

How to Preserve the Ainu Language

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1. Introduction

Some languages used in the world have already disappeared or are in danger of disappearing due to religious issues, national divisions, or the conquest of regions through colonization. Some of these endangered languages are ,or were, spoken in Japan. The following table shows endangered languages in Japan.

Table1 Risk of Disappearance

Extremely serious	Ainu language				
More serious	Yaeyama language	Yonaguni language			
Serious	Hatijyou language	Amami language	Kunigami language	Okinawa language	Miyako language

According to the Japanese agency for culture affairs, the languages in Table1 are still spoken in Japan. With the exception of the Ainu language, all other minor Japanese languages are spoken in Okinawa. The reason for the decline of Japanese minority languages is due to their assimilation into standard Japanese and the standardization policies for language use adopted in the Meiji era. A comparison of languages which have been lost in other cultures may provide insight into finding out what happened to those languages, and to finding a way to keep the Japanese minority languages from disappearing. As the Ainu language is most at risk, that focus for comparison is the most logical starting point.

2. Method

Research on the Internet was conducted to how the Maori language, Hawaiian language, and how the preservation effects in New Zealand and Hawaii can be applied to the Ainu language in Japan.

3. Results

①Native Hawaiian Language

The native Hawaiian language has been used throughout the Hawaiian Islands since the 8th century, but in 1992 the number of native speakers had dropped to 2,000. The following three points are considered as factors of this decline:

- Reduction of indigenous peoples due to infectious diseases brought in from Western Europe
- Insufficiency of the Hawaiian dynasty that urged modernization

Since the middle of the 19th century, the number of public high schools whose educational language is Hawaiian has dropped dramatically. In 1896, the Hawaiian government designated English as the official language of government offices, so in 1896 English became the primary educational language in schools. Additionally, this policy was used to ban the use of the Hawaiian language at home.

In the mid-1980s, Punana Leo, a kindergarten, was established to raise preschool children only in Hawaiian language. At the end of the 1980s, Kura Kaiapuni, a school, which teaches all subjects in Hawaiian, was established. According to December 2006 statistics, about 2000 children were educated primarily in the Hawaiian language.

With the introduction of the Hawaiian Renaissance in the 1970s, the state constitution was changed and the Hawaiian language was included as an official language of the state. Because of its inclusion, the Hawaiian language has seen wider usage and acceptance through childcare, traditional hula dance, sports, and music in Hawaii.

② Decline of Maori

In the early 19th century, there were British settlements which were visited by missionaries and traders. This contact helped spread English in New Zealand, but many local communities still used Maori as their primary language. However, during World War II, emigration to cities continued for economic reasons. In the 1970s, Maori population in rural areas reduced by 25%. The major people who migrated from rural areas to cities, lost their connection with their communities. Due to this, they no longer used the Maori language in their daily lives.

On September 14, in 1972, 30,000 signatures were submitted to the Diet by the Maori group. They petitioned the government to, "Guarantee opportunities for students who want to learn Maori language and culture". This movement was successful. A Maori language law was established, the language was given a status as an official language equivalent to English. This led to the establishment of Maori language schools and requirement for all students to take Maori language classes prior to graduation. People can now hear Maori used on TV and the radio in New Zealand.

4. Discussion

People who live in Hokkaido need to have a desire to preserve Ainu language and as advocates for this in order to preserve the language. Therefore it is important to spread Ainu

culture among Hokkaido people in order to increase interest and support for preservation. From the Hawaii and New Zealand examples, there seems to be a decline in the use of Ainu language which may also explain the lack of interest and preservation efforts. Increasing opportunities related to the language will be the first way to tackle this problem.

For example, broadcasting radio in the Ainu language, playing Ainu music, and broadcasting programs such as anime in the Ainu language could increase knowledge and interest. Providing school education in the Ainu language is also an effective means to increase engagement. By doing so, there is a possibility of continuing to use the Ainu language in the future. In addition, text books with audio supplements enable people who have difficulty learning the language directly to experience the Ainu language and also leave a written and verbal record if preservation efforts are alternately not successful. Most importantly, the diversity of languages is connected to the diversity of culture so the effects to protect these cultural legacies is significant and must continue in the future.

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