

Revitalizing Ainu: A Web-accessible Ainu-Japanese-English Conversational Dictionary

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In November 2007, being engaged in the ELDP (SOAS) project "Documentation of the Saru Dialect of Ainu" (2007-2009), I attended the 11th annual Ainu speech contest Shiranuka, Hokkaido. This was an opportunity to experience advanced Ainu presentations and a community passion for learning the language, and presented strong demand for Ainu conversational audio recordings. Thus, was the start of Revitalizing Ainu and creating a web-accessible Ainu-Japanese-English conversational dictionary.

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Genetic, dialectal and typological profile of Ainu

- ✓ A genetic isolate, Ainu shows considerable dialectal variation.
 - Primary divisions are Hokkaido, Sakhalin and Kurile groups.
- ✓ Ainu is polysynthetic and agglutinating, with SV/AOV constituent order.
- ✓ Ainu is head-marking with a few elements of dependent-marking.
- ✓ Morphological expression of arguments is basically tripartite.

Sociolinguistic situation

- ✓ Ainu is nearly extinct at present. Spoken as a language until the 1950s, currently only a few people aged 80-90 in Southern Hokkaido remember Ainu as their native language.
- ✓ Present population of the ethnical Ainu is about 100 000, with the main spoken language being Japanese.
- ✓ The Ainu experienced severe ethnic and linguistic repression from the state in early 20th century, leading to rapid abandonment and eventual loss of the language.
- ✓ 'The Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture' was enacted in 1997, and the Ainu were officially recognized as the indigenous population of Hokkaido in 2008.
- ✓ Subsequently, the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture was established to promote and teach Ainu language, and sponsor traditional festivals and speech contests.
- ✓ Recently, more Ainu are experiencing a new sense of self-identity and becoming aware of the importance of revitalizing their language and culture.

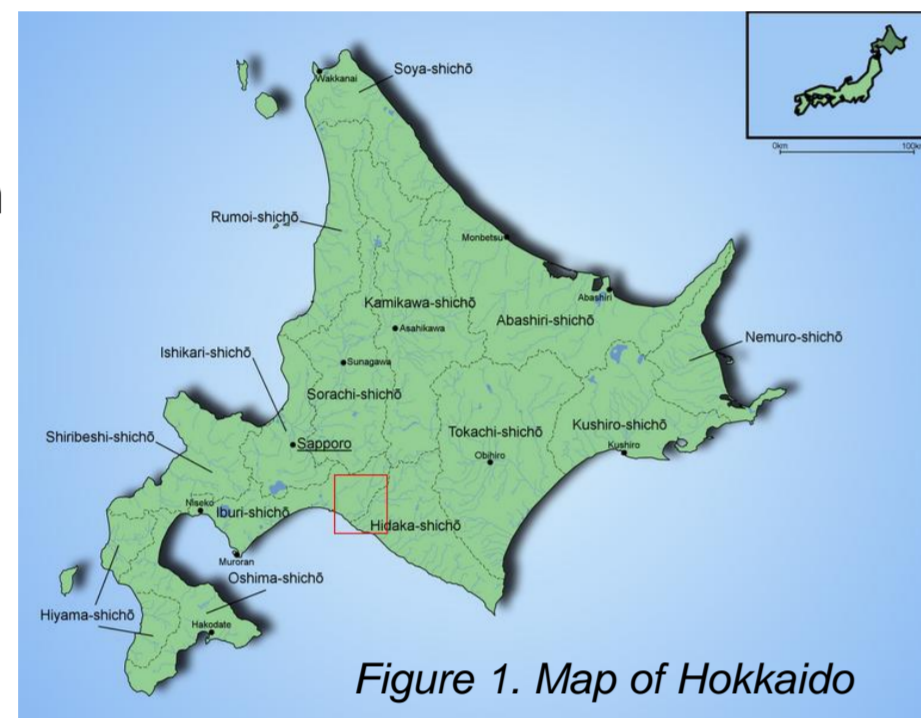


Figure 1. Map of Hokkaido

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Aims of the project

- ✓ Ainu is not a written language, and is currently transcribed with Latin and Japanese *katakana* scripts. Since previous Ainu documentation focused on recording folklore texts, this project aims:
 - ✓ To produce an easy-accessible and easy-usable multimedia with audio and video materials of conversational Ainu in order to meet the actual needs of the community as a primary audience.
 - ✓ To additionally provide the linguistic community with the underrepresented conversational Ainu data that is accountable for further linguistic analysis.

Primary asset of the project

- ✓ Collection of conversational Ainu data has been scarce and difficult due to the geographical location, older age and poor health condition of speakers. A prominent asset for this project was Jinbo, K. and Kanzawa, S. (first edition: 1898) *Ainu go kaiwa jiten* [Ainu conversational dictionary].

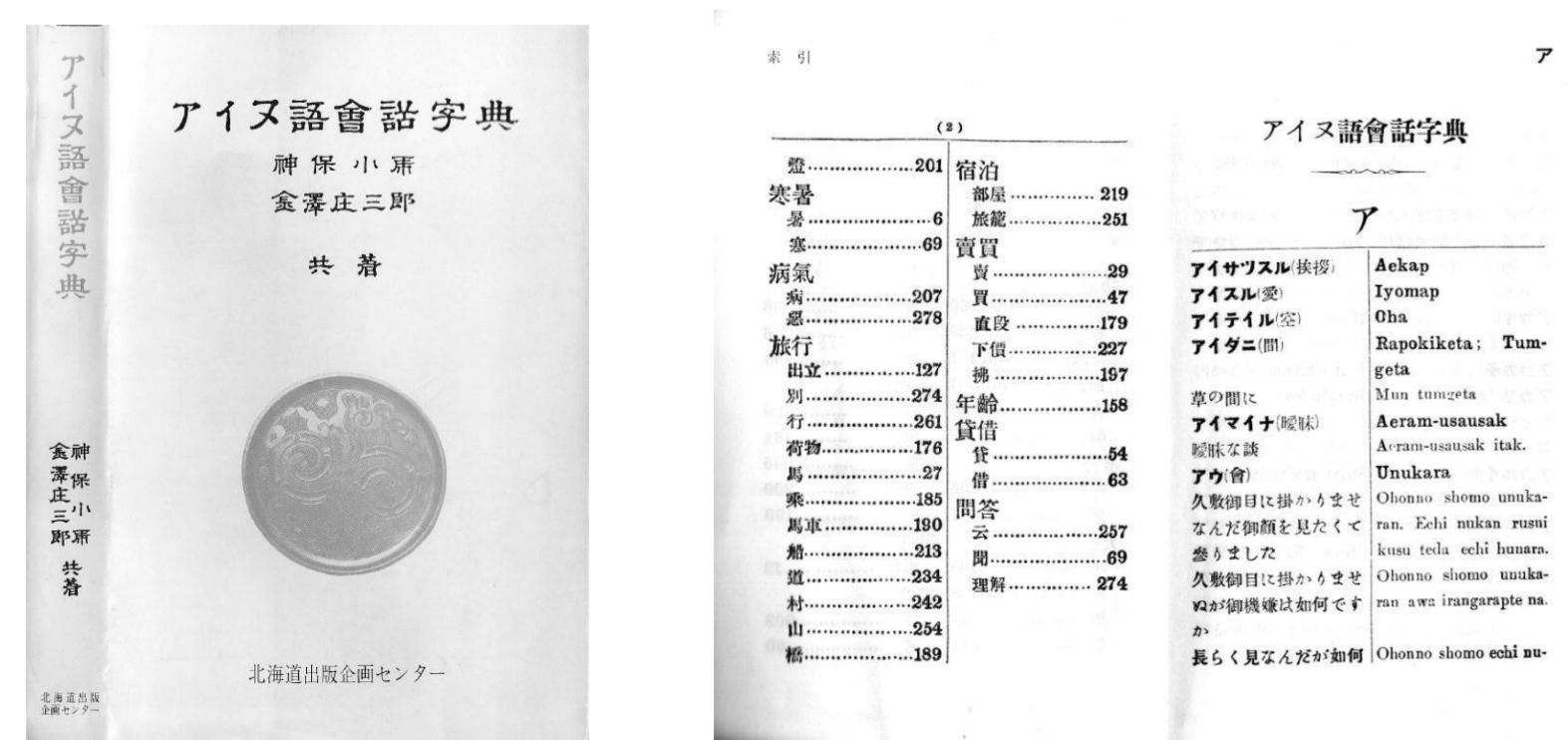


Figure 2. *Ainu go kaiwa jiten* [Ainu conversational dictionary].

- ✓ Compiled by Shozaburo Kanazawa, a postgraduate in linguistic studies at Tokyo University, and supervised by Prof. Kotora Jinbo, a geologist actively promoting research on the Ainu language, this dictionary introduces 3,847 entries, i.e. conversational phrases or words, presumably belonging to the Saru dialect.

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- ✓ Kanazawa visited Hokkaido about four times between 1895 and 1897, for a total of 50 days, to gather data which was compiled into commonly used words and phrases.
- ✓ Unfortunately, this dictionary contains many transcription mistakes and misinterpretations, and the orthography of Ainu (with Latin alphabet) and Japanese is far too outdated. This makes this precious source on conversational Ainu absolutely incomprehensible for the Ainu community members.

Actual tasks, workflow and timetable

This project was started with the help of Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa (85) a good speaker of Saru dialect (Nukibetsu).



Figure 3. Ainu fieldwork: Mrs Setsu Kurokawa (Ainu language consultant) and Anna Bugaeva (linguist), Hokkaido, Nukibetsu, 7 September 2008.

Together, the following tasks were completed:

- ✓ Typing original content (Ainu and Japanese translations) of the dictionary into a database.
- ✓ Correcting original Latin transcriptions and translations and adding them to the database.
- ✓ Preparing *katakana* transcriptions of Ainu for community members and adding them to the database.
- ✓ Making Ainu recording of the dictionary.
- ✓ Cutting the audio files cut into separate entries (3847 pieces).
- ✓ Making English translations.
- ✓ Transcribing the recordings of Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa as if they were completely new texts, since actual utterances deviated considerably from the original dictionary. Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa often corrected mistakes in the original, as in (1).

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(1)	ref. 2196		
Wor-r-j	どこから来たか	original Japanese translation	
Wor-tx	Nak wa ek?	original Ainu transcription	
Wtx	hunak wa e=ek?	Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa's Ainu	
Wmb	hunak wa e=ek?	morphemic boundaries	
Wge	where from 2SG.S=come glossing		
Wps	intr.prt pp ppx vi	parts of speech	
Wft-e	Where did you come from?	English translation	
Wft-j	どこから来たか	Japanese translation in modern orthography	

Figure 4. An example of data in Toolbox

- ✓ Transferring all the data from Excel into Toolbox, interlinearization and annotation of Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa's recorded texts in Toolbox.
- ✓ Undertaking an additional fieldtrip for consulting on the meanings of some unclear entries. Investigating the history of the dictionary compilation.
- ✓ Assigning all entries to the preexisting Topical categories/subcategories and creating new Topical categories/subcategories.

Evolution of the project

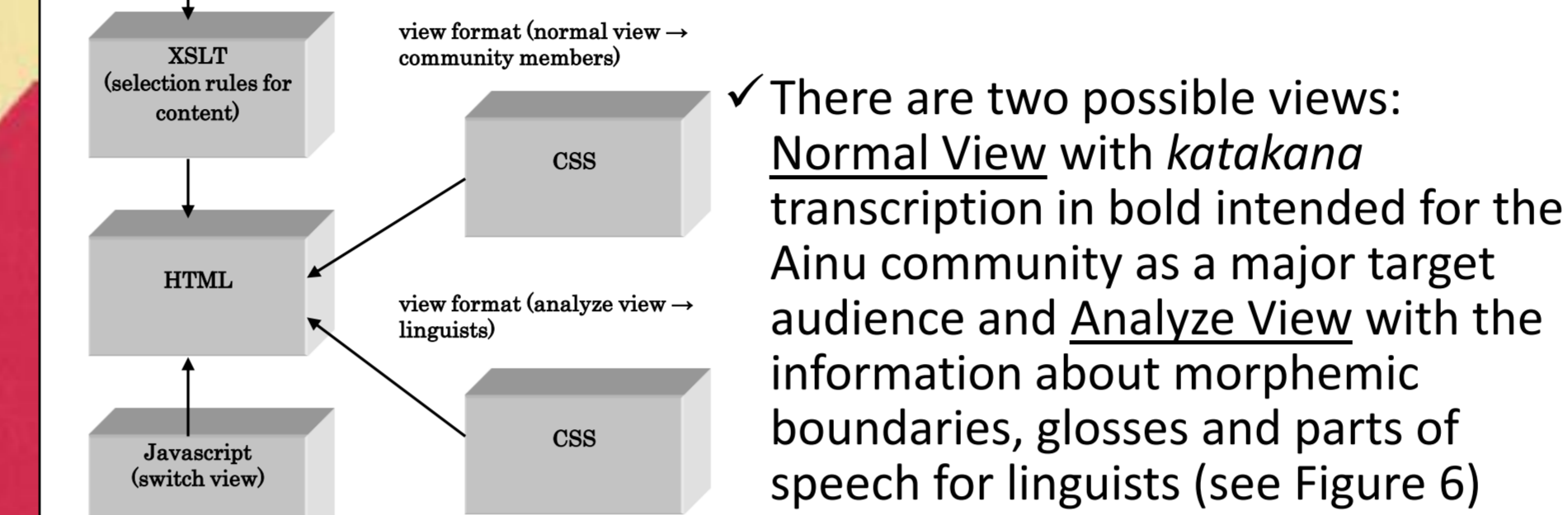
Key issues for developing multimedia included:

- ✓ the importance of input from community at ALL stages of the project and possible interim and final evaluation by the community members;
- ✓ the importance of hiring a programmer experienced or willing to develop multimedia for endangered languages: inviting David Nathan (London University, SOAS), a media programmer with a background in linguistics, to cooperate with the project;
- ✓ "do not attempt to make a significant multimedia product without a graphic designer." (Nathan 2004: 158)

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- ✓ A tentative multimedia product "Ainu morning talk" which draws upon a piece of my Toolbox data and the respective audio recordings by Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa was prepared.

Figure 5. Architecture of the tentative multimedia product "Ainu morning talk" (by David Nathan).



for community members for linguists

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Figure 6. Screenshots of the tentative multimedia product "Ainu morning talk" made by Anna Bugaeva and David Nathan at the Documentary Linguistics Workshop, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 9-13 February 2009.

Evaluation of the preliminary results by the Ainu community members

- ✓ "Ainu morning talk" was presented to a group of Ainu community members studying Ainu language in February 2009.
- ✓ Strong positive reactions and valuable feedback, as well as kind words of encouragement, were received.



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Figure 7. Evaluation of the tentative multimedia product "Ainu morning talk" by a group of Ainu community members who attend advanced Ainu classes held by Prof. Nakagawa at Ainu Cultural Centre in Tokyo, 28 February 2009.

Expected outcome

- ✓ Creation of a web-accessible Ainu-Japanese-English Conversational Dictionary (host site: Waseda University) in collaboration with a programmer (David Nathan as a co-author) and a web-designer (to be appointed) with art (paintings and photography) of the community (June 2009).
- ✓ Actual joint work will involve:
 - Storyboarding process, with initial screen being based on Topical categorization and sub-categorization as that of the original with slight modifications.
 - Two succeeding screens functionally similar to Normal view and Analyze view of the "Ainu morning talk" which was so well received by the Ainu community.
 - Finally, the dictionary will consist of a simple search interface that allows the user to enter a string to be found in the dictionary, either in Ainu or Japanese/English.
 - Any word/phrase clicked on will be heard and some words/phrases will be even seen on the video to show the audience the articulation process.
- ✓ In addition to the website, a CD-ROM edition of the dictionary will be created to facilitate its use by those who do not have internet access.

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Conclusions

- ✓ The "talking dictionary" (Hercus & Nathan 2002) project emerged as a direct response to a strong demand for Ainu conversational materials in the Ainu community which is in the process of revitalizing its language and culture.
- ✓ While "Multimedia projects are typically more time consuming and expensive than other activities" (Nathan 2004: 156), it was chosen here because multimedia provides the most effective way to mobilise language materials. I have shown how a large-scale (3,847 entries) multimedia product may possibly be created in one year.
- ✓ Not only community's initiation but also its support and ongoing participation are important for the success of a community-oriented project.
- ✓ Ainu language consultant Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa helped revise and give new life to old but very precious materials.
- ✓ The fact that Mrs. Setsu Kurokawa's productive skills in Ainu considerably surpassed all expectations proves that it is never too late to give your fieldwork another chance in the case of moribund languages!

References

- Hercus, L.A. & Nathan, D. (2002). *Paakantjy. Multimedia CD-ROM*. Canberra: ATSI.
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