class participants during and after the Ainu language class (see Haugen 1966; Baker 1992). Based on Mühlhäusler (1996, 2003), data was collected in relation to attendance at the Ainu language class; teaching pedagogy; student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions; use of teaching materials; instances of intergenerational interaction; and student attitudinal

23 In the description of this case study, no information, which identifies its actual location or specific people involved, can be given. The town's name has been changed to give it anonymity. This complies with the conditions stipulated by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) under which this research was initially undertaken.

24 The teacher, students and HAA representatives were required to sign consent forms before participating in the research. They were also provided with explanatory statements outlining the main aims of the research projects and how the information would be used. Anonymity in any research report was assured as part of the research design and Ethics procedures.

25 The Hokkaido Ainu Association is the main political organization for the Ainu in Hokkaido.

behaviour. Tourist brochures and town information booklets about Town Utari were also collected to assist in determining the position and status of the Ainu language community in terms whether there was any promotion of an Ainu public presence to the wider community. Photographs of the town were taken to document the physical environment. Information collected in July and August 2005 was updated in 2010.

The Ainu individuals in the case study self-identified as Ainu within the Ainu community. This did not mean that they were comfortable being identified as 'Ainu' outside of the Ainu community in the public domain. This is another reason for the identity of this town being concealed to protect their privacy.

The class in Town Utari was chosen as it comprises of a group of individuals who have reached a level of socio-economic stability which allows them to have the psychological space, time and desire to attend classes (see Bourdieu 1991). This class therefore, exhibits the necessary environment for current and future Ainu language revitalization (see Batibo 2009; Brenzinger 2009). More than half the students were and still are involved in Ainu embroidery classes, Ainu song and dance performances (as members of the local Ainu community's Cultural Preservation Society) and the learning of traditional musical instruments (such as the *mukkuri* 'mouth harp'). These activities provide new and continued contexts of Ainu language usage in their daily lives.

Within this Town Utari microsystem, the following conditions and factors are examined:

- the position, vitality, and status of the Ainu language and its speakers in the language ecology;
- Ainu language learning context and other Ainu cultural practices;
- the mainstream Japanese perceptions of Ainu such as indifference, potential discrimination and bullying towards Ainu people;[26]
- whether the Ainu have a public presence within the town; and
- whether and how the language is being transmitted to subsequent generations (intergenerational interaction).

26 The focus is on those negative or indifferent views as these negatively affect a sense of pride in being Ainu and thus, language learning and usage of Ainu. Also, these negative perspectives were the views provided by the members of the Ainu language class.

7. 1. Geography and demographics of town and Ainu community center (non-linguistic factors)

Town Utari is a rural community with a population under 10,000 people. The economy is based on farming, fishing, agriculture and, to a certain extent, tourism. This town has a majority Wajin population and a small Ainu populace. Japanese is the main language used in all public domains (government, law and education) with English being learnt in the formal school system. At first glance, there are no obvious signs of the presence of Ainu people and their culture, nor of the history of Ainu/Wajin relations. There are no shops run by Ainu people selling Ainu craft, books or goods. However, unlike other towns where the Ainu language classes are held, the Ainu community center is mentioned on the town map.

The Ainu community center is a large building which has been built to incorporate traditional Ainu patterns and design in a contemporary setting. It is located back from the main road, and a train line runs behind it. The center, which has an Ainu name, is approximately 15 minutes walk from the town's train station. The Ainu community center itself contains a number of large rooms which are used for meetings, embroidery and craft lessons, dance, singing and music lessons, and cooking. There is even a room for performing ceremonies and rituals with a traditional fire pit and other sacred objects. The open entrance area contains a variety of exhibits from the local Ainu community, showcasing their locality's traditional patterns, designs and colours. The Ainu language class was held in a large Japanese-style room with tatami mats.

7. 2. Overview of the Ainu language class and the dynamics of the students

In this Ainu community, there is a strong sense of belonging and pride in Ainu identity. Sixteen women aged between 30 and 90 attended the class. This town recorded a higher attendance rate at classes than those student numbers in other Ainu language classes in Hokkaido, which often only had between 3 to 10 people in attendance.[27] The Ainu language teacher also had a higher level of Ainu language and cultural proficiency than is typical in other communities.[28] This proficiency level allowed her to easily answer student

27 This is based on a primary data survey of Hokkaido Ainu language classes in the summer of 2005. This information was corroborated by the Head of the FRPAC (interview conducted by author, June 2006).

28 This is in comparison to other Ainu language teachers' self-assessment of their own language abilities and participant observation undertaken in 2005/2006 in Hokkaido Ainu communities.

questions related to Ainu language and cultural usage instead of solely relying on the translations and explanations given in Ainu texts to teach the language.

In 2005, the Ainu language class was held once a week on a weekday in the evening for around 2 hours. The class consisted of mainly women with an Ainu background.[29] Based on information provided by the women in the class, there had been some men attending the language classes, but due to either work commitments or being too tired after work, the men had decided not to attend the language classes during that year. The women also indicated that some men were not interested in the class's content or learning the language, especially given its lack of socio-economic benefit. For these men, learning the Ainu language did not have any socio-economic benefit for the maintenance or improvement of their social status within mainstream Japanese society (see Mufwene 2002). The younger generation were said not to attend for a number of reasons. These included school commitments; perceived lack of relevance of the class and language in their young lives; and embarrassment or fear of possible discrimination/bullying at school.[30]

7. 3. Dynamics of classroom environment for Ainu language class

The class format was unique to this town and emphasised intergenerational communication and cultural transmission. The class revolved around two elderly sisters recounting their childhood experiences within their Ainu families, and the Ainu language teacher providing Ainu language explanations and further discussion of Ainu cultural practices. An elderly woman in her late 80s sat in front of the class talking in Ainu and Japanese about Ainu customs, rituals and objects, and related these back to her own life experiences. She was recollecting her childhood experiences with her grandmother and mother. Hers was the last generation to grow up speaking Ainu in everyday life and actively practicing the Ainu culture. Her younger sister added to her own experiences, too, while the language teacher attempted to link these experiences to the teaching of the language in the context of the class. Handouts were provided of pictures of objects used in rituals and ceremonies that were discussed by the two sisters. The handouts were taken from the HAA sponsored textbook *Akor Itak* and were employed as visual aids in the learning of the

29 Given that these classes are open to anyone and that many Ainu people feel uncomfortable with Wajin present in the class, the question of people's ethnicity is not a topic which can be openly discussed. One woman in the class indicated that there were a few Wajin in the class on that occasion.

30 However, since 2005 the younger generation has now become more involved in language activities and dance and music performances as part of the local Ainu Cultural Preservation Society.

language. In particular, the names of these objects and their contexts of usage were taught.

The relaxed atmosphere of the class was conducive to learning and allowed for discussions to develop between the women of different generations. The women freely swapped stories about their own experiences in relation to the information provided by the elderly sisters and teacher. When the elderly sisters or the teacher did not know a particular word or concept in Ainu, the teacher referred to works by Shigeru Kayano. However, Shigeru Kayano's dictionary and works are based on the subdialect of the Nibutani region and not that of Town Utari's, therefore the teacher attempted to adapt the knowledge to the regional and subdialectal context of this town. It was stressed in the class and in the interviews outside of the language class that the town had its own regional variety, but that written class materials were not readily available to use. Since the original fieldwork was conducted, linguistic texts have been produced detailing the town's place names and oral traditions.

7. 4. Purpose and outcomes of language class

In this language class, learning the names of objects served as a way of accessing cultural knowledge and seemed to act as a means for eliciting discussion amongst the women in the class. Therefore, the purpose of this class appeared to be more about cultural and knowledge transfer and intergenerational interaction than language learning *per se*. However, the teaching methods and content emphasized the interconnectedness of language and culture, and encouraged and respected the acquisition of Ainu culture and language. The class content was more 'traditional' in its orientation, rather than having a more 'modern' context of Ainu culture. It emphasized the connection between the past practices of rituals and ceremonies and the contemporary life experiences of the class participants over the generations. Such a class appears to fit in with the goals of the HAA in terms of the language classes being a "sense of familiar 'gathering'" as:

> Through this gathering around our language we can begin to make our first steps to the learning of Ainu. And with these steps we will bend all our effort on the road to the development of the Ainu language and the learning of it (in Maher 2001: 324).

Rubin (1999: 20) provides five levels of fluency which can be identified as possible outcomes for indigenous language learning classes:

- **passive**: able to understand common words or phrases, with or without deeper comprehension of their meaning.

- **symbolic**: able to use common phrases and sentences in formal settings, as symbols of language participation and cultural ownership.
- **functional**: able to speak the language, with basic understanding of its syntax, grammar, and rules of usage and a minimal vocabulary.
- **fluent**: able to understand and speak the language with confidence and skill, with understanding of normal syntax, grammar and rules of form, and an extensive and growing vocabulary.
- **creative**: able to understand and speak the language fluently in ways that create new word usage and structures, showing a deeper understanding of the language and its potential new uses.

In the case of Town Utari, the potential outcomes of the classes would be counted as both passive and/or symbolic levels of fluency in Ainu as this class is for beginners. The two sisters and the teacher demonstrated that their Ainu language fits into the functional level as they were able to create basic sentences in Ainu using simple vocabulary and phrases. The fluency levels of individuals in the class were impossible to determine given that class members were not individually interviewed. In the class itself only commonly used words relating to traditional rituals were spoken in Ainu with the remaining discussion occurring in Japanese. However, greetings and thanks were spoken in Ainu, and this could be interpreted as "symbols of language participation and cultural ownership" which is the symbolic level of fluency. The outcomes of most Ainu classes would fall within the passive and symbolic range of fluency given the focus being more on cultural empowerment than development of language proficiency. These levels of fluency are characteristic of indigenous language learning at the early stages of language revitalization (see Fishman 2001).

7. 5. Position and status of Ainu in the general population

Within the classroom context, there was a strong sense of pride and respect for the Ainu culture and language. However, when asked about the perceptions of the Ainu people and their culture held by the general public, Ainu individuals replied that there is still a high level of discrimination in the local community. The older generation women said that during their childhood at school (and into their adulthood lives) they encountered discrimination in terms of bullying at school (name-calling, isolation techniques and sometimes physical violence) from both fellow school children and also from their teachers. They further spoke about enduring racist comments about being Ainu and discrimination

in being accepted as suitable marriage partners for Wajin men. Some indicated that they hid their Ainu ethnicity and identity when in public to protect themselves. As discussed above, these women self-identify as Ainu within their own Ainu community and as members of the HAA, but do not wish to be known as 'Ainu' outside of this context in the public domain of mainstream Japanese society. A similar sentiment is also discussed in Minami (2009) in relation to Ainu individuals in Nibutani.

The Ainu individuals in this class felt that the Ainu culture and its language are not well respected by mainstream society. They felt that it is regarded as somehow inferior to Japanese. This is even if it is part of the consciousness of mainstream Japanese. The lack of respect or lack of awareness is connected to the colonization policies of previous Japanese governments in particular the legacy of cognitive imperialism caused by the assimilative policies of the Meiji Era (see Battiste 2000). The language teacher indicated that within their town as well as in Hokkaido and Japan as a whole, the general public had little or no knowledge and understanding of Ainu history, Ainu/Wajin relations, the history of settlement in Hokkaido or the contemporary situation facing Ainu people. This lack of awareness was demonstrated by the volunteer working on the local tourist information desk who had no knowledge of an Ainu presence in the town. She made the suggestion to visit the Ainu Museum in Shiraoi (in southwestern Hokkaido) to find out about Ainu history and traditions.

The language teacher suggested that this lack of knowledge and awareness is the main cause of discrimination and for the lack of respect shown towards Ainu people and their language and associated cultural practices. She gave examples of discrimination in finding employment, acceptance as suitable marriage partners, having poorer education opportunities, and racist comments. Examples of racist comments included remarks based on stereotyped facial and physical features of Ainu such as being overly hairy; Ainu being dirty and inferior to Wajin; and Ainu people having poor Japanese language skills due to Ainu genetic inferiority compared to Wajin. She did indicate that the instances of discrimination against Ainu people have decreased, and that the younger generation now faced less obvious discrimination than their grandparents did. This could point to an increase in the awareness of some mainstream Japanese in Town Utari, however, no examples of positive perceptions or genuine interest in Ainu were provided by the members of the language class. This (perceived) negative view towards the Ainu has led to the local Ainu residents not wanting to publicly self-identify as having Ainu heritage, and some from the younger generation did not want to attend the language classes for fear of discrimina-

tion and bullying at school.

7. 6. Future of the Ainu language in Town Utari

There is still hope in this town for the future learning and use of the Ainu language. This is in spite of the lack of awareness in the general public, discrimination against Ainu people, the younger generation not attending the language classes, and the language classes focusing more on cultural transfer than language acquisition. The revitalization of the Ainu language in this community is only in the beginning stages, and the focus is on the learning of important lexical items related to sacred rituals and ceremonies. The Ainu women in the class stated that for them the Ainu language is an integral part of the Ainu identity. Such an attitude is essential for future language learning and understanding the vitality of the Ainu language in the town's sociolinguistic environment (see Smolicz 1981; Fishman 2001).

Since the initial visit in 2005, some of the younger generation have now graduated from university with a major in Ainu studies and are working in Ainu-related areas. They are actively practicing Ainu music and cultural practices in a contemporary setting. New contexts of language use are being developed to enable the language to be used in private and more public domains (such as tourism outside of the town and cultural maintenance). For instance, members of Town Utari's Ainu community have participated in the Ainu speech contest sponsored by the FRPAC with the members of the language class and some of the younger generation winning their respective categories over the last 6 years.[31] The different generations are also communicating with each other in Ainu through dancing and singing at local Ainu community events in the town, around Hokkaido and in Tokyo. In 2010, the different generations from this language class were joined by some of the women in their 20s from the community to perform together as members of their local Ainu Cultural Preservation Society, dancing and singing in Ainu. They also participated in workshops with other indigenous communities including a group from the United States, giving greetings and thanks in the Ainu language.

The Ainu people involved in the continued usage of the Ainu language within this community play a central role in the revitalization of this endangered language. In the words of Shigeru Kayano (1987), the younger generation and those learning the language

31 For further details see http://www.frpac.or.jp/eng/e_rst/e_ben/index.html.

have “started to build a breakwater, a sea wall” to halt the disappearance of their language and “are [now] an ever-increasing rock” to provide stability and a platform for the continued efforts to revitalize the Ainu language and culture (in Maher 2001: 323).

8. Conclusion

From an ecological perspective, in the fight to find a space for the Ainu language alongside Japanese usage at a national level and English at a global level, understanding the complexities of historical, educational, socio-economic and cultural factors on past and current Ainu language usage is essential to build an ecology in which ethnolinguistic diversity is promoted and respected. At a local level, Town Utari is one of the Ainu communities which has begun to revitalize their ancestral language. This is in spite of the large-scale processes and pressures of colonization and its legacies in Japan over the last 200 years. A major consequence of such Japanese governmental policies has been the almost complete omission of the Ainu people from the public discourse on national identity until recently, which has resulted in a general lack of awareness of Ainu culture, Ainu-Wajin relations and even the actual existence of Ainu themselves amongst mainstream Japanese.

The Town Utari case study provides an example of the impact of these large-scale processes on the use of the Ainu language within Hokkaido. Mufwene (2002) and Mühlhäusler (1996) have both argued that from an ecological perspective, language shift away from a small language is an attitudinal and behavioural response of the speakers. For the Ainu in Town Utari, Ainu language learning appears to be an extension of having a sense of pride in their Ainu heritage. Their sense of pride demonstrates a positive attitude towards Ainu, despite being faced with discrimination and marginalization in mainstream Japanese society. The Japanese language may be their first language and used in all public domains of society, but the Ainu language itself, at least for the members of this language class, is central to developing a sense of community within their local environment. This seems to be a crucial condition for motivating Ainu people to continue learning the language and actual language usage.

The language class provides a safe environment for the development of a sense of belonging in which being Ainu is socially acceptable. This positive attitude has directly affected the language behavior of the members of the language class who are now using the language in new contexts such as singing traditional songs (which accompany their dances

at community-based events), in discussions on Ainu embroidery designs, and competing in the annual Ainu speech context.

In Town Utari, this sense of belonging promoted and nurtured the self-reflection of individuals' own Ainu identities in relation to the group. Within this local language environment, there was a positive attitude towards using the language as a means of accessing traditional knowledge and as a way of facilitating intergenerational communication.

The dynamics of the classroom environment in Town Utari provides some insight into a key condition needed to promote this sense of belonging in that this class was dominated by Ainu people, and not Wajin students. In the language class, Ainu people were positioned as the authority figures whose knowledge was valued. In such a context, the Ainu people were given a voice to articulate their indigenous identity. Hornberger (2006) uses Bakhtin's concept of 'voice' in her discussion of indigenous language education to demonstrate its importance in developing indigenous identity and language competency. 'Voice', she argues, relates to the "speaking consciousness, articulated as social practice, in dialogue with others and in situated contexts" (2006: 13).

In Japan, this indigenous voice has often been silenced in classrooms at schools through the processes of assimilation. In those Ainu language classes in which Wajin dominate the classroom discourse, this Ainu voice is also often hidden and silent. Ainu people have expressed their concern at the dominance of Wajin who probably have greater time and intellectual space to attend classes than many Ainu people. Ainu people feel that this negatively influences their desire to attend the classes as well as their opportunities to learn and use the language within the classroom itself (see Siddle 1997; Maher 2001). Hornberger (2006: 25) argues that it is important for indigenous people to find their voice through the use of their language in their learning environment. The gaining and articulation of this indigenous voice is key to reversing language shift away from their ancestral language. Hornberger further writes that:

> Indigenous voices thus activated can be a powerful force for both enhancing...learning and promoting the maintenance and revitalization of their languages (2006: 25).

This case study is an example of Ainu people finding their 'voice' and articulating their sense of pride in their Ainu identity and their desire to continue learning and using their ancestral language. The articulation of this Ainu voice is firstly connected to individual Ainu feeling comfortable at their local level to self-identify as Ainu. This, in turn, is directly related to achieving a certain level of socio-economic stability in their lives which

enables them to have the intellectual space, time and energy for learning a language which is not highly regarded within mainstream Japanese society (Mufwene 2002; Bourdieu 1991). The next step for Ainu language revitalization is to cultivate a sense of pride in self-identifying as Ainu outside of the Ainu community's activities and those sponsored by the HAA at the wider community level within mainstream society. Ainu individuals such as those represented in Town Utari could act as role models and mentors for other Ainu people who hide their heritage for fear of discrimination and socio-economic marginalization. They could find their own indigenous voice through the use of their language to promote their existence to mainstream Japanese and other Ainu.

This step is also connected to mainstream Japanese recognition and acknowledgement of the existence of Ainu people and their culture in contemporary society. In other words, the contemporary ethnolinguistic diversity of Japan needs to be acknowledged and respected at the individual, local, community and national levels of society for the continued usage of the Ainu language. The Japanese government's policies over the last 200 years have ensured that the Ainu people have been hidden from most of the public discourse on national identity, citizenship and national ideologies. Such ignorance, coupled with discrimination, has negatively affected the sense of pride felt by many Ainu towards their culture and its language. For the continued language vitality of Ainu, the education of non-Ainu Japanese about Ainu and their place in the broader Japanese national society will play a crucial role in acknowledging past wrongs and addressing the negative views of Ainu people. This, in turn, has the potential to result in a greater feeling of pride in being Ainu and more people learning the language as a means of cultural empowerment and to maintain the connections between the past, present and future within the Ainu culture.

The raising of awareness is difficult in Japan given the erasure of the Ainu from the designated textbooks in the formal stream of education. At an official level, the FRPAC has attempted to address the problem by holding public seminars on Ainu/Wajin relations and Ainu culture past and present. It has also developed accompanying texts for use in classrooms at Japanese schools. In addition, workshops are held by the HAA and by Ainu communities to raise awareness of Ainu culture. However, as yet, there is no systematic approach to the mandatory inclusion of textbooks or classes which specifically deal with Ainu culture and language.[32] There needs to be greater discussion and acknowledgment

32 See Mainichi Shimbun '*Kyokasho Kentei: Shougakkou Peji Zou Doko Made Oshiereba "Daitenkan" ni Kyoshi Fuan'*, March 31, 2010 for discussion of the expansion of textbook coverage of Ainu culture.

of Ainu culture in the formal stream of education to overcome the process of cognitive imperialism caused by the assimilation policies of previous Japanese governments (see Aylward 2007, 2009; Battiste 2000). Only then will there be a public space for the Ainu within the ethnolinguistic diversity of Japan.

A major issue facing the Ainu sociolinguistic communities at the moment is the transition from traditional culture to finding a contemporary context for the use of the language. This presents a difficult challenge given the restricted use of the language to very limited private domains over the past 100 years and the lack of intergenerational transmission. Widespread language shift is a problem inherent in language and culture revitalization for Indigenous Peoples throughout the world. A systematic approach to the development of the Ainu language driven by the Ainu communities themselves is essential for the language to be used to meet the needs of the new second language speakers in the 21st century. New contexts of language usage are needed for the younger generation to develop an appreciation for their ancestral language and to increase the linguistic capital of the Ainu language in relation to Japanese and English (see Mufwene 2002; Bourdieu 1991). Since 2006, younger generation artists such as the Ainu Rebels and Emi Toko from the urban Kanto region (Greater Tokyo area) have started to mould new contexts of usage. They have begun to find their indigenous voice through the composition of new song lyrics to express their Ainu identity in contemporary Japanese society.[33] These artists represent a growing number of younger generation Ainu who have reached a certain level of socio-economic stability and self-identify as Ainu both within the Ainu communities and outside of them in the wider mainstream society.

The Ainu people are facing an uphill battle to revitalize their language and culture. However, there is still hope and an optimistic affirmation of the future in regard to finding a balance between the traditional values of the past Ainu sociolinguistic communities and the modern realities of society in Japan and the world for the promotion and development of the Ainu language and culture into the future.

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33 The Ainu Rebels website is http://www.ainunow.com/. Information concerning Emi Toko's music can be found at http://www.middles.jp/.

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(Received; November 3, 2010; Accepted; March 29, 2011)

《SUMMARY》

Aynu itak
—— on the road to Ainu language revitalization ——

Kylie MARTIN

In the last 30 years, the indigenous Ainu in Japan have begun to reclaim and revitalize their ancestral culture and language. In 1983, the first Ainu language school was established by Shigeru Kayano in Nibutani, Hokkaido, and today there are a number of Ainu language and culture classes held throughout Hokkaido and other regions of Japan. There appears to be a strong desire to learn the language in Ainu communities, although the number of students in Ainu language classes still remains low.

An ecological perspective on indigenous language revitalization as outlined by Mühlhäusler (1996, 2000, 2003) and Mufwene (2002, 2004) will be used to explore the dynamic nature of Ainu sociolinguistic communities. This allows for an examination of the dynamics of past and present Ainu sociolinguistic ecologies, and those large-scale sociohistorical and political processes and pressures which have impacted on Ainu language usage over time. A case study of an Ainu sociolinguistic micro-system will also be discussed to provide an example of how local interactions in a small town in Hokkaido are connected to the large-scale processes of colonization and its legacies within Japanese society. Focus will be given to those linguistic and non-linguistic factors which have affected the desire to learn this endangered language as this is directly connected with actual language learning and language use. The responsibility of this language now rests with the second language learners of Ainu and the broader Japanese community through their recognition and respect for this indigenous language of Japan.