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.

1. 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 Sino-African constituent order.
   - Ainu is head-marking with a few elements of dependent-marking.
   - Morphological expression of arguments is basically transitive.

2. Sociolinguistic situation
   - Ainu is nearly extinct as 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 ethnic 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.

3. 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 1998.

4. Culture was established to promote and teach Ainu language, and the Ainu Culture’ was enacted in 1997, and the Ainu were encouraged to maintain and promote the Ainu culture.

5. Present population of the ethnical Ainu is about 100 000, with the Hokkaido remember Ainu as their native language.

6. The Ainu go kaiwa jiten dictionary introduces 3,847 entries, i.e. conversational phrases or words, presumably belonging to the Saru dialect.

7. Recently, more Ainu are experiencing a new sense of self due to the geographical location, older age and poor health. The Ainu go kaiwa jiten dictionary enables Ainu to maintain or learn the language.

8. 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.

References