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〈Notes on Research〉

A Case of Nivkh Phonetic Material: Possibilities of Archiving Recordings of Endangered Languages in the Sakhalin Region

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1. Audio materials of Endangered Languages in North-East Eurasia

In North-East Eurasia, many languages of indigenous peoples are in serious danger from so-called language shifts to dominant languages: Russian, Chinese and Japanese. Conservation and documentation activities of the Ainu language in Japan may provide some kind of model case for the other endangered languages in this area.

In this short paper, I would like to discuss archiving phonetic recordings of the Nivkh language.

Ethnologists began to record the languages of some Northern peoples in the nineteenth century. Most of these recordings (both written materials and phonetic recordings) were of oral literature. One reason for this was that researchers regarded “myths” or “mythic stories” as a kind of “history” of “non-literate peoples”. Ethnologists tried to find out some traces of Northern peoples’ past in their mythical stories¹. Another reason was that it was difficult to write down natural conversations, as the researchers’ proficiency in northern indigenous languages was insufficient. Although phonetic recording technology was invented at the end of the nineteenth century, the duration of recording time was quite limited. Ethnologists wrote down simple phrases by listening to speakers, but this was only for practical use or for analysis of the grammar. After ethnologists, linguists came and recorded northern indigenous languages. They had a strong tendency to record oral literature, because those stories were told slowly, pronounced clearly, and could be listened to calmly by other people in attendance. Oral literature provided the best materials for the start of linguistic analysis. Thus, the majority of materials recorded in the Ainu and Nivkh languages were oral literature: fairy tales² and epics.

2. Audio materials of the Ainu

The innovations of phonetic recording technology in the twentieth century made it possible to record for a longer time. Some researchers recorded several hours of Ainu language

¹ Shternberg (1908) and Pilsudski (1912) tried to find some traces of cultural exchanges and influences between Ainu and Nivkh in their fairy tales.

² At least three categories are distinguished in Nivkh oral literature. Legends are usually called *k'er*’ (individual experiences), fairy tales are usually called *t'ylgur*’ (stories that have been told by former generations), and epic songs are called *ngastur*’ (sung stories).

conversations with magnetic tape recorders in the 1950s to 1960s³. In the 2000s a half century later, it was already possible to record several tens of hours of conversation with only small portable digital voice recorders, which could be powered by small AA batteries⁴.

Researchers recorded and published these materials in the form of books and cassette tapes. The earliest works were by Murasaki (1976), and a publication of Ainu language materials by Tamura.

These materials included not only fairy tales and legends, but also stories about the speakers' ordinary lives and natural conversations. They are now used as materials for discourse analysis and for research on traditional lives.

The "Ainu Folklore Reports"⁵ series (1981 to 1998) is one of the most important written materials. Surveyed items are bears, plants, hunting, fishing, humans, nature (the supernatural), tools (wares and clothes), buildings and nature (seasons, weather, and astronomy). These nine items were surveyed in every region in Hokkaido. This series is called *Ao-hon* ("Blue Books"), named after the color of their covers, and is regarded to be one of the most important materials for research areas other than folklore studies, such as oral literature, anthropological studies, and so on. Today, the original cassette tapes of interviews which researchers recorded for their reports attract attention. A greater amount of information can be found in the tapes than in the published reports, especially about the ordinary lives of Ainu people. For example, information about ordinary foods could be found in the tapes, and the listener could learn about Ainu sources of materials for hunting tools, clothes and musical instruments. *Ao-hon* project policy was that information divulged by interviewees was basically recorded without strict selection. As a result, *Ao-hon* includes various interesting pieces of information that cannot be found in other materials. Unfortunately, the audio materials that were recorded for *Ao-hon* were not archived.

Until several decades ago, the most attractive materials for linguists were phonetic materials of the Ainu language. However, current researchers also consider interviews in the Japanese language that include Ainu language speech to be important, as these include information about traditional culture.

3. Recordings of the Nivkh Language

Regarding the Nivkh language, the number of interview recordings is limited. In the Soviet period, E. A. Krejnovich⁶, Ch. M. Taksami and several other ethnologists⁷ conducted

³ Not only linguists, but also those who were simply interested in Ainu oral literature recorded materials personally at their own expense.

⁴ "Edirol R-1" was released in 2004. It was the first popular portable digital voice recorder which could record in the WAV file format. It worked for more than two hours with two AA batteries.

⁵ Hokkaido kyoikuiinkai (1981-1998)

⁶ Some materials were used in Krejnovich (1973).

⁷ Some of them used cassette tape recorders in the 1990s.

ethnographic research. Furthermore, in the post-Soviet period, B. Grant interviewed Nivkh people about the Soviet period in Sakhalin⁸. Almost all of these materials were written, not audio recordings. Most phonetic recordings were only folk songs, fairy tales, epics and mythical legends, because phonetic recording tapes were very expensive and researchers had a strong tendency to record musical materials from the 1950s to 1990s. In the 1990s, researchers started to use DAT, but this was not very beneficial.

Linguists recorded phonetic materials to analyze accents, discourse and other linguistic objects, and folklorists recorded fairy tales and other oral literature pieces. However, in the 1990s, linguists and folklorists began to change their methods and started recording a wider variety of materials, especially when they were conducting research among speakers of so-called “endangered languages”. Researchers found that the best speakers were often very elderly people, and considered the interview tapes with these elders to be very precious. Sometimes they were able to do cooperative research only once or twice. Some researchers changed their fieldwork technique. “Record now, analyze later” became the new policy. Under this new policy, materials from the 1990s included various recordings, such as the following:

- (1) Fairy tales: easy to understand and convenient for linguistic analysis.
- (2) Life stories: the speaker’s life story is necessary in order to recognize influences from other dialects.
- (3) Interviews about traditional culture: important information to recognize meanings of words.
- (4) Various conversations: often, only to put the speakers at ease

Only several decades ago, it was complex and limited work to record stories or interviews, but today it is possible to record whole conversations and speech for five or six hours without even touching the digital voice recorder. A researcher cannot predict the specific time when the interviewed speakers of endangered languages will provide important information, so it is advantageous to record whole conversations for hours. Due to this way of recording interviews, recorded materials today include various fragmented speeches that were not collected systematically. Sometimes these were recounted not in the speakers’ first “endangered” languages, but in their second “dominant” languages: Russian or Japanese. In such cases, linguists cannot use these materials in the documentation of the endangered language itself. They are often regarded essentially as “useless” materials for descriptive research. However, are they really “useless” for other researchers? These materials include precious information related to traditional culture and elders’ life stories, albeit in short fragments. In fact, in Ainu studies, the same kind of recording materials have been reevaluated as an important source of information.

⁸ B. Grant (1999b) was recorded in 1995.

In research on fairy tales, all the recorded materials are only limited variants of the tales (stories). One recounted fairy tale is always merely one performed example of the story. It is not possible to establish a fairy tale in detail. To tell a story twice perfectly, in the same words, is impossible. Minor differences always exist between performed examples. This means that “a story” consists of whole performed examples. Thus, all the recorded examples are equally important. Without sufficient variants, it is difficult to find out what genre the story belongs to. Ootani (1996) shows that the categorization of Ainu stories differs not only by region but also by storyteller and by the situations in which they were told. Even genres can be changed. One story can be told as a game (“uparapakte”), as a lullaby (“ramusuye”), or as a short epic song. This must be true also for research on life stories and other interviews. A recorded material is always an example. It is impossible to recognize accurately whether one fragment could be important in the future, or never have any significance.

Of course, it is difficult to make all materials available publicly directly after they have been recorded, mainly from the point of view of protecting the privacy of speakers and of other related people. Recorded interviews often - in fact always - include secrets of the speakers, of their families or their communities. As shown in the later list, many private conversations were recorded. A conversation entitled “About my relatives” is not really a “secret”, as other people often know about the contents. However, this cannot be made public. Thus, such audio materials should not be made available. Sometimes they include religious materials that should not be accessed by other peoples. Recorded materials always include both “stories that can be widely listened to” and “stories that should be listened to only by interviewers, not by other people”. Almost all materials must be edited before being made open access⁹: alternately, access to such materials should be limited. Berez et al. (2012) present a case of the Ahtna language in Alaska. The Ahtna local community has strong control over accessibility to their digital archive.

4. Interview with a Nivkh Elder in 2004

(A), (B) and (C) are lists of Sakhalin Nivkh phonetic material recorded by Tangiku from October 12 to 14, 2004¹⁰. All were recounted by one Nivkh elder¹¹. The main purpose of the fieldwork was to record oral literature: fairy tales and legends. The recording was made over three days, but storytelling was performed only on the second day. The first day was dedicated to “warming up” the Nivkh language, which the interviewee did not use in everyday life. The third day was dedicated to the exchange of information about relatives and mutual friends by the interviewer and the interviewee. Fairy tales and legends recorded on the second day can be

⁹ Research Division of the Hokkaido Ainu Culture Research Center (2011). The center is constructing an Ainu Language digital archive. Audio materials are edited precisely before being made available.

¹⁰ Recorded by I. Tangiku. Not published.

¹¹ Tatiana Ulita (1917-2007).

published with only minor edits. However, other stories and conversations can also be published, if carefully edited. These recorded materials can be classified into three categories, (A), (B) and (C), from the point of view of “feasibility of publication”.

(A) Fairy tales and legends: 66 minutes

(B) Materials that can be made open access: 48 minutes.

(C) Materials that cannot be made open access: 83 minutes

(A) Fairy tales: 66 minutes.

“A lake in the mountain” (legend): 10 minutes

“A strange experience in the mountain of Nogliki” (true story): 6 minutes

“Various monsters” (story): 8 minutes

“A monster in the water” (true story): 1 minute

“A monster” (true story) 1 minute

“A fox-lady” (story): 1 minute

“Reindeer and a monster” (true story): 6 minutes

“The creation of the world” (legend): 3 minutes

“A monster called Mauzl Ekhlng” (fairy tale): 2 minutes

“Marriage with the mountain spirit” (fairy tale): 15 minutes

“A great shaman” (legend): 7 minutes

“A bird called Afjal” (fairy tale): 6 minutes

(B) Materials that can be made open access: 48 minutes.

“Plant gathering”: 2 minutes

“Difference in pronunciation of “star” and “shadow””: 1 minute

“The word for the Milky Way: astrological knowledge”: 10 minutes

“Lavgun: people in the Amur district”: 2 minutes

“How other peoples are called”: 6 minutes

“Traditional food using powder”: 1 minute

“Traditional food: dog meat, seal meat and fish”: 3 minutes

“Dog sled”: 1 minute

“Dog meat and reindeer meat are delicious”: 1 minute

“We have neither wolverine nor musk deer”: 1 minute

“About today’s weather”: 4 minutes

“Differences between fairytales, legends, and epics”: 3 minutes

“About the Japanese people in Sakhalin”: 13 minutes

“Dog sled (2)”: 1 minute

(C) Materials that cannot be made open access: 48 minutes.

“Individuals mentioned by Krejnovich”: 22 minutes

“My sons”: 5 minutes

“About the research schedule”: 1 minute

“Healing my ill relative by dog oil”: 3 minutes

“Conversation (with interviewee’s son)”: 2 minutes

“About my relatives”: 2 minutes

“Conversation (with others)”: 2 minutes

“About my daughters”: 2 minutes

“Koreans in Sakhalin”: 2 minutes

“Villages and individuals mentioned by Krejnovich”: 11 minutes

“About my clan and my experiences”: 9 minutes

“Conversation (with interviewee’s daughter)”: 9 minutes

“Exchange of information about others”: 13 minutes

Not only (A), but also (B) can be published and made open access. In other words, they can be uploaded to the Internet. Nivkh sound materials published by Shiraishi H. and Lok G. from 2004 are the very good model case. Their publications are based on the same concepts as Tamura (1984-1998) and Murasaki (1976). The Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies of Hokkaido University is preparing a digital archive of Ainu and other indigenous peoples’ language. Tangiku and other researchers are now editing audio materials of the Nivkh and other peoples for a forthcoming website¹². This may include conversation in the Russian language by Nivkh people.

Linguists are now constructing some digital language archives of the Ainu language that can be accessed on the Internet. All of these have been edited carefully in advance. In some cases, only the lists of materials are uploaded and the materials themselves cannot be accessed. Some materials are provided by using the ELAR (*Endangered Languages Archive*) site established by SOAS¹³. The level of accessibility to the materials by others can be selected on this website. To

¹² The website will be constructed in 2014 by the Ainu and Indigenous Language Archive Project of the Center for Ainu and Indigenous Studies of Hokkaido University. Tangiku and Kitahara are the main members of the project. “The Languages and Cultures of Northeast Eurasia” URL:

http://www.ling-atlas.jp/index_en.html. The Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies made a preceding attempt to construct a language archive with its Web contents. These contain mainly fairy stories told in endangered languages.

¹³ SOAS, University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies). ELAR URL:

<http://elar.soas.ac.uk/>, HRELP URL: <http://www.hrelp.org/>.

access resources from ELAR, users must register. Accessibility is graded in four levels according to status: ordinary user, researcher, community member and subscriber. Each registered user can have one or more statuses.

5. Phonetic Archives in the Near Future

Today, due to digital technology, the situation of phonetic recorded materials has changed considerably from that of 20 years ago. For example, all the phonetic materials that one researcher had recorded over 20 years - from the 1990s to 2000s - could be saved on one 1-2 terabyte hard disk drive of a personal computer, and it is possible to make as many copies of these as desired. Today, for digital data, the concept of “original” is meaningless. Researchers started to use digital voice recorders in fieldwork from the 2000s¹⁴. Thus, their data are digital versions from the beginning. Every copy is the “original” one. It is very difficult to foresee future fieldwork methods, and even now there are some new problems: for example, it is necessary to control “versions” of digital copies. However, researchers could have many more positive opportunities in using and conserving their data. Researchers may delegate conservation of backup copies of data to other organizations such as museums, language institutions or other universities. Only ten years ago, to entrust original cassette tapes to others (universities, libraries) would be to entrust the material from which the best copies can be made. In the 2000s, those who recorded using cassette tapes or open reel tapes wanted to their materials to be digitalized¹⁵. They entrusted their tapes to universities or research institutes because they were not able to digitalize them themselves¹⁶. However, today, to entrust materials only means to give the chance to use a copy.¹⁷ It seems quite natural that the same materials (data) will often be conserved by several different organizations in the near future. For example, in the case of research on endangered languages, not only universities and research institutes, but also researchers and speakers can construct individual archives of their own. Technology and social conditions are almost sufficient at present. Recorded materials can be arranged in digital archives.

¹⁴ The production of portable DAT (Digital Audio Tape) recorders ceased in 2005.

¹⁵ The last model of open reel tape was removed from sale in 2007. Many collections of Ainu language audio materials stored in universities and institutes were digitalized around 2000 using DAT or CD-R. Ainu audio materials stored at the National Museum of Ethnology were digitalized in 2004. However, many professional researchers individually started to use DAT in their fieldwork in the 1990s, mostly using Sony TCD-D7, D8, D100, and PCM-M1. Thus, those who had conserved open reel tapes at that time knew that it was possible to digitalize those analog materials using DAT.

¹⁶ The case of audio materials told by Shitaku Yae (1904-1980) recorded by Keiichi Tomimizu was a typical one. In 2006, the materials were entrusted to Tamura Masashi who was a doctoral student in linguistics at Chiba University at that time. The materials were digitalized and published as Taira, T (2007, 2011, 2012) for general readers.

¹⁷ Copyright is quite well protected under Japanese law. In general, research institutes and researchers in Japan digitalize materials on the condition of being allowed to use those materials for their research.

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ニヴフ語音声資料の事例：サハリン地域の危機言語アーカイブの可能性

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言語学調査・口承文芸調査の際に同時に採録される「言語学調査資料」「口承文芸資料」以外の雑談や生活体験の語りなどはプライバシー保護のための編集を経て、あるいはアクセス制限を設けることによって公開可能になるのではないかと。特に北東ユーラシアの「危機言語」の言語共同体においては今後の調査はますます困難になる事が予想されることから、過去の調査資料は他の研究分野にとっても貴重な資料となりうる。北海道のアイヌ民族関係の研究では、すでに過去のさまざまな調査資料が整理されつつあり、多様な研究分野によって利用されはじめている。本稿では 2004 年に行った 3 日間のニヴフ語調査資料を例にあげ、主目的から外れた採録資料の公開可能性とその具体的な計画について述べる。そして今後の「言語アーカイブ」にはそういった資料が含まれるべきであることを述べる。