

17 **The Ainu Language: Bilingualism and Language Education**

Summary 17.1 Japan – A Monolingual Nation? – 17.2 Bilingual Education in Japan. – 17.3 Teaching and Learning Ainu as a Second Language.

17.1 Japan – A Monolingual Nation?

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

As Morris-Suzuki (1998, 27) notes, imposing Japanese as the national language at all institutional levels during the Meiji period represented the central element of the assimilation process. Especially for the speakers of Ainu and the Ryukyuan languages, who were subjected to assimilation more directly and thoroughly, a forced education imparted only in Japanese slowly resulted in a language shift from the native language to Japanese by the end of the nineteenth

century. Importantly, although as a result of this Ainu and Ryukyuan people became in fact bilingual, they were never visibly acknowledged as such. The history of Ainu and Ryukyuan languages illustrates how not recognising bilingualism as a reality has contributed to creating the myth of Japan being a monolingual nation and helps us better understand the difficulties of establishing bilingual education systems in today's Japan.

17.2 Bilingual Education in Japan

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

on the Japanese government's part, aimed at addressing bilingualism as a primary aspect of Japanese society, individual attitudes can also make a difference in how a new language can and should be acquired.

17.3 Teaching and Learning Ainu as a Second Language

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

The difficulty of implementing bilingual education partly comes from the sheer length of time needed to acquire language(s). Moreover, the actual language learning process is individually different, in the context of the society in which the speaker lives. Depending on the speaker's age, bilingual education involves the speaker's language acquisition, language learning, language maintenance and language loss. In some cases, this depends on the position of a language in a society where bilingual education is involved in language endangerment, language death and language revitalisation. Bilingual education cannot be separated from the constant language dynamism of the speaker's life and social reality. Together with the individual difficulty, how to contextualise bilingualism and multilingualism into "bilingual education" will be a challenge for the twenty-first century. (Fujita-Round 2019, 180)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

