

## On the etymology of the Ainu word *\*emciu/\*emciw*

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### Abstract

Japanese words *emishi*, *ebisu* and *ezo* were derived from Ainu *\*emciu/\*emciw*. In the word-form of *emciw* can be singled out the suffix of *-iw* that is used in counting people: *iwan-iw* “six people”, i.e.: the *-iw* suffix means “human being”, or “people”. We suppose that the word-form of *emciw* is an example of fusion: *i* belongs to the suffix and to the stem at once, so the stem is *emci*. This *emci* correlates with the personal marker of *enci=* that is used in Ishikari/Asahikawa and in Tokachi dialects. This personal marker expresses first person singular in the forms that can be interpreted as passive, it shows that first person singular is a patient, a target or a beneficiary of an action. In this *enci=* the attention is especially focused on the first person singular. And thus, the word *emciw* can be translated as “my people”, “my group”, “ours”.

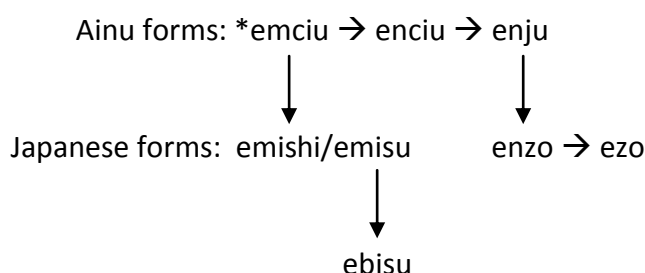
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### 1. Introduction to the problem

Emishi is an ethnic group mentioned in old Japanese chronicles such as Nihon Shoki 日本書記, Tenshoki 天書記 and also other recordings. This ethnic group is also called Ebisu and Ezo. Emishi people are generally considered as direct ancestors of modern Ainu or as an ethnic group related to Ainu.

Japanese words of *emishi*, *ebisu* and *ezo* were derived from Ainu form *\*emciu/\*emciw*<sup>1</sup> (Kindaichi 2004: 113 – 115; Akulov, Nonno 2021: 12 – 13).

The processes of transformation of Ainu form *\*emciu* into Japanese forms can be summarized in the following scheme:



<sup>1</sup> In Practical Latin Orthography this word can be written as *emciu* as well as *emciw*.

The form of *emishi/emisu* seems to be the oldest Japanese form, *ebisu* appeared later and *ezo* seems to be the latest (for more details see Akulov, Nonno 2021: 12 – 13)

Although the Ainu origin of the word *emishi* is quite evident, its original meaning is unclear, and so in the current paper we are going to clarify this issue.

## 2. The inner structure of the Ainu word *emciw*

It is possible to say that in the word-form of *emciw* can be singled out the suffix of *-iw* that is used in counting people, this suffix can be seen in such word-forms as, for instance: *iwān-iw* “six people”, *arwān-iw* “seven people” or *wān-iw* “ten people”.

According to Tamura the *-iw* suffix is used with stems that end in consonants while with stems that end in vowels is used the *-n* suffix (Tamura 2000: 255 – 256).

At the first sight it is possible to say that in the case of *emciw* the stem is *ent*<sup>2</sup>, however, we suppose that the word-form of *emciw* is an example of fusion, i.e.: *i* belongs to the suffix and the stem at once, and so the stem is *emci*.

## 3. Interpretation of the meaning of the word *emciw*

From the above-shown numeral forms it is possible to conclude that the *-iw* suffix has the meaning “human being” and “people”.

The component of *emci* can be correlated with the personal marker of *enci*=<sup>3</sup> that is used in Ishikari/Asahikawa<sup>4</sup> and in Tokachi dialects. This personal marker expresses first person singular in forms that can be interpreted as forms of passive voice<sup>5</sup> (Ōta 2005: 35). This marker correlates with the subject of the sentence, and it shows that the first person singular is a patient or a target or a beneficiary of an action. When this marker is used in a verb, then a marker of agent is absent. Below are shown some examples of sentences with the marker.

An example from the Ishikari/Asahikawa dialect: *enci=emina* – I am laughed at (Ōta 2005: 35).

An example from the Tokachi dialect:

*kuani(1) anakne(2) ku=rupneutari(3) somo wen kur ne(4) kus(5) pirkano(6) enci=resu(7) kan an(8)*

since(5) my adults(3) are not bad/poor people(4) I(1) topic marker(2) am raised(7) well(6) a marker of present continuous tense or a continuous aspect(8) (Kawakami 2016: 24 ).

<sup>2</sup> In the Ainu language the [ts] sound expressed by the c letter can't be in the final position of a syllable, and taking into account the fact that from the point of view of history [ts] originated from [t], it is possible to say that there could be the stem of *ent*.

<sup>3</sup> The form *enci* evidently can be considered as a form derived from the form of *emciw*. The form *enci* appeared under the influence of the Japanese language. In Ainu [m] and [n] are easily interchangeable sounds, (for instance *tanpe* “this thing” often is written down as *tampe*) while in Japanese syllables of Vm structures aren't allowed and so become Vn syllables.

<sup>4</sup> Asahikawa dialect is a local variant of the Ishikari dialect spoken in the region where the city of Asahikawa is currently located (see Fig. 1).

<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Ainu language has no a fully developed passive voice, so it should be described as a language without voices. There are no personal markers like *enci=* for other persons and numbers except *unci=* that performs the same functions as *enci=*, but for the first person plural (Ōta 2005: 234). In addition, such markers are represented only in some dialects.

And another example from the Asahikawa dialect:

*kamuy huci(1) tane(2) pakno(3) ku=kor nimak(4) kamuy huci(5) ku=kore(6) haw(7) tap an(8) na(9); pirka(10) nimak(11) enci=kore(12) nankor(13) na(14)* (Ishikarigawa 2014: 29)

*kamuy*<sup>6</sup> of fire(1), till(3) now(2) I gave(6 – 7) my teeth(4) to the kamuy of fire(5) suggestive/affirmative sentence final expression(8 – 9); maybe(13) I will be granted(12) [by] good(10) teeth(11) suggestive/affirmative sentence final particle(14).

This last sentence is about the offering of milk teeth to the kamuy of fire and getting a new good tooth instead: when the milk teeth fell out, they were placed in the furnace.

It is noted that the personal marker of *enci=* is used quite regularly (Ōta 2005: 35).

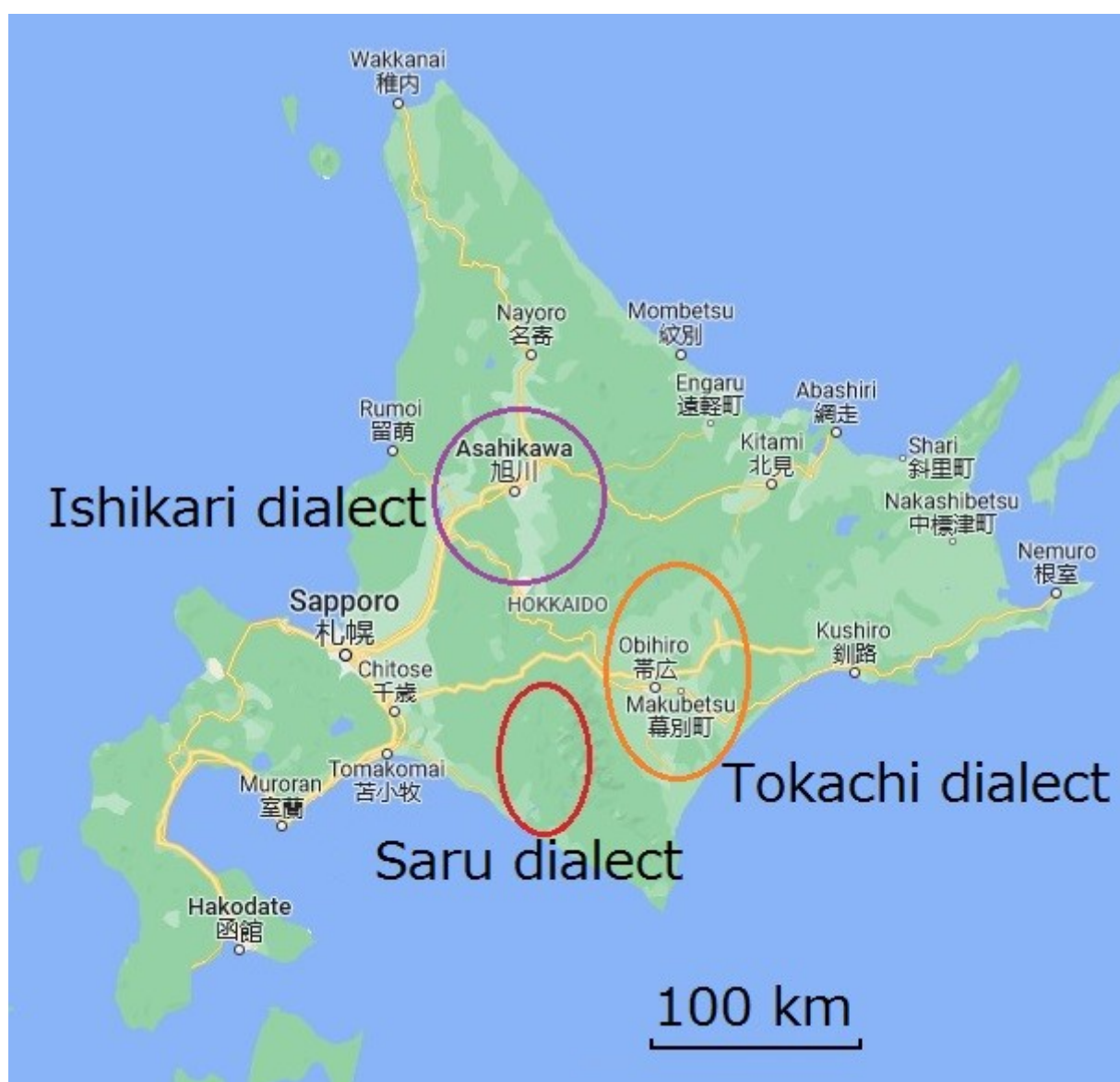


Fig. 1. Map showing regions where the dialects mentioned in the text were and are spread (the map has been drawn after a Google Maps screenshot)

<sup>6</sup> Ainu word *kamuy* means a being/item that is filled with vital energy *ramat* and can share *ramat* or take it away.

From the foregoing it is possible to conclude that in the personal marker of *enci=* the attention is especially focused on the first person singular.

And thus, the word *emciw* can be translated as “my people”, “my local group”, “our people”, or “ours”.

The fact that in modern Ainu *enci=* marks first person singular while as a component of the word-form of *emciw* it most probably means “we” should not be a surprise. A certain shift of meaning is completely normal in the Ainu language, for instance, in Ainu epic poems of the Saru dialect first person singular agent is expressed by *a=* and the same morpheme is used to express first person plural agent, while in modern Saru *a=* is used to express first person plural inclusive agent, but isn't used to express first person singular agent.

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