

A Historical Perspective on Japanese Language Policy Towards the Ainu Minority Language and its Relationship to Policies of Colonial Expansion and the Concept of Ethno-linguistic “Purity”

Jon BLUNDELL

Faculty of International Communication, Aichi University

E-mail: blundell@vega.aichi-u.ac.jp

要 旨

本稿は日本のアイヌ民族への言語政策に言及しながら「少数民族の言語」と「民族言語学の純粋性」の概念を定義し論ずるものである。その関係は日本のアイヌの領土への領土拡大の政策を通して歴史的観点から論じられる。

アイヌ民族に対する日本の言語政策は大きく次の三つの時期に分けられる。江戸時代以前と江戸時代（1603年以前～1868）、明治時代（1863～1913）、明治時代以降（1913～今日）である。

アイヌ民族に対する日本の言語政策は江戸時代以前及び江戸時代における言語の純粋性の初期の概念に派生することが明らかになる。言語政策はその後、江戸時代後期から明治時代へとたどることができる。それは当初、孤立政策によって、後に同化政策に転換していることに特徴付けられる。

明治時代からの言語的、地理的な同化政策はアイヌ民族の言語と民族の独自性の観点からはアイヌ民族を徐々に弱めていくことになった。北海道旧土人保護法（1899）にもかかわらず、差別的な言語政策をとってアイヌ民族を保護するどころかアイヌ言語と民族の独自性を弱体化させることになった。

最後に、明らかにより寛大な政策がとられた明治以後の時代を論じる。第2次世界大戦以後（同化が完全に達成され、そのような政策がもはや必要なものではなくなった）一部国際的な圧力によって今日まで存続する保護政策がとられている。

このようにアイヌ言語への孤立、同化、保護のさまざまな日本の言語政策は歴史的な進展を通してたどることができる。

I Introduction

In this paper, Japanese language policy towards the Ainu minority language will be discussed.

First the concepts of 'minority language' and 'ethno-linguistic purity' will be examined and defined. Then Japanese language policy towards the Ainu outlined, and its relationship towards policies of colonial expansion assessed from a historical perspective.

For the purposes of this essay, Japanese policy towards the Ainu will be divided into three periods: Pre-Edo and Edo Period, ((pre.)1603–1868)); Meiji Restoration Period (1868–1913), and Post Meiji Period (1913–present day). However these are broad divisions and we shall see that there were other major landmarks (such as the 1899 'Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act').

It will become apparent that language policy towards the Ainu minority language is inextricably bound up with policies first of 'nation-building' and later of colonial expansion. However, this is not to say that policies remained constant. Indeed, major revisions were made according to whether doctrines of *isolation*, *assimilation*, or *historical preservation* were adopted. These stages, in turn, were contingent upon the psychology of the colonisation process and pre-dominating views on the preservation of ethno-linguistic purity.

II Linguistic Minority

First, let us examine the meaning and implications of 'linguistic minority'. As Heller (Longman '99) points out, the concept assumes that there is a whole of which a group is a minor part, and that the difference between the whole and the group has a linguistic basis. Referring to Anderson ('83), Heller continues:

"The concept of 'linguistic minority' only makes sense today within an ideological framework of *nationalism* in which language is central to the construction of the nation." (Heller, '99, 7).

As we shall see, this statement is equally valid with reference to the past history of Japanese minority language policy, and such a policy, whether seen within Heller's more global context, or specifically within the Japanese context, is linked to the process of nation-building. Through the use of a common language a uniform system of shared cultural practices and *modus vivendi* can be established and re-inforced. However, this very process of unification, has the corollary of exclusion. An 'in-group' requires an 'out-group' to define its existence, even in large-scale nationalistic terms.

Thus, as Heller states:

“Linguistic minorities are created by nationalisms that exclude them.” (Heller, '99,7).

In the late 18th. century for example, Ainu ‘natives’ were excluded from using Japanese. (Takakura, 60, 53). However, by the turn of the century this policy was reversed. The Ainu were encouraged to learn Japanese, and this accentuated their minority status. ‘Linguistic minority’, then, should be seen within the context of nation-building—a term which may also embrace ‘colonial expansion’—an activity which can involve the exclusion or inclusion of a given linguistic minority.

III Ethno-linguistic Purity

Let us now consider ‘ethno-linguistic purity’. An amalgam of two terms: ethnicity—definable as “sharing a distinctive cultural and historical tradition, often associated with race, nationality or religion, by which the group identifies itself and others recognize it.” (Brown (ed.) '93), and “linguistic”, referring to the language(s) used by such a group.

Perhaps more difficult to define is the term ‘purity’. Various ‘races’ have considered themselves to be ‘pure’. Hitler’s Germany with its attack on those of non-Aryan race is an obvious example, but the world abounds with examples (Bosnia / Serbia / Croatia, Arab ‘ethnic cleansing’ at present taking place in the Sudan, etc.). Not surprisingly, such concepts of ethnic purity are linked to policies of nationalistic expansion. Also, nations may go to great lengths to attempt to maintain what they regard as linguistic as well as ethnic purity, even to the extent of establishing organisations which pronounce on the acceptability / non acceptability of particular linguistic terms, especially ‘foreign’ words. (e.g. the Académie Française, established in 17th. century France).

With respect to ‘ethnicity’, Japan, with its historical belief in the divine creation of the Emperor, has also entertained notions of racial purity. As Screech, quoted in Morris-Suzuki, points out:

“Japan has always considered itself ethnically pure and in this it draws a distinction with China and Korea, held to be racially diverse.” (Morris-Suzuki, '98, 81).

As early as the 1630s, all Europeans except the Dutch, including mixed-race children were expelled from Japan. (Morris-Suzuki, *ibid.*). Furthermore, notions of ethno-*linguistic* purity were also adopted by Japan (somewhat ironically as Japan's writing system was borrowed from China in the 3rd. or 4th century AD), (Henshall, '88). The Ainu were portrayed as 'eastern barbarians' -the terms 'Ebisu', Emishi, and 'Ezo', all have this connotation. (Sasamura, '99, 369), (Howell, '92, (Foreward pp.xvi-xvii)), and (Siddle in Maher, John, C. & Macdonald, Gaynor, '95, 74). Also, the Ainu were initially forbidden to use Japanese. Later the linguistic framework was to become 'inclusive', and a different policy of assimilation and acculturation adopted.

IV Language Policy towards the Ainu Minority Language

Having defined the terms 'linguistic minority' and 'ethno-linguistic purity', let us now consider Japanese policy towards the Ainu language and its relationship from a historical perspective to the concepts of ethno-linguistic purity and colonial expansion. Policy towards the Ainu language—in fact, 'dialects' might be a more proper term, see (Tamura 2000, 2) and (De Chicchis, Joseph, in Maher, John C. and Yashiro, Kyoko, '95, 108), who recognize three main dialects: Sakhalin, Kurile and Hokkaido—may be divided into three stages : Edo period (1603–1868) and pre-Edo period, Meiji Period (1868–1913), and post-Meiji period. However, these classifications are extremely broad, and within them occur other significant milestones (e.g. the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act).

1 Pre-Edo and Edo Period

According to Hanami, Makiko (in Maher, John, C. and Macdonald, Gaynor (eds.), '95, 125) at the end of the 14th, century the Japanese began to migrate to Hokkaido and make contact with the Ainu. Also, according to DeChicchis:

“The Japanese called this people Yezo, and their land Yezogashima (Yezo's islands)... Ainu Moshir (the Ainu homeland) especially Hokkaido, was so commonly regarded as the Ainu's country, that it was standardly distinguished from Japan and referred to as Yezo.” (DeChicchis, *op.cit.*, 108).

There seems little evidence of any clear language policy in these early stages of contact. Indeed, there was little need, as it was not until the late Edo period (circa 1785 with the danger of Russian colonisation of Hokkaido) that policies of colonial expansion were most clearly linked with those of linguistic isolation and later

assimilation. Similarly concepts of ethno-linguistic purity were yet to be developed, although the beginnings are traceable in the use of the pejorative terms '(Y)ezo', 'Emishi' and '(Y)ebisu' (see above). However, there was little need at this stage to create any myth of divine origins or purity of language for purposes of national expansion or colonisation.

Perhaps at this point it is worth noting that as far as linguistic purity is concerned the Japanese language borrowed 'foreign' kanji from China, adding kana (also derived from kanji) later. (Henshall, '88).

Similarly, as Nakano Hideichiro points out, regarding ethnic purity:

"It is hypothesized that ancestors of the present imperial family came to this country from the northern part of the Chinese continent and that this nomadic neo-Mongoloid people conquered the original inhabitants in the Japanese archipelago, establishing the Yamamoto dynasty somewhere in Kyushu or Kinki around the fifth century. The early inhabitants can for their part, be divided into at least four ethnic categories; (i) the Ainu and the southern islanders, who are believed to be the proto-Japanese deriving from the old Mongoloids; (ii) the Wajin, rice cultivators of the old Mongoloids, who are believed to have come from the southern part of China; (iii) the southern sea peoples from Indochina and Indonesia ... and finally, (iv) the Koreans from three ancient kingdoms in the Korean Peninsula ... *Though some of these conclusions are still debatable, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that the Japanese are a mixture of originally different ethnic branches, not, in any sense, a mono-ethnic group who can be traced from the beginnings of the nation.*" (my italics), (in Maher, John C., & Macdonald, Gaynor, '95, 50).

It is interesting to contrast this information, with beliefs propagated by elites of the Tokugawa period (when Japan was embarking on the process of nation-building, and thus sought justification in terms of racial superiority) such as those in the following excerpt from *The Land of the Gods* (R. Tsunoda, et.al.):

"Japanese differ completely from and are superior to the peoples of China, India, Russia, Holland, Siam, Cambodia, and all other countries of the world, and for us to have called our country the Land of the Gods was not mere vainglory." (quoted in Siddle, '96, 10).

By 1603, the re-unification process of Japan as a centralized state meant that Northern Honshu and Hokkaido (original homelands of the Ainu) began to lose their independence as autonomous trading and diplomatic centres. Howell ('92), sees this as a significant point in the process of an isolationist policy linked with national expansion:

“The establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603 completed this process of re-unification and left a clear boundary between Japan and the realm of the Ainu—nominally autonomous, yet clearly subordinated to the Japanese state—in Southern Hokkaido. Over the course of the seventeenth century the Ainu gradually lost access to Honshu ... their world became much more insular as a result of this process of *state building* in Japan.” (my italics). (Howell, '92, Foreward xix).

At what point national expansion becomes colonial expansion is an interesting issue. From the geographical viewpoint, it might be that the existence of a clear maritime boundary between Honshu and Hokkaido, might indicate initial national expansion, whereas later expansion into Hokkaido, particularly when accompanied by mass immigration and capitalist development ((Siddle, '96, 8) might be more appropriately termed colonisation. However, northern Honshu was also regarded by the Ainu as their homeland. A useful definition of colonisation is offered by Becket:

“A colonial order arises when the state that has annexed a territory formally and systematically discriminates between the conquering invaders and the subject indigenes in such a way as to entrench the differences between them and to foster their economic, political and cultural inequality.” (quoted in Siddle, '96, 8).

Initially, then, in the early Edo period, Japanese expansion into the Ainu homelands may best be regarded as 'nation building'. However, in 1669 'Shakushain's war' ended in an Ainu defeat, resulting in further mistreatment and a gradual, but severe reduction in population. (circa 40,000–17,000 by the mid-19th. century - (Howell, *ibid*, p.xx).

By the time of Shakushain's defeat, Becket's criteria for 'a colonial order' were beginning to be met. Japanese interests (Matsumoto domain) had spread from northern Honshu to the southern tip of Hokkaido. There was no formal annexation as yet, but the Wajin well illustrated an example of a central organisation which was beginning to 'systematically discriminate' in the way outlined by Becket (*op. cit.*).

By 1785, Russian expansion had resulted in a colony being established on Etofuru (Kurile islands). According to Takakura ('60, 53) the Russians in trading with the Ezo, taught them Russian and treated them fairly. He continues:

“In Japan no policy has yet been decided upon... Knives are not allowed *nor are the natives permitted to use the Japanese language*. The policy of keeping the people ignorant and uncivilized is a most regrettable one.” (ibid., 53).

The fact that the Ainu were forbidden to use Japanese is thus clearly linked to an isolationist policy of attempted colonial expansion. It is interesting, however, that Howel refers to both a *lack* of decided policy and a *specific policy* (keeping the people ignorant and uncivilized). This may reflect Howel's confusion, or a certain confusion in Wajin policy itself. In any case, prohibition of Ainu to use Japanese, certainly fits Becket's criteria for a colonial order in terms of “entrenching differences” (between Ainu and Wajin). (op. cit.).

Finally, on February 10th., 1799, the Bakufu decreed that Ezo was now under the direct control of the central government, thus fulfilling Becket's first criteria (formal annexation) for colonial order. At this point, policy began to change from *exclusion* to *annexation*. Not only politically, but also culturally and linguistically. Annexation was justified through the claim that the Ainu were uneducated and living in a poor condition:

“Officials sent there shall endeavour to educate the people and gradually have them adopt Japanese customs.” (Howel, op. cit., Appendix, 57).

Language policy towards the Ainu was now reversed. The Ainu were to be encouraged to use Japanese. In a sense this was a liberal policy. The Ainu were no longer forbidden to use their own language, but rather were permitted to use Japanese if they wished, as a step towards integration:

“The Ezo have been forbidden to use Japanese, but in areas where the Bakufu has taken over, *the use of that language shall be permitted and in fact encouraged* so that the natives will more easily adopt our ways of life. *Keep in mind, however, that they are to use our language and we are not to use theirs... Since the prohibition on the use of Japanese has been abolished... the best thing is to have the Edo learn Japanese*. It is up to the Ezo themselves whether they wish to copy the customs of the Japanese. *If*

there is such a one and he has learned the Japanese language he shall be granted permission to become a Japanese." (Howel, op.cit.). Thus we can see that the new language policy of assimilation was now a major factor in what had become a totally revised colonial integration policy.

2 Meiji Restoration Period

In 1869, the Meiji government declared 'Hokkaido' part of Japan. Yezogashima was renamed 'Hokkaido' and the Japanese central government embarked upon a more aggressive colonial policy. (De Chicchis, in Mayer and Yoshiro (eds., '95). According to Savage :

"In 1877, Ainu land was nationalised and their language and traditional customs were prohibited... From the Meiji period the education system all but annihilated the Ainu language. (Savage, Theresa, p. 44 / 45) in Mackie, V., Skoutairdes, A, & Toika, A, (eds.) '2000). (my italics).

Consequently, from the beginning of the Meiji period the situation of the Ainu changed radically. Under the Tokugawa regime, they had been allowed to maintain a distinct identity. Although given the opportunity to learn Japanese if they wished, there was no compulsion (see Howel above). From the Meiji period onwards, however, anti-Ainu linguistic policy was used as an integral part of a much more aggressive colonial policy linked with immigration of Wajin from Honshu to Hokkaido. Assimilation policies encouraging intermarriage of Ainu and Wajin must also have tended to act as *quasi 'unofficial' linguistic policy*, as, for social and economic reasons, (discrimination) the Japanese language would tend to be adopted over Ainu. Furthermore, according to Howel :

"Universal education in Japanese undermined the Ainu language and the influx of hundreds of thousands of Wajin immigrants into Hokkaido left the Ainu dispossessed of their land... As a result of intermarriage with Wajin, the number of people of unmixed Ainu ancestry dwindled rapidly... Their difficulties were compounded by the cultural insensitivity and persistent discrimination they faced from officials and immigrants." (Howel, op. cit., xxi-xxii).

The undermining of the Ainu language through education was accompanied by renewed emphasis on the purity of standard Japanese. According to Maher (Maher & Macdonald, '95), the Meiji ruling elite created the term 'hyojungo' or 'standard

language' and the national language was renamed 'kokugo' in order to symbolize uniformity in Japanese language and culture. Language movements leading up to the Meiji period had called for: "... the revival of a 'pure Japanese' study of the Japanese classics, philology and history, and a purging of all foreign influence including the use of *kango*." (Maher & Macdonald, op.cit., 109).

Western influence had changed this perception somewhat, so the need to re-assert the concept of linguistic purity and use it as a powerful weapon to unify Japanese language and culture arose. As Maher re-iterates:

"Language ... is always accompanied by power and to possess language has long been thought a magical property." (Maher, '95, 107).

During the Meiji period, then, language policy became a major means of consolidating an assimilation policy of colonialisation that contrasted the positive 'pure' and 'superior' aspects of the conquerors' language and concomitant political, economic and social mores, with the 'inferior' Ainu language (no written form, etc.) and comparatively uneducated and unsophisticated life-style of the 'barbarian' Ainu. The culmination of this philosophy occurred with the passing of the Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act of 1899, which far from 'protecting' the Ainu, used the twin areas of agriculture and education to further discriminate against them. Education was to take place in Japanese only, and separate syllabi existed for 'shamo' and Ainu children (sometimes even separate schools). (Ogawa, M. in Loos & Osanai (eds.), '94). As Ogawa points out (op. cit.):

"The main reason why Ainu children had an 'easier' curriculum than *shamo* was that the first stage of education was *the thorough elimination of the Ainu language and customs through adoption of the Japanese language and indoctrination to the Japanese way.*" (op. cit. 241). (my italics).

In 1904 further discriminatory regulations were introduced (Ordinance 92, Hokkaido Prefectural Government) emphasising differences in Ainu and *shamo* education. Although abolished in 1908, the post-Meiji period saw them re-introduced in 1916, in an even more discriminatory fashion, Ainu starting school one year later (7 years old) than *shamo*, the curriculum lasting 4 years rather than the *shamo* 6 years, and fewer subjects being taught to Ainu compared with *shamo*.

3 Post-Meiji Period

The post-Meiji period was characterized (after the initial further discriminatory action mentioned above) by an apparently more tolerant policy towards Ainu language and education. Separate Ainu / *shamo* education, for example, was gradually phased out from 1920 and abolished in 1937. (Ogawa, M., in Los & Osanai (eds.), ('94). However, this seems to have been due not to a sudden burst of enlightenment on the part of the Japanese authorities, but rather because there was no longer any need for further discriminatory language / education policies:

“The system, which had been set up to destroy Ainu language and culture, had accomplished these aims so thoroughly that it was no longer necessary.” (Ogawa, op. cit.).

Thus, after the Second World War, Japan no longer pursued so vigorously its anti-Ainu ethno-linguistic policies. Assimilation, in the view of the *wajin* policy-makers and perhaps even some of the Ainu themselves, had through colonisation and consequent inter-marriage largely been achieved. However, in reality discrimination continued on historical and racial grounds. For this reason, the period after the Second World War, particularly since the '70s, has been characterised by Ainu attempts to “recreate ... themselves as an indigeneous people” (Siddle, ('02, 1)).

Finally, in 1997, what was greeted by media as a major milestone, the passing of the Ainu Cultural Promotion Act, was achieved. However, the Council, while recognising that “language is the ‘core’ of ethnic identity” (Siddle, (op.cit.), “ignores the fact that most Ainu themselves recognize that Ainu is no longer the language of daily life...” (Siddle, op. cit.). It is perhaps too late now for Ainu language and customs to become much other than a homogenized tourist attraction as opposed to a vibrant living entity.

Japanese policy now allows (even encourages through financial support) the *preservation* of the Ainu language. Positive on the surface, this policy could (perhaps uncharitably) be regarded as a ‘face saving device’ necessitated through international as well as Ainu pressure.—A politically correct move that now offers no threat or danger to Japanese society. Perhaps, now, as Suzuki Muneo (Hokkaido based member of the House of Representatives) controversially declared, Japan is indeed:

“one state, one language, one nation (*minzoku*). The Ainu are now completely assimilated.” (Hokkaido Shinbun, 3 July, 2001, quoted in Siddle (op, cit., 417).

Thus, consciously or unconsciously a type of ‘psychological assimilation policy’ may still be being employed. Granting recognition to the *historical preservation* of Ainu language and culture, in a sense further relegates it to the past and enshrines it rather than re-vivifies it, however well-intentioned policy makers may be.

V Conclusion

In this paper, then, we have discussed Japanese language policy towards the Ainu language (and policy concerning the use of Japanese by the Ainu) within the framework of the concepts of colonial expansion and ethno-linguistic purity.

Having defined the above-mentioned concepts, language policy has been examined over broadly three periods- pre-Edo and Edo, Meiji Restoration and post-Meiji... The pre-Edo period was characterized by policies of exploration and trading rather than colonial expansion, but the beginning of the Edo Period saw expansion into northern Honshu with associated *exclusionist* nation-building policies aimed at preventing the Ainu from using Japanese. Expansion continued into Hokkaido, and could be termed ‘colonial’ rather than merely national. However, by the end of the 18th. century, faced with the threat of Russian colonisation of Hokkaido, the isolation policy was reversed by the Bakufu and replaced with an *assimilation policy* which allowed and even encouraged Ainu use of Japanese.

In the early Meiji period Hokkaido was declared part of Japan, and the Ainu were forbidden to use their own language. This took place within the context of considerably increased colonial expansion associated with mass immigration of Wajin into Hokkaido. Universal education in Japanese and the naming of the national language as ‘kokugo’, with its connotations of linguistic purity and superiority further undermined the use of the Ainu language.

After an initial period of increased discrimination, in the post-Meiji period the aim of assimilating the Ainu into Japan was largely achieved. Consequently the policy of forbidding the Ainu language, gradually became one of language *preservation*. The annexation of Hokkaido had obviated the necessity for further assimilative action, and allowed an (apparently) more positive policy, that of historic preservation, now that the mother state was no longer under threat...

It should, however, be emphasized that not all policy-makers and administrators

were necessarily without good intentions. Nevertheless, the overall result of colonialist policy and its concomitant language policy clearly had a deleterious effect on the Ainu language and the existence of the Ainu as a separate ethnic group. This is, of course, not a purely Japanese problem. Most national / colonial excursions around the world that have taken place have been accompanied by linguistic policies deleterious to minority languages. (Welsh in Britain, for example, the Australian aborigine languages, etc.).

However, regarding Japan, we can say, that language policy played a major role within Japanese policies of nation-building and colonialization. These policies, varied according to contemporary political expediency, but culminated in the virtual annihilation of the Ainu language, customs and people as a meaningful autonomous force existing independently within present day Japan.

To conclude, then, Howell writes:

“We should not see the Ainu only as the object of Wajin aggression, nor should we make light of their victimization at the hands of the Japanese state.” (Howell, xxii, op. cit.).

Unfortunately, one feels forced to concur more with latter part of Howell’s statement than the former.

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