

ANOTHER JAPANESE REGIONAL KOINE OF KURIL JAPANESE

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Abstract

This paper investigates sociolinguistic situation in a Russian island of the Kuril Islands, and points out the possibility of the establishment of a Japanese regional koine. Plant names were raised for an analysis, and this paper found out that a large degree of borrowings were made from an adjacent dialect of Hokkaido. Apart from it, it was dialects of Tohoku and other regions that came into the Kuril Japanese, which coincides with the distribution of the plant itself. Analyses also showed that a dialectal form of a different kind of plant was used in place of the original plant name in the Kuril Islands. On the contrary, general terminologies are also given to some plant names, as well. With a mixture of numerous dialectal features and diverse nature of the community, this paper claims that a regional koine of Japanese emerged in course of its 130 years history of Japanese speakers.

Keywords

Kuril Islands, Japanese, plant name, dialects, koine

1. Introduction

Located between Hokkaido, a northern island of Japan, and the Kamchatka peninsula, the Kuril Islands (or Chishima Islands in Japanese) consist of more than 50 islands. A history of the Kuril Islands clearly shows that a number of ethnic groups move from the both ends of the islands to the other ends for their trade. In fact, this island has received a number of ethnic groups. In the same way as Sakhalin in Russia, this island has been a multiethnic society. On the other hand, these islands were, and have been a target for an ownership dispute between Russia and Japan. This ownership

problem especially in the Southern Kuril does not find its solution even after 65 years' period. Whereas Japan claims ownership of this part of the islands, Russia has made a declaration of ownership.

In a sociolinguistic sense, the Kuril Islands are an ideal case in the sense that it has undergone societal multilingualism for more than a century. A socio-historical situation for Kuril Ainu language needs a detailed description although this topic is not within a scope of this paper. Kuril Japanese, a scope of this paper, has emerged as a regional koine in the course of her history. In fact, this island received Japanese migrants between 1816 and 1945. Almost 130 years' period of the ownership would not be too short for a regional koine to be formulated. This koine, however, lost most of the speakers at the end of the 1940s when Russian settled in the Kuril Islands. Whilst former islanders spend their life in Hokkaido, the formation process of the Kuril Japanese itself was stopped at this point. Fortunately enough, it is possible to have an access to the islanders even today though those who remember their old days back in the Kuril Islands are faced with problems of aging.

This paper pays a close attention to this Japanese variety, especially to plant names, to claim that this Japanese variety includes a number of dialectal features from different Japanese dialects. Based on this claim, this paper will consider to what extent this Japanese is a regional koine. The first section briefly describes general information about the Kuril Islands. The language contact history of the island will be illustrated, and the Japanese language features will be discussed using plant names from the Kuril Islands. Based on the discussion, this paper will summarise my findings in the analysis and the dialect contact situation in the islands.

2. General description of the Kuril Islands

Before looking at the sociolinguistic situation of the Kuril Islands, this section renders a brief sketch of the Kuril Islands. They stretch from the eastern end of Hokkaido to the northern end of the Kamchatka Peninsula, a total distance of 1,180 km (Figure1).

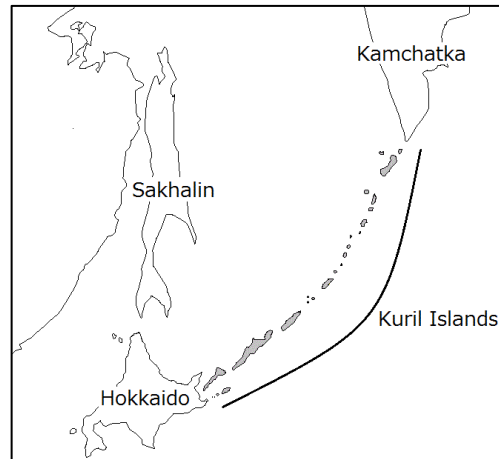


Figure 1. Location of the Kuril Islands

Currently, only Kunashir, Iturup, Shikotan, and Paramushir islands have local residents (as shown in grey in Figure 1). The population of the Kuril Islands was 18,730 in 2009 (General Consulate of Japan in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, p.c.) Their detailed ethnic composition is, to the best of my knowledge, unknown. However, it is more likely that major ethnic groups are Russian, and Ukrainians. Japanese are said not to live on the islands.

3. Sociolinguistic situations in the Kuril Islands

This section provides a diachronic account for the sociolinguistic situations in the Kuril Islands. As mentioned earlier, the Kuril Islands expand its distribution of nearly 2,000km. Eventually, the regional differences would exist within the islands.

With a close look at the situation of the Kuril Islands, most islanders have spent their life in the Northern Kuril or in the Southern Kuril in course of her history. Therefore, this section focuses on these two areas. It may be true that some people lived in the Central Kuril. However, I have not collected enough information to give any illustrations. For this reason, the description of this area would be described in another paper.

3.1. Sociolinguistic situation in the Northern Kuril

It is said that Kuril Ainu is the very first resident in the northern Kuril, especially in the Shumushu Island. Since 1875, they were forced to evacuate from this island, and to move to the Shikotan Island soon after the unauthorized fishery boats were active in those areas.

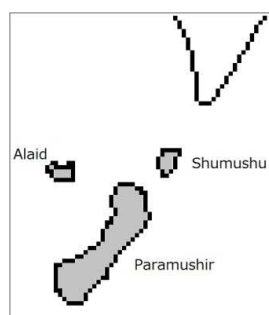


Figure 2 Northern Kuril

Since 1893, Japanese came to settle in the Shumushu Island through the explorations by some associations such as *Chishima Kōhōgikai* (Kuril association for the reclamation and defence). By 1896, the number of the settlers increased up to 49. At the island, along with the fishery industry, they had their domestic animals, made their fields for vegetables, established canneries, and even started primary schools (Hokkaido 1963).

Along with this movement, industry prospered in the Northern Kuril Islands. Fishery industries, including cod, salmon, trout and crab, were prosperous at that time. As a result, there were more than 15,000 temporary labourers in this particular area. Table 1 shows a number of migrant workers and settlers between 1938 and 1940.

(Number)

Year	Settlers			Migrant workers		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1937	170	117	53	14,487	14,049	438
1938	182	120	62	15,737	15,399	338
1938	164	110	54	18,036	17,677	359
1940	152	102	50	18,037	17,679	360

Table 1 Population in the Northern Kuril (Hokkaido 1963)

According to Hokkaido (1963), the dialectal backgrounds of the islanders in the Northern Kuril is characterised by a dominant proportion of migrant workers from northern Japan, i.e. Hokkaido and Tohoku. However, the dialectal backgrounds of those who lived on a permanent basis are not available in any references although it is likely that more immigrants came from Aomori, a northernmost prefecture of the mainland Japan. It is, therefore, possible to assume that Hokkaido dialects and Aomori (and Tohoku?) dialects were in contact.

Interestingly enough, in the Northern Kuril, migrant workers were a major group at that time. Although details about the workers' background are not clear, a number of dialects were surely in contact for a restricted, but certain period of time. Soon after the end of the World War II, the Soviet army took ownership of this island. Islanders were eventually evacuated from there, and came back to Japan via Sakhalin.

3.2. Sociolinguistic situation in the Southern Kuril

The southern Kuril consists of four islands, i.e. Kunashir, Iturup, Shikotan, and Habomai Islands. Immigration towards the Southern Kuril started since the beginning of the 19th century. In 1816, it was decided by the Japanese government that Kunashir and Iturup were controlled for the security by *Akita-han* (*han* was a political unit in those days, which is equivalent to prefecture, in today's Japan), and *Sendai-han* respectively. Since this decision, migration to the islands proceeded to a great extent.

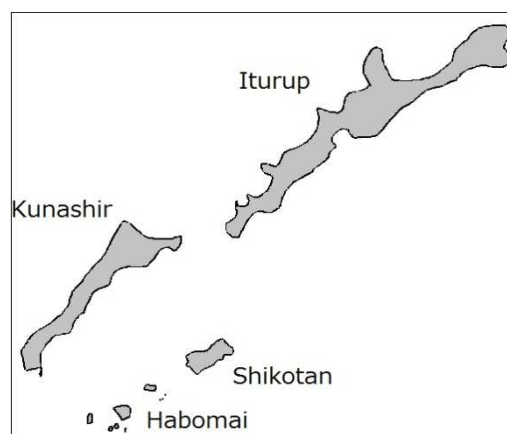


Figure 3. Southern Kuril

The sociolinguistic picture of each island in the Southern Kuril differs from one island to another. Islanders of Kunashir, Shikotan, and Habomai had a strong connection with Hokkaido. In particular, Nemuro, an easternmost city of Hokkaido, played an important economic as well as political role in the relationship.

Table 2 shows a rough population in the Southern Kuril in 1945. This table shows that around 16,000 islanders are said to live in the Southern Kuril Islands. Moreover, the population of the Kunashir and Habomai is larger than other groups. This has something to do with the geographical closeness with Hokkaido.

(Number)

	Population
Habumai	4,455
Shikotan	920
Kunashir	7,370
Iturup	3,760
Total	16,505

Table 2 Rough population of the settlers in Southern Kuril (Hokkaido (1958))

The major industry in the Southern Kuril is the fishery. The percentage of those who engage in the fishery is the highest in Habomai Islands (95.2%). Similar trends can be found in Kunashir (83.7%), Shikotan (83.4%), and Iturup (57.2%).

Soon after the end of the WWII, Japanese residents were forced to leave island. According to Hokkaido (1958), 83% of them evacuated back to Hokkaido, 17% to outside of Hokkaido. Interestingly enough, 40% of those who lived in Hokkaido decided to settle either in Nemuro, an easternmost city of Hokkaido or in its surrounding area. This can be the very characteristic feature when it comes to the Southern Kuril islanders. Apart from those living back in Hokkaido, some of the islanders settled in Toyama (9%) and in Aomori (5%).

Through a look at the sociolinguistic situations in the Southern Kuril, it is possible to extrapolate the dialect backgrounds of the islanders. Southern Kuril shows a similar composition of the dialects with the Northern Kuril. Hokkaido is the largest group, which is followed by Tohoku and Hokuriku region, each of which includes Aomori and Toyama respectively.

3.3. Sociolinguistic characteristics in the formation of the Kuril dialect

Previous sections revealed that it is sensible when it comes to the formation of the Kuril dialect to take influences from dialects in Hokkaido, Tohoku, and Hokuriku regions into consideration. Their dialects were transplanted into the Kuril Islands, and dialect contact situation emerged. What should be noted here is that the contact settings observed in the Kuril Islands are almost identical to those in Sakhalin (Asahi 2010, 2008, forthcoming, etc.) as well as those in Hokkaido (Ishigaki 1983, etc.).

In this regard, it is even possible to assume that dialects contact on the three islands would show, as a result, both similarities and differences to varying degrees. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the relationships amongst three dialects, especially their relationships with the Hokkaido dialect. The rest of this paper shall examine this contact phenomenon through written materials and survey data.

4. Linguistic features in the Kuril Islands

This section looks into examples of the Kuril dialect in written materials and in survey data. Specifically, this section focuses on a dialectal form of plant names in the Kuril Islands.

4.1. Plant vocabulary listed in Chishima Retto Shokubutsu Zukan

Firstly, let us take a look at the dialectal features observed in a written material. There are a number of references on the Kuril Islands in various fields. *Chishima Retto Shokubutsu Zukan* (Illustrated Guide to the Kuril Islands Flora) was published by a head of the department of medicine in the Northern Division of the Japanese army in May 1945, to report the distributions of plants on the islands.

This guide book, symbolically represented by the publication of the doctor, illustrates the plants (poisonous plants, medical plants, and edible plants) observed in the Kuril Islands. Moreover, it is extremely intriguing that dialectal forms are also written to some plants. These forms were collected through local islanders so as for the

distribution to become availableograms for these 120 tokens were created using Praat 4.4.20 (Boersma & Weenink 2006).

Out of 237 items listed in this guide book, 52 items have dialectal forms. The rest of this paper pays a close attention to their distribution patterns, relationships with mainland Japanese dialects, and their naming patterns. In particular, this section raises

- (1) Original Kuril plant names in the Kuril Islands
- (2) Plant names derived from the mainland Japanese dialects
- (3) Application of a general term to several plant names.

(2) can be further divided into (2-1) the application of a dialect form from the same plant names, (2-2) the application of a dialect form from another plant names. The rest of this section, therefore, follows this categorisation so as to examine any characteristics of the plant names in the Kuril Islands. It is necessary here to note that in comparing the plant names observed in this material with mainland Japanese dialects, I decided to consult with Yasakashobo (2001) and Ishigaki (1983) for reference.

4.1.1. Original plant names in the Kuril Islands

Table 3 is a list of the original dialect plant names in the Kuril Islands. It is certain that some names may have their distributions in mainland Japan in such area as Hokkaido. However, their dialectal forms themselves are, to the best knowledge of this author, peculiar to the Kuril Islands. Five plants names are categorised as the original dialect forms in a Kuril dialect.

In Table 3 (and also in Table 4, Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7), dialect forms are written with its standard Japanese name, botanical name, and classification. Also, ‘distribution’ in Table 3 (and also in Table 4, Table 5, and Table 7) shows the geographical distribution of the plant itself. ○ shows that the plant has this area in its distribution and × shows that it does not. ‘Relationship with mainland dialect’ means whether or not the dialect form can be found in the mainland dialects. A grey cell means that it can be found, and a white cell means that it cannot. The geographical information on the category of the region in Japan (i.e. Hokkaido, Tohoku, and others) is shown in Figure 4.

	Dialect form	Japanese Name	Botanical Name	Classification	Distribution			Relationship with mainland dialects				
					South	Middle	North	Hokkaido	Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Other regions
1	kojaku	shaku	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Apiaceae	○	○	×					
2	hakkagusa	ezohakka	<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	Lamiaceae	○	○	×					
3	ringogusa	koshikagiku	<i>Matricaria matricarioides</i> (Less.) Porter	Asteraceae	○	○	○					
4	sukambo	takensuipa	<i>Rumex montanus</i>	Polygonaceae	○	○	○					
5	benisarasa	ezorennrisō	<i>Lathyrus palustris</i> var. <i>pilosus</i>	Fabaceae	○	○	○					

Table 3. Original dialectal forms of the Kuril plants

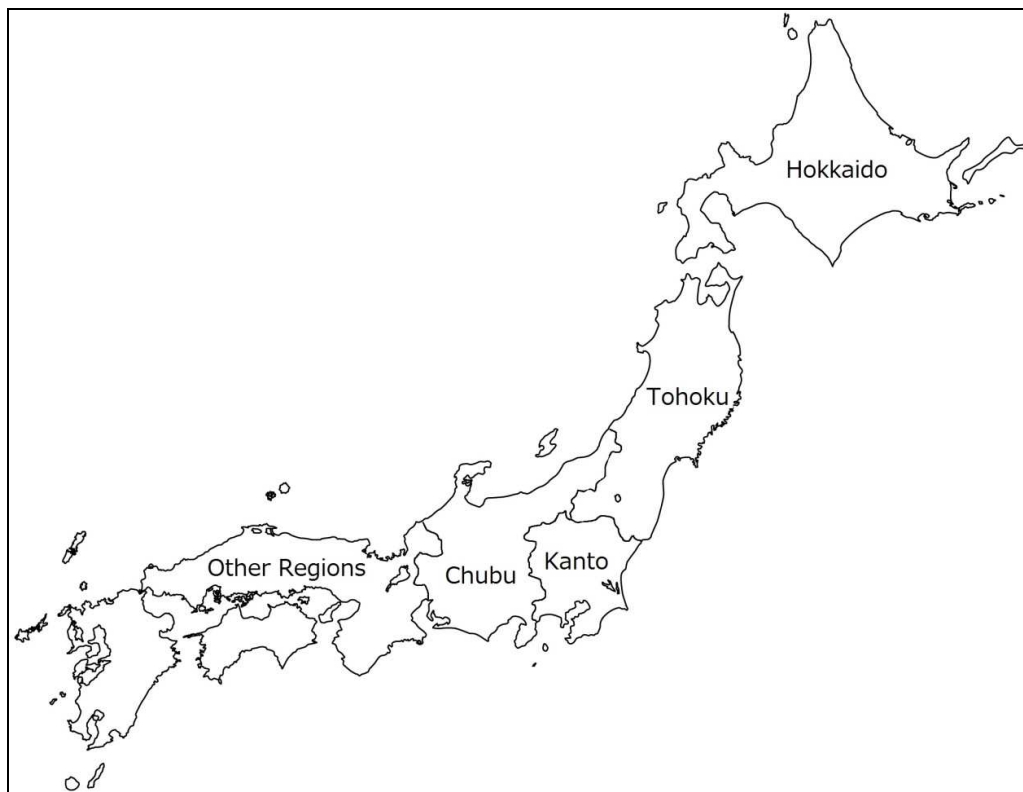


Figure 4. Relevant regions of Japan

Distributions of the five dialectal forms are generally wide, i.e. their distributions do not limit to a specific area of the Kuril Islands. The dialectal forms, needless to say, do not exist in the mainland Japanese dialect although the forms might be used for another kind of the plant. These forms are thought to be named through their sociolinguistic life in the Kuril Islands.

What should be stated here is that the number of the dialectal forms is never large enough to make any claims that interdialectal forms were born. Rather, it is likely that most dialect plant names are derived from mainland Japanese dialects.

4.1.2. Plant names derived from the mainland Japanese dialects

This section focuses on the plants in the Kuril Islands whose dialectal forms are taken from the mainland Japanese dialects. Table 4 and Table 5 are the dialect plant forms observed in the *Chishima Retto Shokubutsu Zukan*. As mentioned earlier, the way how the dialect forms are given is different between Table 4 and Table 5, in the sense that the former takes dialect forms from the same plant whereas the latter takes them from another kind of the plant.

4.1.2.1. Dialect plant names from the same plant names

Firstly, let's take a look at the dialectal forms of the plant whose distribution covers not only all of (or a part of) the Kuril Islands but some parts of mainland Japan. Table 4 collects 22 dialectal forms. The dialect forms in Table 4 show a strong relationship with mainland dialects, especially with Hokkaido dialect forms. In fact, 18 out of 22 names share their dialectal forms with a Hokkaido dialect. It indicates that the local islanders had a number of opportunities to see these plants which look exactly the same as the ones they saw in Hokkaido.

The influence of Hokkaido dialectal forms can be found throughout the Kuril Islands. Those plants whose distribution covers with all parts of the Kuril Islands (no.8 through no. 13 in Table 4) have the same dialectal form with a Hokkaido dialect (although some names (no.12 and no.13 in Table 4) also include Tohoku dialect features). It follows that whilst the distribution of the plant reaches a northern end of the Kuril Islands, islanders basically borrowed the same features from Hokkaido dialectal forms, not giving new names to the plants.

Some plant names also include dialectal forms apart from Hokkaido. No.19 through to No. 22 take the dialectal forms from Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu, and so forth. It might be possible that the dialectal form is found in Hokkaido. Interestingly enough, however, all the plant names in this group can be found only in the Southern Kuril Islands.

	Dialect form	Japanese Name	Botanical Name	Classification	Distribution			Relationship with mainland dialects				
					South	Middle	North	Hokkaido	Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Other regions
1	rirî	suzuran	Convallaria keiskei	Liliaceae	○	×	×					
2	umadaishi	ezogishigishi	Rumex japonicus	Polygonaceae	○	×	×					
3	unbairo	ôubayuri	Cardiocrinum cordatum Makino	Liliaceae	○	×	×					
4	yachikogomi	yamadorizenmai	Osmundastrum cinnamomeum var. fokiense	Osmundaceae	○	×	×					
5	hebinodaihachi	mamushigusa	Arisaema serratum	Araceae	○	×	×					
6	nemagari	chishimazasa	Sasa kurilensis	Poaceae	○	○	×					
7	bôna	yobumasasô	Cacalia hastata	Asteraceae	○	○	×					
8	ainunegi	gyôjaninniku	longrooted onion	Liliaceae	○	○	○					
9	kitobiru	gyôjaninniku	longrooted onion	Liliaceae	○	○	○					
10	nanatuba	hangonsô	Senecio cannabifolius	Asteraceae	○	○	○					
11	fureppu	kokemomo	Vaccinium vitis-idaea	Ericaceae	○	○	○					
12	bekonoshita	mitsubasô	Achlys japonica	Berberidaceae	○	○	○					
13	kokenomi	gankôran	Empetrum nigrum	Ericaceae	○	○	○					
14	gambi	shirakanba	Betula platyphylla	Betulaceae	○	×	×					
15	kogomi	kusatotetsu	Matteuccia struthiopteris	Athyriaceae	○	×	×					
16	akadamo	harunire	Ulmus davidiana var. japonica	Ulmaceae	○	×	×					
17	nekojarashi	enokorogusa	Setaria viridis	Poaceae	○	×	×					
18	ombako	oobako	Plantago asiatica	Plantaginaceae	○	×	×					
19	kusamenoki	ezourajirohanahirinoki	Leucothoe grayana	Ericaceae	○	×	×					
20	otokoyama	ezourajirohanahirinoki	Leucothoe grayana	Ericaceae	○	×	×					
21	akamamma	inudate	Polygonum longisetum	Polygonaceae	○	×	×					
22	penpengusa	nazuna	Capsella bursa-pastoris	Brassicaceae	○	×	×					

Table 4. Plant names derived from the mainland dialects

4.1.2.2. Dialect plant names from the similar plant names

Table 5 is a summary of dialect plant names borrowed from mainland dialects, but from a different (though similar) kind of the plant. It is often the case when the plant name in origin is a general (or super-ordinate) name, and the plant names in the Kuril Islands is categorized as one subcategory. In fact, both of *erimaki*, and *kaikusa* are dialectal forms in mainland dialects of *mayumi* and *ikurasa*, both of which correspond to *ezomayumi* and *chishimaikurasa*.

	Dialect form	Japanese Name	Botanical name	Classification	Distribution			Origin plant name of the dialect form	Relationship with mainland dialects				
					South	Middle	North		Hokkaido	Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Other regions
1	erimaki	ezomayumi	<i>Euonymus hamiltonianus</i>	Celastraceae	○	×	×	mayumi					
2	yamasoba	ōbanaenreisō	<i>Trillium tschonoskii</i>	Liliaceae	○	○	○	miyamaereiō					
3	kaikusa	chishimaikurasa	<i>Urtica platyphylla</i>	Urticaceae	×	○	○	ikurasa					
4	sukambo	chishimagishigishi	<i>Rumex japonicus</i>	Polygonaceae	×	×	○	sukambo					
5	kaikusa	kaisaikugusa	<i>Urtica platyphylla</i>	Urticaceae	○	×	×	ikurasa					
6	dongui	ootadori	<i>Polygonum sachalinense</i>	Polygonaceae	○	×	×	itadori					
7	hagi	ezoyamahagi	<i>Lespedeza bicolor</i>	Fabaceae	○	×	×	yamahagi					
8	bushi	chishimitorikabuto	<i>Aconitum maximum</i>	Ranunculaceae	○	○	○	torikabuto					
9	nadeshiko	ezokawaranadeshiko	<i>Dianthus superbus</i>	Caryophyllaceae	○	×	×	kawaranadeshiko					
10	urui	tachikiboushi	plantain lily	Liliaceae	○	×	×	giboushi					

Table 5 Plant names taken from similar plant names

Relationships with mainland dialect forms are also interesting in the sense that most of the relevant plant names are borrowed from both Hokkaido and Tohoku. Different from Table 4, a use of Tohoku dialects in applying dialectal forms is more common. It is possible to assume in this particular respect that the more general sources for a dialect name become, the more likely it becomes for dialectal forms from other than Hokkaido to be adopted.

4.1.3. Application of a general term into several plant names

Thirdly, as shown in Table 6, some plant names take general terminology as their forms. The ‘dialect forms’ do not necessarily belong to any specific dialects. In fact, most of them can be regarded as Tokyo (or standard) Japanese forms. Examples are *tampopo*, *yomogi*, *rindo*, and so forth.

A main reason why this general form is adopted in these plant names can be attributed to their similarity. Technical/specialized knowledge would be required so as to make an accurate classification of the plants. Classification of *tampopo*, for instance, has several names although almost all of the plants look the same. It is, therefore, sensible that they gave a common name to different types of the plant although their distributions differ from one plant to another.

	Dialect form	Japanese Name	Botanical name	Classification	Distribution		
					South	Middle	North
1	akahagi	ezoyamabukishoma	Aruncus dioicus var. kamtschaticus f. tomentosus	Spiraeoideae	○	×	×
		yamabukishoma	Aruncus dioicus var. kamtschaticus		○	○	○
		chishimaazami	Cirsium kamtschaticum Ledeb.	Asteraceae	○	○	○
2	tampopo	etorofutampopo	Taraxacum miyake	Asteraceae	○	×	×
		shikotantampopo	Taraxacum shikotanense		○	○	×
		ketoitampopo	Taraxacum ketojense		×	○	×
		shimushirutampopo	Taraxacum vulcanorum		×	○	×
		araitampopo	Taraxacum perlatesens		×	×	○
		kotampopo	Taraxacum kojimae		×	×	○
		shumushutampopo	Taraxacum camtschaticum		×	×	○
		hosobatampopo	Taraxacum trigonolobum		×	×	○
		marubatampopo	Taraxacum ketoense		×	×	○
3	yomena	kouzorina	Picris	Asteraceae	○	○	×
		kanchikouzorina	Picris hieracioides ssp. Kamtschatica		○	○	○
4	yomogi	ezoyomogi	Artemisia montana (Nakai) Pamp.	Asteraceae	○	○	×
		chishimayomogi	Artemisia unalaskensis		×	○	○
5	rindō	ezirundou	Gentiana triflora var. japonica	Gentianaceae	○	×	×
6	sakura	ezoyamazakura	Prunus sargentii	Cerasus	○	×	×
7	hanaudo	ohonahauo	Heracleum lanatum	Apiaceae	○	○	○

Table 6. Application of the general plant names

4.2. Plant vocabulary in Iturup

This section focuses on the plant vocabulary reported by a former islander of Iturup in the Southern Kuril. I conducted an interview in Nemuro in December 2009 to collect spontaneous speech data. One of the speakers from a small village of Shibetori in Iturup island, (born in 1935, female) reported on her life in Iturup, and mentioned some ‘dialect forms’ she remembers until today. Some of the dialectal features included plant names. Interestingly enough, her information on a plant name is not found in the reference book we saw in section 4.1. Table 6 is a summary of what she reported to be a dialectal form of several plants.

Dialectal forms in Table 6 are the forms that she actually reported using during her childhood. Therefore, it is next to impossible that her report would be listed in the ‘*Chishima Retto Shokubutu Zukan.*’ Base on this assumption, it is possible to consider the followings;

- (1) Same dialectal features are used both in Hokkaido and Aomori

Three items (*imonoko*, *kanzo*, and *kokenomi*) belong to this category. As seen in section 4.1, it is certain that the some lexical forms are identical between Iturup and

other southern Kuril Islands. What is more, these forms were transplanted from Aomori.

(2) Vocabulary on *fureppu* is developed

The speaker found this fruit, *fureppu*. She reported that she had several terms for *fureppu* based on when to eat them, their colour, and size. Some of the items are shared with Sakhalin Japanese.

	Dialect form	Japanese Name	Botanical name	Classification	Relationship with mainland dialects				
					Hokkaido	Tohoku	Kanto	Chubu	Other regions
1	kanzo	ezokanzo	<i>Hemerocallis middendorffii</i>	Liliaceae					
2	akajifureppu	ezokurousugo	<i>Vaccinium ovalifolium</i> var. <i>coriaceum</i>	Ericaceae					
3	icchari	iwatsutsuji	<i>Vaccinium praestans</i> Lamb.	Ericaceae					
4	imomochi	miyamananakamado	<i>Sorbus sambuchifolia</i> var. <i>pseudoglacilis</i>	Rosaceae					
5	kitunefureppu	maizurusô	<i>Maianthemum dilatatum</i>	Liliaceae					
6	hegakka	gozentachibana	<i>Chamaepericlymenum canadense</i>	Cornaceae					
7	masufureppu	hasukappu	<i>Lonicera caerulea</i> L. var. <i>emphylocalyx</i> Nakai	Caprifoliaceae					
8	kokenomi	gankôran	<i>Empetrum nigrum</i>	Empetraceae					
9	imonoko	satoimo	<i>Colocasia esculenta</i>	Araceae					

Table 7. Plant names in Shibetori Villiage, Iturup

(3) Etymology of some words is not known

She reported that one of the lexical items, *begakka*, was in active use in her childhood. She did not know its etymology. It is necessary to clarify this etymology through my further research.

5. Formation of Kuril dialect during the Japanese residential period

This section considers the formation of the Kuril dialect based upon the lexical features in the previous sections. It was in the 1810s when Japanese first settled in some parts of the Kuril Islands. Since then, a Japanese regional variety started to form in the following 135 years of her history. Japanese dialects mainly from Hokkaido, Tohoku (including Aomori) were brought to the islands. Kuril dialect, based on its sociolinguistic circumstance, was established through continual contacts with other Japanese dialects. This section, therefore, attempts to draw its sociolinguistic picture through a history of the islands and through the features of plant names.

Figure 5 illustrates a relationship between the composition of the islanders both in Southern and Northern Kuril Islands during the Japanese residential period, and the features observed in plant vocabulary. Both Southern and Northern Kuril Islanders have a similar composition of the community, both of which consists of settlers and temporary labours. In this sense, the sociolinguistic settings are particularly similar. However, difference is that a major group in Southern Kuril Islands is settlers whilst a major group in the Northern Kuril Islands is migrant workers. This difference would surely have a certain amount of influence upon the degree of the stability of this phenomenon.

In Southern Kuril Islands, a number of plant vocabulary items are influenced largely by Hokkaido and Tohoku dialects. As a result, they changed their forms in varying extent so that some forms became idiosyncratic. On the other hand, in Northern Kuril Islands, although a high degree of contact did occur amongst temporary labours, the phenomenon did not get stabilised due to the fact that they stayed on the island for a limited period of time. An example of *tampopo* used in the Northern Kuril would be very representative. In this sense, it is possible to assume that the language change is observed in accordance with its sociolinguistic setting.

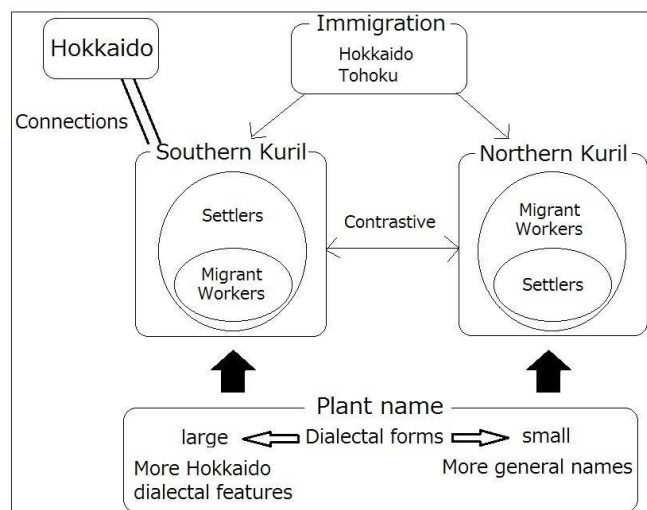


Figure 5. Sociolinguistic situations of the Kuril Islands and plant names

It is necessary here to note that all of the islanders in the Kuril Islands were forcibly evacuated from the Islands soon after the end of the WWII. Kuril Islands had

formed their dialect up until that period. This development suddenly stopped at the end of the 1940s.

The dynamism of language change of the Kuril dialect could be observed only amongst the former islanders who live in the eastern Hokkaido with a sensitive look at their (socio-) linguistic behaviours. In this sense, it is strongly expected to consider the survey design itself when working with this kind of sociolinguistic settings.

6. Conclusions

This paper looked into some examples of a Japanese regional koine formed in the Kuril Islands by examining examples of plant vocabulary developed in the Kuril Islands. Both written materials published during the Japanese period, and interview data are used. Topics discussed include the relationship between Kuril dialectal features and Hokkaido dialect, regional differences within the Kuril dialect, and the stability of the dialectal features.

There are a number of further topics for future research. It is necessary to conduct sociolinguistic surveys with former Kuril islanders to investigate to what extent the plant vocabulary items are widespread. I have been collecting spontaneous speech samples with former Kuril islanders. Based on the speech data, I would like to make a comparison between the features in Kuril Islands and the features in Hokkaido. The main goal of this current study would be to construct the language change path in post-war Kuril dialect.

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