

A JAPANESE CONTACT VARIETY IN THE NORTH: EVIDENCE FROM SAKHALIN ISLAND IN RUSSIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

A number of sociolinguistic studies have been conducted to render detailed descriptions of dialect contact phenomenon. One of the major notions in dialect contact studies, according to Trudgill (1986), is *dialect transplantation*. A dialect transplantation situation occurs when a language variety is “transplanted” into another area with a certain number of the language speakers and with a certain period of their residence. This paper studies one of the former colonies of Japan, Sakhalin, and discusses the status of the Japanese language over the course of the history of Sakhalin.

2. SAKHALIN ISLAND: A BRIEF ILLUSTRATION

Sakhalin Island is located to the north of Hokkaido Island, a northernmost island in Japan (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 for its location). Sakhalin Island is also adjacent to mainland Russia. The size of this island is 78,000 km², which is a little bit larger than that of Hokkaido. The population of Sakhalin Island in 2002 was about 579,000.

3. STATUS OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE IN SAKHALIN

This section overviews the transition of the status of the Japanese language on Sakhalin Island. As stated elsewhere (Asahi 2005, 2006), the status of the Japanese language changed especially in accordance with the ownership of this island. This paper categorizes its history into the following four periods: (a) indigenous inhabitants’ period, (b) Russian domination period, (c) Japanese domination period, and (d) Russian re-domination period. The rest of this section follows this categorisation and explains the linguistic situation in each period.

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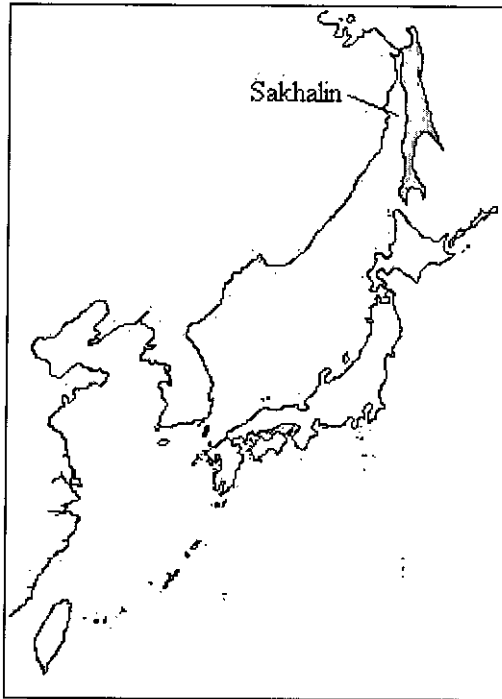


FIGURE 1
Sakhalin Island

3.1. Indigenous inhabitants' period

Indigenous inhabitants, such as the Uilta, Nivkh, Ainu, and Evenki, are the oldest residents on Sakhalin Island. Before the appearance of Russian and Japanese, Nivkh and Ainu functioned as a lingua franca. At that time, when Japanese local governmental officials visited Sakhalin Island, they took an interpreter of Ainu. This indicates that Ainu and Nivkh were ranked as the highest in status during this period, and the status of Japanese was low.

3.2. Russian domination period

In 1875, Sakhalin became a Russian territory. As this island was used as a place of exile, a number of criminals from western Russia were sent to this island. Linguistically speaking, European languages, such as Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian, were “transplanted” to this island. Although the population census in 1897 indicated the existence of Japanese, the Japanese language was not widespread. The status of this language was not high.

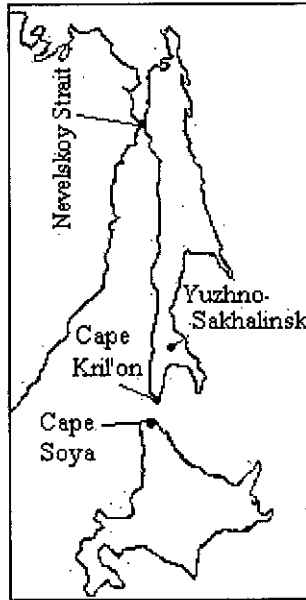


FIGURE 2

Sakhalin Island and the surrounding areas

3.3. Japanese domination period

After the completion of the Portsmouth Treaty in 1905, the southern part of Sakhalin became a Japanese territory. Japan maintained her ownership of this island for 40 years. A number of Japanese immigrated to this island, and the population reached about 220,000 in 1941. Japanese language education to non-native speakers of Japanese was conducted as well. The status of Japanese language was, eventually, high. It was used in public, Japanese local newspapers were published, and Japanese literature by non-native speakers occurred, too.

3.4. Russian re-domination period

When World War II ended in 1945, the Russian Army attacked Sakhalin Island, and Russia dominated this island soon after. Until 1947, Russian and Japanese lived together. A large number of Russians moved onto this island, and language contact between Japanese and Russian was observed. Eventually, Japanese residents at that time needed to acquire a certain degree of Russian in order to interact with Russians. After 1947, most Japanese residents returned to Japan. It follows that Russian became a dominant language and that Japanese language status became low again.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has illustrated the status of the Japanese language over the course of the history of Sakhalin Island. The status of Japanese changed to a large extent. Although Japanese became an official language during the Japanese domination period, its status did not last for a long time. Russian has become such a dominant language that the Japanese language is, in reality, faced with its extinction.

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