

# **RESEARCH REPORT**

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**Sapporo, Japan**  
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The comparative study of endangered languages and cultures in Japan, Russia and Europe made during the research period is part of a larger joint programme of Japanese, Russian and Dutch research groups in the field of ethnology and linguistics. Since 1990, I have taken part in conferences and expeditions to Sakhalin (1990, 1991, 2000, 2001, 2003), Yakutia (1994, 2002), Altaiskij Kraj (1992, 1994), Kazakhstan (1996), the Amur region (1998), Hanti-Mansiisk (2003) and Buryatia (2005). One of our aims was to investigate the ethnic minorities living there and to record their language use. During these years, I also had the opportunity to learn about the Ainu population in Japan and I was able to compare the position of the minorities in Russia and Japan with the situation in Europe. In the Mercator project group at the Frisian Academy, my special task is related to the minorities in Eastern Europe and Russia - and such a comparison is highly useful. My work in Sapporo during the project period has proved to be a very important continuation of this work and can be summarized as follows.

## **1. Study of the Ainu culture and its legal background in Japan**

In 1997, the Japanese government introduced a special law (Ainu shinpoo) for the promotion of Ainu culture. In it, the government has both recognized this national minority with the linguistic rights this implicates and it has provided financial support. In the library of the Ainu Researc Center in Sapporo and also during discussions with various specialists (in particular the Chairman of the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture) I learned much about the legal background of the Ainu culture and the various activities which have resulted from this.

The Northern Regions' Material Collection in the Univerity Library contains a large number of books and documents on the Ainu and many other topics related to my research plans. There, I found important historical documents: in particular those related to the earlier stages of the border area between Japan and Russia and its inhabitants (in particular Ainu and Nivkh).

I visited the Ainu Research Center a few times and became familiar with the sound archives on Ainu in this center, which might serve as an example for the archiving facilities for Nivkh and other minority languages on Sakhalin. I visited museum collections on Ainu in Sapporo, Noboribetsu and Shiraio, where I attended a wedding ceremony in Ainu traditional style.

During my stay in Sapporo, together with Matthias Brenziger (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) I prepared a paper on language endangerment, documentation, preservation and maintenance for the UNESCO encyclopaedia of life support systems (EOLSS), in which a section is devoted to Ainu and Nivkh.

## **2. Comparison of the Ainu situation with minority politics in Europe and Russia.**

In recent years, much important work has been done for the Ainu in Japan. The Ainu situation on Hokkaido should be considered an example of how - in Russia and elsewhere - one should proceed further. This can be realized by the promotion of language and culture and by setting up language courses, broadcasting in the language, speech contests, training of story tellers, etc.

At the Frisian Academy, we are currently preparing an inventory of the languages in the new states of the European Union, where the position of ethnic minorities is often related to language use and can give rise to serious political problems. In our research group on Phonetics and Ethnolinguistics, we are developing a multimedia web site on *The Languages of Russia* with access to information on more than a hundred peoples and their languages as these are spoken in the Russian Federation. The so-called Peoples of the North inhabit the tundra and the taiga in the Northern parts of European Russia, Siberia and the Russian Far East, and many of their languages are severely endangered and doomed to extinction. We pay particular attention to a few of these indigenous minorities, such as the Nenets and the Nivkh.

During my lectures at Sapporo Gakuin University, Sangyo University, Chiba University, and the Slavic Research Center, I reported on this work and in following discussions with Japanese colleagues many aspects of the European and Russian minorities (in particular the endangered languages and cultures) were compared to the Ainu case. In Chiba, I discussed various aspects of the teaching programme and Ainu-related activities in the Tokyo area, whereas in other places the more general problems on endangered languages were discussed. In the Faculty of Letters of Hokkaido University, I was given the opportunity to work with Dr. Shimizu, who prepared grammars of Frisian and Dutch, and for which I contributed the sound material.

## **3. Research on Nivkh**

The collaboration on the Nivkh language with Japanese colleagues has been important, in particular collaboration with those scholars from Hokkaido University and Chiba University who combine the study of Ainu with the investigation of minority languages in Russia, such as Nivkh and the Tungus languages of Sakhalin and the Russian Far East. This is illustrated by the work of the Japanese graduate student Hidetoshi Shiraishi, who received a research grant from Groningen University in order to prepare his PhD thesis - under my supervision - on Nivkh in the period 2002 – 2006.

Mr Shiraishi worked in Groningen from 1 January 2002 until March 2005, and as of this year has secured a teaching and research position at Sapporo Gakuin University. He

intends to finish his thesis on Nivkh phonology in 2005, and the defence ceremony will take place in Groningen before the summer of 2006. During my stay, we had the opportunity to work together on this thesis and related topics, such as the section of Nivkh in the UNESCO encyclopedia article. On 16 October last, Shiraishi gave a very successful presentation of his work at the Tokyo Circle of Phonologists.

### **3. Collection of historical data related to the book of Witsen.**

One of my tasks in Sapporo has been related to the Nicolaas Witsen Project, which is aimed at an investigation of the minor peoples of Northeast Asia, their history, natural environment, culture, language and way of life. It finds its inspiration in the book *Noord en Oost Tartarije ofte Bondig Ontwerp van eenige dier Landen en Volken* by the Amsterdam mayor Nicolaas Witsen. Witsen travelled to Russia in 1664/65 and collected data on the physical appearance of the country, on its fauna and flora and more in particular on the peoples of Siberia and the Far East.

An interdisciplinary team of specialists has been created which considers the various aspects of this project: history, ethnology, linguistics, geography, etc. We have established contacts with foreign institutions which are involved in the study of Siberia and the Far East, such as those in Russia (Saint-Petersburg, Moscow, Yakutsk) and in Japan. Research has been conducted in archives in order to find out from which sources Witsen retrieved his information. Much of the linguistic material has been investigated and compared to the present-day situation in Siberia.

In the Sapporo archives and during consultations with local specialists, I found a solution for some of the problems we encountered in preparing the Russian translation (which has been completed) and edition of this book. I received many important suggestions from Japanese colleagues, in particular from Prof. Toshiyuki Akizuki, whose book *A History of the Exploration and Cartography of the Northwest Pacific* is an important source of information.

During my stay in Sapporo, I was able to add some annotations for many of the pages in the book of Witsen related to Ezo, the Northern territories of Japan and border areas with Russia. My work resulted in a report in Russian on *Witsens North and East Tartary and the border areas of Russia with Japan and China* (see attachment). In consultation with Dr.M.Vysokov this text will be prepared for publication in his *Krajevedcheskii Bulletin on Sakhalin*. We also consider preparing a Japanese translation of the text.

### **4. Lectures and further activities**

During my stay in Japan, I presented lectures on my work at Sapporo Gakuin University (29 Sept.), Sangya University (13 Oct.), Chiba University (14 Oct.) and the Slavic Research Center (25 Oct.). I attended various seminars organized by the Slavic Research Center and other departments of Hokkaido University. Furthermore, I had several consultations with specialists, gave instruction in Dutch and Frisian and helped with reading Dutch texts.

An important aim of the scholars in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk is the establishment of special institutions devoted to the study of the Northern peoples and their languages and cultures. A Faculty of Northern Studies at Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk University could thus be realized with the support from outside, such as from the above-mentioned Japanese institutions and European centers, such as the Frisian Academy. About this future joint activity I had many discussions with Prof. M.Vysokov, historian from Sakhalin, who shared a room with me at the SRC.

For the work on endangered archives, a new Foundation has been created at the British Library in London. For this Programme on Endangered Archives I prepared a proposal for a new project. Within the framework of this new project, we would like to obtain access to some private (and endangered) collections on Nivkh and other Paleo-Siberian languages. We would like to copy these on modern sound carriers, make a catalogue available and publish part of the material together with the related recordings in Saint-Petersburg.

Together with the project proposed for the preservation of the old existing sound recordings (within the framework of the programme on Endangered Archives), we intend to combine this work with the participation of Nivkh informants. They will be able to assist with the description of the material and to act as informants for linguists and other scholars studying their language.

### **Itinerary 1 September – 1 November 2005**

- 1 Sept. Arrival in Sapporo via Tokyo
- 8 Sept. Visit to Otaru (Inoue, Spevakovskij)
- 16-19 Sept. Visit to Kushiro and Abashiri (Murasaki, Nakamura)
- 23 – 26 Sept. Visit to Noboribetsu and Shiraoui (Brenzinger, Nakagawa, Ogihara, Kaneko)
- 29 Sept. Lecture at Sapporo Gakuin University (Okuda, Shiraishi)
- 8 - 10 Oct. Stay in Tokyo (Murasaki, Brenzinger)
- 10 – 14 Oct. Kyoto and Nara (Inoue, Murasaki)
- 13 Oct. Lecture at Sangyo University (Ikeda)
- 14 – 16 Oct. Chiba, lecture Chiba University (Ogihara, Nakagawa, Kaneko)
- 16 – 17 Oct. Yokohama, lecture Shiraishi at Tokyo University (Haraguchi)
- 25 Oct. Lecture at the Slavic Research Center
- 30 Oct. Departure for Tokyo (Sugawara, Brenzinger, Kurebito, Murasaki)
- 1 Nov. Departure for the Netherlands

### **Some resulting publications**

De Graaf, Tjeerd (2004). *The Status of Endangered Languages in the Border Areas of Japan and Russia*. In: A.Argenter and R.McKenna Brown (eds.) *On the Margins of Nations: Endangered Languages and Linguistic Rights*. Proceedings of the Eight Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages, Barcelona, 1-3 October 2004, pp. 153-159.

De Graaf, Tjeerd and Brenzinger, Matthias (2005). *Language endangerment, documentation, preservation and maintenance*. Contribution to the UNESCO encyclopedia of life support systems (EOLSS)

De Graaf, Tjeerd (2005). *Witsen's North and East Tartary and the border areas of Russia with Japan and China*. Internal report, to be prepared for publication in Kraevedcheskij Biuletin, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk

De Graaf, Tjeerd (2005). *Dutch in the Steppe? The Plautdiitsch Language of the Sibeiran Mennonites and their Relation with the Netherlands, Germany and Russia*. In: Crawhall, Nigel, and Nicholas Ostler, edd. (2005). *Creating Outsiders: Endangered Languages, Migration and Marginalisation* (Proc. FEL IX, Stellenbosch, South Africa, 18-20 November 2005), Bath: Foundation for Endangered Languages, pp.23-31.

## **Concluding remarks**

The Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University is one of the best places in Japan for the study of problems related to the Russian Federation. My collaboration with Japanese colleagues in the field of ethnolinguistics started in 1990 with the first scientific expedition to Sakhalin and since then the exchange of scholars between Hokkaido/Japan and Sakhalin/Russia has developed further. My stay in Japan during the research period has intensified this contact and a further exchange of experience and joint projects will become possible.

I was invited to contribute to the International Expert Meeting on the UNESCO Program *Safeguarding of Endangered Languages*. There we accepted various recommendations to the national governments and stressed the importance of mutual contacts between researchers in the field of endangered languages. It should be stated that the study of processes of language endangerment and maintenance has become a very important task for the linguistic community and should be supported further.

My study of the Ainu situation in Japan has yielded important information, which I can use in future joint projects with Russian scholars. I hope that the results of our projects in collaboration with Russian and Japanese colleagues will contribute further to this documentation and to the preservation of Russia's cultural heritage.

It is important that institutions such as the Slavic Research Centre at Hokkaido University continue to be involved in the study of the cultural aspects of the Russian Federation and that scholars in many countries are able to learn about the developments in the Russian Federation by studying them together. I am very grateful to the SRC for offering me this scholarship for the highly interesting stay in Japan and I thank my Japanese hosts for providing excellent facilities for doing my research. I hope that my future work will further contribute to the international contacts between Japanese and Russian scholars.

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