

## LOOKING ANEW AT DATA OLD AND LONG ESTABLISHED

*The task of compiling “European records of the Ainu language”, a chapter for The Handbook of the Ainu Language*

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The value of most of thousands of academic publications appearing every year swiftly diminishes: they become facts soon forgotten and mentioned only in histories of research as bibliographical notes: this is the price of progress. Few remain ultimate sources. Under certain circumstances, however, forgotten research results regain their significance. This is particularly true of records of tongues proclaimed moribund or dead, or offering valuable comparative material.

Languages are doomed to change and death; even state languages of past powerful empires proved mortal. Those having their own scripts have been recorded for posterity but the absolute majority of others disappeared with no traces left. Fortunately, a number of past unwritten languages were documented and the significance of such data is growing. Ainu, an isolate of the past, belongs here.

Asked to compose the text mentioned above, I accepted the proposal only under irrefutable argumentation from Editor of the planned volume, aware of the existence of several such publications by outstanding specialists.

The talk focuses on the vision of the prospective chapter which must include what has already been published – and yet make it new and value-added. Not every record (this pertains to history) is of the same importance (this concerns handbooks).