

Metroethnicity, language, and the principle of Cool

JOHN C. MAHER

Abstract

Cultural essentialism and ethnic orthodoxy are out. In Japan, Metroethnicity is in. Cool rules. Metroethnicity is a reconstruction of ethnicity: a hybridized “street” ethnicity deployed by a cross-section of people with ethnic or mainstream backgrounds who are oriented towards cultural hybridity, cultural/ethnic tolerance and a multicultural lifestyle in friendships, music, the arts, eating and dress. Both Japanese and persons with minority background “play” with ethnicity (not necessarily their own) for aesthetic effect. Metroethnicity is skeptical of heroic ethnicity and bored with sentimentalism about ethnic language. It views such narrative as inevitable but logocentric. Metroethnicity hears the cry of minority rights but positions itself in a more distant and cooler place. This place involves cultural crossings, self-definition made up of borrowing and do-it-yourself, a sfumato of blurred ethnic “identities”. The operating system is Metroethnicity. Its desktop cultural expression is Cool. The cultural effect examined here involves (ethnic) language as an off-the-shelf, take-it-or-leave-it lifestyle accessory that conforms to aesthetic demands rather than ethnolinguistic duty. The criterion for language maintenance and allegiance for the metroethnic then shifts from loyalty to ethnic heritage and political duty to questions of lifestyle emancipation. Is it worthwhile? Is it interesting? Is it funky? Is it a cool thing to do and to have? Cool is the capacity to ignore or minimize the claims of ethnicity. Ethnicity will be deployed — later — for lifestyle purposes when it is deemed cool. Cool is not the same as fashion or popularity. Cool includes a perceived ability to see the flipside or alternative side of things; an ability that multicultural-perspective people or ethnic minorities are uniquely believed to possess. Cool is quirky, innovative and tolerant. Cool is an attitude and a hope. The historic struggle of Japan’s language minorities (Korean, Ainu, new migrant) may be giving way to a new metroethnic generation. Cool has a brittle cultural logic. It is a residual code that has turned itself into an emergent code. Its

performative style is based upon and derives simultaneously from the symbols of both disaffiliation and association. Gone are the immutable ciphers of ethnic identity. Here comes Cool.

Come together. I just want to know what's Cool!
V-6. *Live for the People* Album (2000). (All-boy J-Pop band)

1. Introduction

One winter evening, at an Ainu festival in Tomakomai, Hokkaido, I was seated in a restaurant with fellow participants. Turning to my Ainu interlocutor who was wearing an Ainu earring I asked casually, “Do you speak Ainu? Can you sing in it . . . or something?” The young man, son of a well-known Ainu family, replied, “No, I’m not interested in Ainu but I took an Ainu name when I left school. A lot of Ainu names are really cool. My real interest’s Italian. Italian food. Football. I speak Italian.” He described his Italian studies in Milan and his career goals: managing an Italian restaurant. We were impressed. He was impressed. The assembled listeners exclaimed, *in una voce*, “Cool!”

I regard the discourse of both speaker and audience in this story as deriving from a particular conception of ethnicity that is hybrid, apparently contradictory and which circumvents traditional conceptions of ethnic affiliation. The phenomenon is what I term ‘Metroethnicity’: an exercise in emancipatory politics. It is an individual’s self-assertion on his own terms and that will inevitably challenge the orthodoxy of “language loyalty”. Metroethnicity involves the shift from examining our identity as the site of historic struggle and focusing on what we can achieve as persons or, as McLaren (1995: 109) observes of critical multiculturalism, “What we might become takes precedence over who we are.” The principles guiding metroethnics’ (new) construction of social reality are largely, I argue, in contrast to what they perceive as the claims of the old, aesthetic. It is the “principle of Cool”. Cool is personal. Cool is a demand for self-sufficiency. It is an attitude deployed by the “ethnic”, an attitude undistorted and unheated by the emotions of past struggle, lacking interest for “the struggle”, a form of personal rebellion that eschews “ethnic violence” by (merely) minimizing commitment to ethnicity (sic. ethnic language) whilst at the same time recognizing ethnic affiliation as something that can be usefully deployed: fashion, music, lifestyle, and so on.

2. Tears for fears or “an ethnic romance”

Before turning to further implications of the story, let us recap the basic tenets of the link between language and social identity. The notion that possession of an original language is necessary for the maintenance and promotion of a group identity is a popular belief (sic. “myth”). The “group” may be conceived of an entity involving either the ethnic group or even the nation state. The latter conception found exquisite expression in Johann Herder’s (1744) philosophy of linguistic nationalism in *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* intertwining the nation and “the language of its fathers.” Language, in this sense, functions as an important ideological tool of both nation state and ethnic group (Coulmas 1985). The involvement even of finance and the economy in the patrolling of group/ethnic boundaries has been dissected by Coulmas (1992).

The language-ethnic identity nexus found expression in the emotion of a Japanese Prime Minister on his visit to Sao Paolo. Speaking in Japanese to an attentive audience of mostly aged *Nikkeijin* (Japanese–Brazilians), PM Junichiro Koizumi spoke of the first migrant generation’s courage in maintaining the language of their birth, their love for the language of their ancestry. Fighting back tears, he emphasized that the Japanese language is “the lifeblood for the maintenance of their Japanese identity” (Asahi Shimbun 2004). Interpretation into Portuguese was provided.

The connection has a long history. The language-ethnicity romance shocks liberals and disgusts rational Marxists. It does not and will not go away. “Systematic underestimation” (Smith 1981) of the liaison is widespread. Edwards (1989: 100) laments that the much desired “dissolution of ethnic ties and a transition from nationalism to an ever-widening internationalism has not come to pass”. Revisiting history, we can even say that the “melting pot” (in the United States at least) never really existed (Gleason 1979: 15). In fact, it did not melt at all. It was just another urban myth. “Just gimme dat etnic ding!”

But wait a minute. There is surely another narrative? Are not ethnic languages supposed to be disappearing? Consider the fact of ethnic cultural degeneration: “ethnic culture [and language] gets steadily shallower” (Smolicz 1979). This is the “straight-line theory” which predicts the gradual absorption of minorities and the radical decline in ethnic language. Languages everywhere, the story goes, are threatened, under attack. Linguists organize themselves to see how they (languages not linguists) might be “saved” (Fishman 2000). Live and let live is out, linguistic genocide is in (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Even the sporadic jerks of ethnic revivalism are usually of the symbolic kind. Is a Navaho T-shirt or a coffee mug cheerfully bearing “*An bhuil Gaeilge agat?*” [Do you

speak Irish?] anything more than “ethnicity of last resort” (Gans 1979: 1)? No, Sean Casey does not speak *Gaeilge*.

We return to the charm of ethnicity and its handmaiden — language. There is no use averting our eyes from language and ethnicity’s passionate embrace. Get real. There will be no “non-ethnic tomorrow” (Fishman 1983). The association is resilient. It may cloak itself in social scientific jargon or it may appear in old-style institutionalized purism (dictionaries or state sponsored “Language Councils”). The ethnicity-language liaison resurfaces in the discourse of “multiculturalism” or “diversity” or “pluralism” which celebrates “cultural difference”. Malik (1996) notes that the idea of “cultural difference” as a precious or even absolute entity traces a dangerously similar path taken by the now discredited notion of immutable biological distinctions among races. All in all, plural society is (merely) a multiethnic one. With banal irony, Giddens (1993: 253) describes pluralism thus: “plural societies are those in which there are several large ethnic groupings, involved in the same political and economic order but otherwise largely distinct from one another.”

3. Metroethnicity

Let us return to the story at the beginning of section 1. The cultural positioning of the young Ainu man is what I term here “metroethnic” — an ethnicity that is urban(e), ambiguous and lightly worn. Metroethnicity involves a decentering of the traditional agency of “ethnicity”. No longer can ethnic orthodoxy be assumed to have sole power, authority and the causal force. It’s okay to be an Italian-speaking Ainu who speaks no *Ainu Itak* [Ainu language]. We hear the young man continue, “You know. The best speakers of Ainu in this town are Japanese. Some retired people are learning it. A local primary school teacher and some college students are learning. That’s just fine with me. I’m happy about that. But the Ainu language doesn’t happen to be part of my life. I can take or leave it. And right now I’ll leave it.”

Metroethnicity is a “shifting-sands ethnicity”, driven not by the demands of ethnic orthodoxy or powerful loyalty to a particular ethnic or historical tradition. It is an ethnicity invoked rather by an appeal to other cultural demands. What’s “cool”? Ainu Italiane might be cool. Cool is Ainu ethnic design on T-shirts made in upscale Sapporo shops. Uncool are in-your-face Ainu woodcarvings (men with headbands and beards) sold in the souvenir shops at Chitose airport and in Ainu villages. Metroethnicity is a light touch. Metroethnicity is relativistic. It discards the truth claims of traditional ethnicity. It is a restructuring. Metroethnicity

involves a critique of ethnicity. This critique is a mode of what Habermas (1963) terms “self-reflection” or self-criticism of those ideological determinants of the self-formative process (*Bildung*) that instruct how we should behave in the world and indeed our conception of the world. Metroethnicity is a kind of self-reconstruction.

(1) *Tokyo Story: A. Y., Nibutani, Hokkaido, 1998*

Ainu history was killing me. It was a burden. I couldn't wait to escape from Hokkaido. My father's Ainu. My mother's Japanese. He expected me to be Ainu all the way. It was all or nothing. “Hey. You're Ainu,” my Dad always said. He expected me to live out all the sadness and the discrimination of . . . of the Ainu . . . the fucking history thing. Hey, I knew all about the Ainu thing. I once worked in Pizza Hut in Obihiro. A customer looked at my name tag and said, “What's that?” I said, “It's Ainu.” “Oh,” he said. The manager pulled me aside later and said, “Listen kid. Change it. Your name's drawing too much attention (*medatsu*)”. I was pissed off but I ended up using “Masahiro”. I needed the job. I got out of Obihiro and moved to Tokyo. I joined a men's suit company. The first afternoon at the company we had self-introductions (*jiko shokai*). I was nearly shitting myself. Do I bring up the Ainu thing or not? I knew from past experience it was kind of risky. There were four men and three girls. We were sitting round a table drinking coffee. When I said my name the conversation went like this:

“What kinda name is that?”

“Ainu.”

“Are you Ainu?”

“Yeah. My dad's Ainu. My mum's Japanese.”

“Hey! That's cool!”

One girl said her grandfather was from Shanghai and others said . . . you know . . . blah blah and people were saying “ii naaa! ii naa!” [Wow! Cool!].” Then people went on to talk about where they lived and what they were into and stuff. No big deal. It was weird. No big deal. It was like I could just talk about myself for the first time in my life. It was like me being Ainu was like me liking to surf or me liking Manchester United. I could be Ainu or not Ainu or Japanese and Ainu together. It didn't seem to matter. Everybody was from this place or that place or this family and that family. No big deal. Or may be it was a big deal. We all laughed when one girl said she was from boring Saitama with a boring name (Yoko) and a boring (*omoshiroku-nai*) family. It was cooler to have an Ainu name from Hokkaido. Just hearing people say “Cool!” (*Kakko ii*) changed my

life. I didn't care whether people were serious or not. They just said it. "Cool." I changed companies but I still have friends from Aoki. I got the same kind of reaction in this software company that I'm working for. That was enough. It was like somebody pressed a button in me that I never knew was there. It opened me up. I sort of became a different person.

Metroethnicity is a critique of history. First of all it is sceptical of "heroic ethnicity" by which a particular ethnic group claims the right to special sympathy and privilege from the mainstream ("just look how badly we have been treated"). Secondly, it rejects the logocentric meta-narrative of traditional ethnicity by which a particular ethnic group claims an internally validated description of itself ("we know what's best for our people").

Metroethnicity can be first examined from the point of view of cultural theory, rather than sociolinguistics. It is a phenomenon apparent among Japan's minority communities. The adoption of a metroethnic standpoint challenges ethnicity or group identity as an absolute or "natural" value. Rather, metroethnicity employs (enjoys?) ethnicity as an accessory, an accentuation. Metroethnicity employs "difference" for cultural and aesthetic effect. It elevates the importance of the critique of alleged identities. In so doing, the metroethnic joins a wider "cultural flow" of mixed and shifting allegiances which aggressively intertwine borders and transcend cultures (Iwabuchi 1999, 2004), whereby the ethnic language is an accessory which you happen to have or not have. It is there or not there. It can be viewed as an "effect".

4. The principle of Cool

The cultural effect that derives from metroethnicity is not simply that a particular (ethnic) language is not a necessary element in ethnic identity, but that ethnic allegiance is subjected to the subject's critical judgement on the basis of nonethnic criteria. Is it a cool thing to do? Is it a cool thing to be? If language is indeed incidental to ethnic affiliation, it is a take-it-or-leave-it accessory that is subject to aesthetic demands rather than ethno-linguistic duty. The theory of Cool carries the usual health warning. I refer to social currents rather than this person or that person. If you twist the author's arm, he is referring to a cross-section of young urban minorities, indistinguishable from young urban Japanese who, Japanese and minority alike, are eager to embrace multiculturalism, cultural/ethnic tolerance and multicultural lifestyle, especially when it comes to friendships,

music and the arts, eating and dress. It is a kind of post ethnicity state whereby both Japanese and ethnic minorities “play” with ethnicity (not necessarily their own) for aesthetic effect. It involves a cultural crossing, self-definition made up of borrowing and do-it-yourself, a *sfumato* of blurred “identities”, what one might term Metroethnicity. The operating system of this Metroethnicity is Cool.

Ethnic absolutism is out. Cool is in. The existential and quotidian danger of living on the edge, living at the periphery, living as a minority in Japan forever held in the grasp of the dogmatic classification “minority” is well-documented in Nakano’s *The Sociology of Ethnocentrism in Japan* (1995), Mervio’s (1993) work on Japanese racism and “bias” and in numerous works on minorities and minority languages (Maher and Yashiro 1991, 1996; Maher 1994a, 1994b, 1994c; Maher and Honna 1994; Maher and Macdonald 1995). What “minorities” are we referring to? The mostly postwar ethnic minorities like Chinese and Korean, older indigenous groups like the Ainu, the provincial peripheries (Okinawa), the marginalized and disenfranchised like the deaf, or the new wave foreign workers like Nikkei Brazilians (Noguchi and Fotos 2001).

The historic struggle continues. But the struggle has “postmodernized”. A new cultural track for minorities has emerged from the (younger) generational corpus. It consists of cultural flows, the ethnic boom, a genre of literary work (*zainichi bungaku*) and ethnic rock and pop (Okinawan and Osaka *zainichi* rock). In the midst of the socio-economic disengagement of the late twentieth century, a pathway for minority struggle has emerged that embraces existential risk itself as a means of liberation. It is a cultural phenomenon that is old–new. It involves coming out rather than staying in. It is ethnicity as design, the peripheral as a desirable object. Not surprisingly, the shift in attitude towards minorities occurs unevenly at the same time as existing mechanisms of discrimination. Nevertheless, the new pathway is clearly visible. The pathway is Cool. Cool is not specifically ethnic led but rather exists as a social superordinate. It pushes and pulls. It is more powerful than (mere) ethnic affiliation because it involves multiple social flows: the young, left leaning 30–50 somethings, the unemployed and language minorities. Cool is now the main operating principle of cultural hybridity. Metroethnicity deploys Cool with a vengeance. To what extent and how fast this cultural chill-out brings with it social tolerance, new legislation, educational change and the like is another issue that I cannot develop here. Here, I am emphasizing the importance of Cool in establishing the new cultural credentials of Japan’s minorities and their languages.

In postmodern Japan, the category of “design” with its new forms and materials increasingly operates under the same rules as “fashion”. An

Issey Miyake or Yohji Yamamoto shop interior is just as important as the clothes displayed. Likewise, the quality of being bilingual/bicultural is now undergoing evolutionary cultural change. The old-style Functional debate about how best to speak (just) English (sic. *Eikaiwa*) is increasingly under pressure from Form (the new lifestyle related significances now attached to knowing English but also other languages, including Asian languages like Korean). In the postwar twentieth century, we saw the “historic struggle” of ethnic minorities like Korean and Ainu bearing the weight of a violent colonial past. This struggle involved a wide range of issues like fingerprinting regulations, employment restrictions and the repressive 1899 Law for the Protection of Former Hokkaido Aborigines (*Kyu Dojin Hogo Ho*). There was routine discrimination of disadvantaged groups like the deaf (*rosha sabetsu*) and institutional suspicion of cultural difference (e.g., bilinguals and bilingual education). The struggle continues. However, in the late twenty-first century, a new–old cultural wave is providing an alternative paradigm for Japan: cultural difference as cultural cool. You have an Ainu name? That’s cool. Your mother’s side is Korean? That’s cool. You’re sister’s deaf (*rosha*), so you sign (*shuwa*)? That’s cool. Osaka now understands that its Koreatown is no longer an untidy embarrassment, an urban secret, but a cool urban asset. Function is out. Form is in. Cool is the unexplained force that adopts cultural heterogeneity by coopting difference as design and fashion. Ethnic and community struggle, racism and discriminatory practice exist in good measure. However, the counterbalance of another generation is gaining momentum. It is a view that sees the “historic struggle” as *kurai* [dark], obsessive, banal, contradictory, sometimes irrelevant and always over-heated. Chill. Stay cool.

5. Reframing ethnic/cultural affiliation

The movement towards Cool (involving some members of fourth to fifth generation ethnic minorities) is a desire to reframe cultural affiliation and orthodoxy. It is a desire to rewrite their lifescrpts from the internal angry music of ethnic struggle to a socially transparent note. This new connectiveness with mainstream cultural funk has dynamic meaning in the Japanese society of which these ethnic minorities are members. A note that can be different and culturally provocative but without heat: a long vibratoless note like the trumpet of Miles Davis. Cool. The bilinguality of hyphenated Japanese children and adults was once canonically *hen* [strange] or contrary to nature or producing cultural confusion. It was unsuitable “except if the other language was

English”. When the author became a research consultant and occasional radio commentator for Tokyo’s first bilingual, aggressively code switching radio station called *J-Wave* in 1988, the network was sorting daily hate mail from members of the Tokyo Japanese public. “Children and young people will be corrupted by this bilingual ‘play’” ran the criticism; “young people’s Japanese identity is still in formation and will be wounded, endangered by exposure to English”; “bilingualism among the young is unpatriotic”, and so on. All is quiet now and fifteen years on the nation buzzes with multilingual radio stations doing just the same. So what happened? I suggest that the public perception of bilingualism (an interesting social quirk) fell under the influence of Cool. Bilingualism is cool but not so “learning English” because that English education is still linked to the authoritarian structures of school, company and career. Learning English is not particularly cool unless the teacher is SMAP (boy pop group and celebrity) member Katori Shingo.

5.1. *Cool is postethnic*

Cool puts “ethnicity” in quotation marks. Cool sees the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. Cool is the antithesis of the Whorfian doctrine. Cool actively disengages the naturalistic linkage between ethnicity and language. I don’t speak Ainu-*itak*. So what? The Cool view of “ethnic language” is person-based. Like the young Ainu man in an Ainu village: “Yeah! I can sing a couple of things in Ainu. And a few phrases but . . . well . . . you know . . . Ainu’s not much use to me” (Maher and Honna 1994). In Cool, the Ainu language is optional. The Cool view of language is confrontational both to those Ainu who believe that *Utari* [Ainu compatriots] should speak Ainu and to linguists like the author whom young Ainu suspect of fostering ethnic allegiance and encouraging ethnic orthodoxy: “I’m Ainu but don’t speak Ainu. Do *you* have a problem with that?” (Ainu college student to the author 1998).

5.2. *Minorities: bring on the icons*

Cool is not the same as fashion. It is not the same as popularity. Cool includes a perceived ability to see the flipside or alternative side of things; an ability that multicultural-perspective people or ethnic minorities are uniquely believed to possess. Cool is quirky, innovative and tolerant. Cool is an attitude and a hope. Japan’s language minorities are now finding their place as significant members of the Empire of Cool.

Thanks to the “rediscovery” of *zainichi* [Korean-Japanese] power by the media, there is also a massive reappraisal of minority (group) culture (the deaf, Ainu, migrant worker, Chinese, etc.) in Japan. Korean is cool. Koreans are cool. Even the rightwing or conservative media are now paying homage to *Zainichi*. The icons are actresses, singers, writers and poets, wrestlers and chefs.

The Cool role of ethnic minority figures (in fashion, music, sport, literature, etc.) are part of Cool’s “transculture” or the culture of “crossing”; very much part of this movement. Cool is “Trans”: Cultural Crossing. The exposition of Cool as a means of social liberation quite definitely involves what Ben Rampton (Rampton 1995) calls “cultural crossing”. Rampton was talking about the adoption of West Indian culture and speech by white kids in Birmingham and more generally about a hybridity of Indian, West Indian and white cultural styles operating on the basis of what is Cool. Recently, it is sometimes referred to a “trans” in Japanese.

Cool Magazine (Tokyo) is not a fashion brand magazine per se. On the contrary, its focus is self-help, lifestyle ideas, the availability of second-hand recycled goods for young people. “Minority” people — lifestyle and thinking — are a routine part of Cool and *Cool Magazine*: the Chinese-Japanese Inrin and *zainichi* [Korean-Japanese] rock star Sonin (a person who is particularly active in promoting her cool *zainichi* status). It is significant that minority persons themselves are being drafted to explain how Japan’s multiculturalism could be and should be. The uploading of ethnicity to become part of a wider social movement of Cool is well recognized by a young Ainu who might be more interested in learning Italian than speaking Ainu, or eating at *Spigo’s Pasta* than choosing the Ainu restaurant in Asahikawa. Being “all Ainu” is as uncool as being all Japanese.

We are looking at an era of postethnicity. This is because Cool has a brittle cultural logic. Its performative style is based upon and derives from disaffiliation. How can I (possibly) embrace Cool if I am an ethnic stereotype? Central to being a metroethnic entity (in Japan) is something that Howard Becker of the Chicago School of Sociology described in his pioneering work *The Outsiders* in 1930 [1963]. Speaking of the jazz world, he noted the antithesis between “hip” and “square”. To be hip is to be “in the know”. I suggest that one attractive trait of the Japanese metroethnic Cool is that if you are associated in some manner with ethnic Cool you are a Knower. You know something that has not been acquired by merely “being Japanese”. The symbolic interaction of being Cool and conventional is intricate. Why? Because society is intricate, not because Cool is not powerful. To be Korean is cool. Period. This explains the

huge attraction of *zainichi* films (*Tsuki wa Dochira ni Dete Iru*) and the “multicultural wave” films of the 1990s (*Swallowtail Butterfly*, *Kamikaze Taxi*, etc.). Korean drama and film in Japan has also attracted a large following.

Chinese from Hong Kong are cool. Consider the success of Chinese actresses like Vivian Xu or Ekin Chen. Being Chinese in Japan is complicated. The cool Faye Wong in *Usu Koi* [False love] on Fuji TV in 2001 appeared on the heels of an NHK survey which indicated that Chinese are not considered trustworthy — only 2% assigned them to this category. The success of Faye Wong is worthy of further study. In her appearances, her Chinese ethnicity is apparent but decentred. In fact, she does not speak Chinese (or much Japanese) in *Usu Koi* but rather English. What is prominent is her Chinese Cool. Even more interesting for the hegemony of media Cool is the TV drama *Fan of a Hong Star* which erects the ideal of a pan-multicultural Asian society of which Japan is part and in which the West is an intrusion.

Okinawa is Cool This incorporates now the element of *iyashi-kei* [healing]. Ethnicity is no longer a sacred text. Ethnicity reenacts the same rituals. Above all it is increasingly being seen not as a naturalist entity but rather a genre. A genre which may have reached its dead end. It reflects a subculture — a relatively cohesive system of social organization. It is meant to be distinctive enough to differentiate it from a larger surrounding culture. It has been analyzed with traditional sociological tools such as class, religion, economics, ethnicity, etc.

5.3. *Cool rules*

In the new cultural mythology, hybridity is beginning to emerge. What traits helped land Sonin and Inrin in the land of Cool? Nothing more, one might say than good looks and ethnic Cool. In some cases, the icons have a distinctly liberationist look. The soccer hero Hidetoshi Nakata (who is routinely said to be softly-softly *zainichi*) is often pictured in magazines in ideal form, the savior of Japanese football: rugged, campaigning, Korean-Japanese (?), a fluent Italian speaker. The semiotics are obvious. Jesus Christ? Che Guevara?

Cool is radically involved with “ethnic groups” and other “minorities” in Japan. This is the changing environment in which language moves. For some young Korean-Japanese, speaking and reading Korean (*Hanguk*) is Cool. A *zainichi* colleague of mine reported to me that at his son’s primary school, his son’s ability to read the *Hangul* on the packets of Korean *nori* (flat dried seaweed, now a gourmet craze among schoolchildren)

made him the coolest boy in school. But Cool is still the operating aesthetic principle and not ethnicity per se. Therefore, if you are Ainu in this author's university, it is cool to be able to speak (some) Ainu, but it is equally cool if you are Ainu and speak Italian instead of Ainu (as in the story in section 1).

Cool enables the metroethnic to turn the corner of concealment history, i.e., "Do not reveal to the public your ethnic secret." The corner has been turned on account of Cool. It is okay (cool) to speak an ethnic language. I'm okay. You're okay. I have come across this when talking to young people during research on "cultural creoles" of ethnic towns (Korean-town, Chinatown, Okinawatown) in Japan (Maher 1994, 1995). Consider a street conversation from Ikuno-ku Koreatown in Osaka. A group of junior high school children once stopped me in the street and asked me to take their picture (video) I asked the question, "Do you speak Korean?" When one of the (fourth generation) girls tried out a few words of Korean, the response of her friends was "*Kakkoi Kakkoi*" Young metroethnics get cool.

5.4. *The cool-ing of dialects*

Other than its role in minority/mainstream interaction, does the principle of Cool have anything to say about social/regional speech forms? Cool is, I suggest, having a significant impact upon the relation of traditional regional dialects and the mainstream language. Cool is romantic only about romance. Cool is small group and small scale interest. It is unromantic about "the nation" and dislikes elites and elite dialects. German might be an uncool (standard) language but German accented English can be very cool indeed (consider Marlene Dietrich). Cool speaks dialect as well as (but not instead of) standard Japanese (*hyojungo*). The standard language is institutional language — necessary but unfunky. It is the symbolic territory of elites and power and authority. These are not bad things at all but they are insistent things that make too many social demands. However, if *hyojungo* is uncool by virtue of its political hegemony, then some other dialects are uncool too. Dialect absolutism cannot be incorporated into Cool, either. The Osaka dialect, for instance, frequently becomes a parody of itself: a garish, in-your-face, *kote-kote* [tacky] Osakajin who likes *takoyaki* (squid-on-sticks) and talks loudly, the proletarian cliché of the Osaka dialect. What we now witness is a kind of Cool metrodialect: it is beaujolais rather than *nama-chu* [a mug of draft beer]. It is a smart, lighter type of dialect identity. Consider the dialectally mixed speech of the funky young

singing duo *Kinki Kids* as a much admired template for “Cool Osaka” speech.

5.5. *The history of Cool*

Cool is not merely not arriving at a party too early. Cool is not merely a well defined cultural phenomenon, but an operating principle: an assumption, an underlying attitude, a primary source or ingredient of personal action. Cool neatly follows the lines of institutional practice and yet departs and improvises from it. Cool is a quality of behavior. Cool is adept social behavior like metroethnics knowing when and how to “deploy” their ethnicity in society. If I am Korean-Japanese, my knowledge of the Korean language may be skillful (or unskillful) and playful at the same time. Cool was visible in nineteenth century aristocratic English reserve and poetic irony, the cool jazz of twentieth century jazz, in the cool and distant girls of Yumeji Takeshi who smoked Russian cigarettes (Donald Richie, personal communication 2004) and who wore polo-neck sweaters under their kimonos.

The history of Cool is reported in Pountain and Robins (2000). Cool was visible in the English aristocratic reserve and irony of nineteenth century poetry, among the black musicians of the twentieth century and hard-boiled crime writers of the 1930s and 1940s. The Surrealists, the Beat Generation, film noir, conceptualism, rock, soul, funk, the intellectual techno of YMO and to some extent *iyashikei* (the “healing” culture of music and film, smells and fashion colors) of today. Cool, as Pountain and Robins (2000) recount, is not a contemporary phenomenon. It has a long history as a mechanism of social or minority liberation. Its feature is a kind of silent knowing, inner strength. It reflected the dignity of the African arrivals on the slave ships; their pride in the face of violence and humiliation was retained, a pride founded on a calm, quiet control in the presence of the ultimate provocation. It is against this background that Japan’s minorities can deploy Cool as a barricade against authority: the authority of the mainstream and the authority of ethnicity.

5.6. *Cool and being*

Whilst fashion is a changing series of phases, Cool is a stable state. Fashion displays collective energy, Cool signifies personal attitude. Cool has long been a rebellious posture adopted by minorities. It then mutated to become part of a larger culture. Cool still plays on the periphery, the

outside. Its social effects are visible in the realm of consumption (media and corporate Cool, cynical advertising Cool), politics, aesthetics and personal relations. When I was growing up on a working class urban housing estate in Britain in the 1950s, I remember many details of the physical and verbal abuse that accompanied “being Irish” in England. Now, the tables have turned. It’s funky to be Irish, to have Irish roots. Irish is world class music, Nobel Prize winners, Riverdance and good booze. How boring to be one hundred percent white Anglo-Saxon English (the sad state predicted by novelist Angus Wilson [1976] in his book *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*). It’s cool to be Irish.

According to the traditional formula (NHK 2004; Hanazaki 2000), Japan’s minorities hid their roots, concealing their public identity above ground. Now social Cool reverses the practice. It is cool to display the above ground flowers (“Yeah, I’m half Ainu”), but you lack concern about the authenticity of that statement legitimizing that connection to the roots (“Nah. I don’t speak Ainu. No big deal”).

6. Ironic detachment and empowerment

If you are *Nikkeijin* (an Ethnic Japanese migrant from South America in Japan) or Ainu or Chinese and discriminated against, there are several everyday responses: anger, political struggle, do nothing, frustration, concealment. Another response is ironic detachment or Cool. Cool — as an attitude of mind — thereby leaves the minority persons free to explore not only their ethnicity (language, lifestyle) as they wish or do not wish but it also allows minority persons a sufficient degree of “narcissism” (a corollary of Cool) necessary for selfdetermination (as “some kind of” minority person). Cool is a patchwork of styles that can be adopted, worked and reworked by minorities to suit their own purposes.

- (2) *The bike from Taiwan: interview with female first year student, aged 20, Tokyo*

What do I think is cool? My fold-up bike made in Taiwan is cool. My dad says I should have spent my money on a proper Bridgestone bike made in Japan. My mum likes my bike. It’s dumb anyway because all the Bridgestone bikes are made in Taiwan. And they’re too heavy. With these small bikes it feels kinda light. You’re a lot freer. It doesn’t tie you down. It’s cool anyway.

Whilst fully absorbing and enjoying material consumer culture, Cool views itself as a historical and anti-establishment (a “cool millionaire” is an oxymoron) because it takes the signifier more seriously than the sign.

The form of the statement is more “significant” than where it comes from. Cool is thus McLuhanesque. It takes for a starting point not content (what you say and mean) but material shape (how you say and mean) as rather important. As the Irish protagonist of (Bohemian) Cool remarked, “You can always judge a book by its cover” (Oscar Wilde 1905).

Cool offers a new kind of social empowerment because it offers varying degrees of ideological disengagement/engagement with power structures. It is disengagement from the dictatorship of political rhetoric, a refusal to join the discourse (“There are no minorities in Japan”: Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone in 1986). It is also engagement with ideological coercion even dictatorship in the ethnic group (“Ainu who have no respect for and no interest in maintaining the Ainu language are a *traitor* to Ainu history and to themselves”: Narita 1989 [personal communication; my italics]). Cool has dynamic effect within these language communities. Within deaf culture, within Korean and Okinawan culture. It is an ever expanding circle, a reorienting. It is an emerging canon in the cultural reformation of the language minorities in Japan.

The logic may seem strange but the paradox of Cool is precisely its power. Cool does not follow riot and rebellion for the sake of ethnic-pride or minority group pride. The reverse is true. Cool does not employ rebellion to gain social freedoms. Rebellion employs Cool for social freedoms. It is also the culture engine that drives the postnation state. Iwabuchi (2004: 24) recently noted:

Theory has demolished the nation-state. We overcome it. Theory has demolished ethnic absolutism. We have overcome it. Multiculturalism and hybridity is here to stay. In place of ethnic absolutism we have ethnic pointilism. It is a patchwork of colliding affiliations within and outwith the ‘minority group’ itself. The problem is: how do we translate our new theoretical certainty into real practice, practice on the ground? How does hybridity translate to the present condition of minorities in Japan?

Iwabuchi’s question is insightful and raises many practical questions. For example, how do we reconcile *zainichi* Korean culture in Japan with mainland Korean culture in Japan? To some extent an answer is already quickly emerging. It is already happening and the mechanism is Cool.

The Korean teenager and pop diva Boa speaks only (fluent) Japanese in public but we know she is Korean. But is she? Then how come she was chosen to represent both Japan and Korea in the 2004 MTV Asian Pop Festival? Cho Paggie is an icon in Osakan *zainichi* rock. He pumps up his *zainichi*-Japanese band *Garnet Rage* with dedicated three-way language switching: Japanese, Korean and English. Paggie himself is a

professional English teacher. This is a homage to cultural hybridity. The author first met Cho Paggie doing a gig in the Ainu village of Nibutani. Cho Paggie is Cool. What did he represent to his Japanese and Ainu fans? Hybridity certainly. Cool certainly.

How to talk about the new multiculturalism? Who will talk about multiculturalism? Who better to teach about multiculturalism in Japan than *Zainichi* themselves. That is a cool thing to do. And so we turn to Today's cool *zainichi* Korean icon Professor Kan San Jun. His recent NHK lectures on multiculturalism to his old primary school consisted of getting children to visit foreigners' houses in his old town and ask them about differences between "their" culture and "our" culture (NHK 2004). Whilst this was paradoxically old-fashioned (the focus being cultural "difference", non Japanese-speaking foreigners in Japan, nationality based multiculturalism) it did provide a platform for children to grasp some issues of Japan's multiculturalism and multilingualism. His concluding lecture focused on the transition from multicultural awareness to personal awareness. Multiculturalism is a moral imperative, a search for personal wisdom. Knowing "them" is knowing "us".

The principle of Cool does not make impossible demands. It merely requires social observation and selftraining to know what is cool. Cool eschews conformity to an ethnic or group orthodoxy. Your mother is Korean or Ainu but you do not have to be *zainichi* Korean or be Ainu. You are a residual ethnic code that is becoming a new, emergent code. The Cool *Zainichi* has dodged the bullets of a previous nasty and noisy generation. The Cool *Zainichi* he and she are invited for social play and experiment with just the same concepts that were previously fixed and immutable ciphers of identity. Cool is crossing. Cool is mixed talk as we are informed by *zainichi* rockers and rappers: Cool is a discourse of the creole, a discourse of the people.

7. Freedom versus exile?

Cool poses serious questions about personal freedom: the freedom to adopt a personal style in appearance and speech, the freedom of association within and beyond so-called "ethnic boundaries", the freedom of a young Ainu to prefer Italian rather than Ainu — if you please. Cool puts "ethnic language" in quotation marks. Cool approaches the world aesthetically.

Young people reject the role of being caught up in a historical moment, helpless to alter one's personal destiny, a straw caught up in the whirlwind of being a Japanese minority. Do you feel like an exile in

Japanese society? “No,” replies a Tokyo student. “I feel special. Sometimes I think my friends value me more because I’m *zainichi*, because I’m half. I mean double. I’m connected. I feel connected. To *Kichijoji*, to my family, to my friends, to my work.” (Yuri Li, former International Christian University student, *Zainichi Kankokujin*, aged 25).

8. Conclusion

What do minorities really want? Kymlicka (1995) has argued that what minorities want is not the control of the individual and the enforcement of cultural orthodoxy. Rather, they desire the freedom to construct their own version of group identity: political and personal freedom for all persons in society. Maybe. May (2001) disentangles the issue as a struggle between cultural essentialism and personal autonomy. The sentimental camaraderie of “being an ethnic minority” is giving way to a tougher option. In Japan, in the midst of society’s normal suspicion of foreigners (business as usual), there is a clear sign of regard, even admiration, for minorities. Tokyo University San Jun Kan’s cool looks and his black polo-neck gravity assist in the metroethnic turnaround of attitudes. Ethnic minorities have or at least symbolize something the mainstream wants. What is it? Multiculturalism, heroism, and, unlike import foreigners, they can tell us about it in Japanese, our shared language. From within a circumscribed habitus within “our” mainstream body they have an outer body, a transnational worldliness that we admire. Minorities know and the mainstream knows that it is minorities that hold the multiculturalist talisman and not the mainstream.

The problems that minorities face is no longer about difference (we are different), it is about their possible exclusion (we are excluded) from the centre of cultural action.

Exclusion not difference. In postmodernity, tradition is transformed from being a historical property to being a cultural reference. No longer a national symbol but rather a cultural affect, cultural play. *Homo ludens*. You coopt tradition, borrow what you want from tradition for your own purpose. Tradition thereby becomes temporary property. Display tradition, but at no point show that you are its prisoner. Play with it, mug for the camera like Japanese women tourists walking around Kyoto in mock “ethnic” dress with style references to Edo and India and Korean.

Language maintenance, traditional ethnic language affiliation has new social values to negotiate with. For a minority in Japan, it is no longer chic to present yourself as a lonely planet in Japan’s solar system. It is no longer chic to live in a condition of elevated solitude just because you

are Ainu, and certainly uncool to portray yourself as bruised and at the mercy of the mainstream. Japan's young minorities are less and less intellectually inspired by traditional minority myths. The myth of the minority as "exile" is a very comforting minority myth but, as the Afrikaaner writer Breyton Breytonbach has observed, exile is a sterile and foreclosed category to be fitted into. The minority is given to self-dramatization as well as self-pity.

It used to be the case that Hokkaido tourists would buy woodcarvings of bears and salmon. No longer. It used to be that in our search for the Other, we tourists would demand all kinds of material symbols, proof of our meaningful contact with native and exotic cultures. Such kitsch commodity fetishism has dramatically declined (DeChicchis 1995; Hanazaki 2000). Is it because Ainu have become cool? What is alive and well is Ainu-Japanese jazz, Ainu music that you find in the world music section of *Wave* and *HMV* and *Virgin*; cool-not-kitsch Ainu Culture Centres thrive in downtown Tokyo and Osaka; new laws and, yes, bookshelves about learning Ainu and Ainu history. We even find much admired Ainu design serialized among trendy printmakers and design houses. In Japanese cities, minorities live together with the mainstream, share values, food, music and intimacy. Inter-marriage levels are the highest in Japanese history.

Hybridity is here to stay. From my own fieldwork and college environment interactions with younger Ainu, I suggest that they have rejected the essentialist ethnic identity option because it is perceived as a dead end. Instead we are talking lifestyle, action systems and social worlds. In the minds of Cool, Ainu no longer has hegemonic ethnic status but rather cognitive status.

Ethnicity used to be a warm glow. The glow of the fire was made with the wood of Japanese oppression. The wood has not run out. It's just got wet. Wet, wet, wet. This does not mean the end of ethnicity. It means the end of ethnicities. A much better lifeway, pathway for Japanese minorities is to exploit ethnicity as a macro lifestyle category. A superordinate of music, dress, food, names, language which receives its value not from history but aesthetics. It receives its value from how the subculture is now being valued in the mainstream. It is newly valued, I suggest, as an expression of Cool. Applied to language, linguists have long been used to referring to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "linguistic capital" which is derived from "cultural capital". We must now learn to refer to the "sub-cultural capital" of Japan's minority communities and languages and the sub-cultural capital's mediating principle of Cool.

International Christian University, Tokyo

References

- Asahi Shimbun* [Asahi newspaper] (April 2004). The Prime Minister visits the Japanese community in Brazil.
- Becker, Howard (1963). *The Outsiders: Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.
- Cool Magazine* (April 2004). Tokyo: Wani Books.
- Coulmas, F. (1985). *Sprache und Staat. Studien über Sprachplanung und Sprachpolitik*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- (1992). *Language and Economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- DeChicchis, J. (1995). The current state of the Ainu language. In *Multilingual Japan*, J. Maher and K. Yashiro (eds.), 103–124. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Edwards, J. (1989). *Language, Society and Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fishman, J. (1983). The rise and fall of the 'ethnic revival' in the USA. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 4 (3), 5–46.
- (2000). *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gans, H. (1979). Symbolic ethnicity: the future of ethnic groups and cultures in America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, 1–20.
- Giddens, A. (1993). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gleason, P. (1979). Pluralism and assimilation: a conceptual history. In *Linguistic Minorities, Policies and Pluralism*, J. Edwards (ed.). London: Academic Press.
- Habermas, J. (1963). *Theorie und Praxis*. Neuwied: Luchterhand.
- Hanazaki, K. (2000). Ainu Mosir and Yaponesia. In *Multicultural Japan*, D. Denoon et al. (eds.), 117–134. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herder, Johann (1744). *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*. Königsberg.
- Iwabuchi, K. (1999). Return to Asia? Japan in the Asian audiovisual market. In *Consuming Ethnicity and Nationalism: Asian Experiences*, K. Yoshino (ed.), 177–199. London: Curzon Press.
- (2004). *Transcending Cultures, Intertwining Borders*. Tokyo: Serika Shobo.
- Kymlicka, C. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship and Minority Rights*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Maher, J. (1994a). Ainu Itak. In *Atarashii Nihonkan, Sekaikan ni mukatte: Nihon ni okeru Gengo to Bunka no Tayosei* [Towards a new order: linguistic and cultural diversity in Japan], J. Maher and N. Honna (eds.). Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin.
- (1994b). Environmental linguistics. In *Atarashii Nihonkan, Sekaikan ni mukatte: Nihon ni okeru Gengo to Bunka no Tayosei* [Towards a new order: linguistic and cultural diversity in Japan], J. Maher and N. Honna (eds.). Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin.
- (1994c). Korean in Japan. In *Atarashii Nihonkan, Sekaikan ni mukatte: Nihon ni okeru Gengo to Bunka no Tayosei* [Towards a new order: linguistic and cultural diversity in Japan], J. Maher and N. Honna (eds.). Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin.
- Maher, J.; and Honna, N. (1994). *Atarashii Nihonkan, Sekaikan ni mukatte: Nihon ni okeru Gengo to Bunka no Tayosei* [Towards a new order: linguistic and cultural diversity in Japan]. Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin.
- Maher, J.; and Macdonald, G. (1995). *Diversity in Japanese Culture and Language*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Maher, J.; and Yashiro, K. (1991). *Nihon no Bairingarizumu* [Bilingualism in Japan]. Tokyo: Kenkyuusha.
- (1996). *Multilingual Japan*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- May, S. (2001). *Language and Minority Rights*. London: Longman.
- Malik, K. (1996). *The Meaning of Race*. London: Macmillan.
- McLaren, P. (1995). White terror and oppositional agency: towards a critical multiculturalism. In *Critical Multiculturalism*, Goldberg (ed.), 45–74. Chicago: Cultural Studies Group.

- Mervio, M. (1993). Research on Japan in a world afflicted by nationalism, racism and other biases. In *Transient Societies. Japanese and Korean Studies in a Transitional World*, Acta Universitatis Tamperensis, Kivisto et al. (eds.). Tampere: University of Tampere.
- Nakano, H. (1995). The sociology of ethnocentrism in Japan. In *Diversity in Japanese Culture and Language*, J. C. Maher and G. Macdonald (eds.), 49–72. London: Kegan Paul.
- NHK, Channel 1 (2004). *Returning to Primary School. San Jun Kan Returns to School*.
- Noguchi, M.; and Fotos, S. (2001). *Studies in Japanese Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Pountain, Dick; and Robins, David (2000). *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Rampton, B. (1995). *Language and Ethnicity among Adolescents*. New York: Longman.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic Genocide in Education — or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Smith, A. (1981). *The Ethnic Revival*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smolicz, J. (1979). *Culture and Education in a Plural Society*. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.