

The original version of this paper was presented at the Seventh International School on Lexicography, held on September 12-14, 2007, at Ivanovo State University, Russia.

in terms of word selection, definitions and grammatical information, thus gaining strong circumstantial evidence of J.K.'s close perusal of the *Gazophylacium*. It may safely be concluded now that the *Gazophylacium* was essential background material for J.K., and that his NED would have been quite different from what we now know without the *Gazophylacium*.

In case Skinner's practice in his *Etymologicon* was transmitted to J.K. via the author of the *Gazophylacium*, as it apparently was, it can safely be said that the *Gazophylacium* bears historical significance as a bridge between the tradition of the English-Latin bilingual dictionary and that of the general English dictionary.

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The feeling of *sakura* – Are you interested in such a Japan?

Hisamatsu Ken'ichi and Hayakawa Fumitoshi

Introduction: before hitting the road...

Whether you are contemplating studying the Japanese language, undertaking the task of finding out what makes Japan *tick*, or interested by the intellectual challenge

of gaining insights into Japanese culture, I would like to congratulate you on having the courage and curiosity to embark on this journey to conquer the enigma of this island nation and break the code, otherwise

known as the Japanese language. Let me preface my remarks by saying I would like to ensure that you recognize the challenges and understand the dimensions of the task. This is the reason why, instead of assuring you of the simplicity of this venture, I go overboard to show how utterly and maddeningly interwoven the language is, with the plethora of cultural rules, both stated and implicit; how the frame of reference shifts depending on the situation; and how the situation itself is not what it appears, depending on the perspective, the relationship between the participants, and the mood of the narrator. In short, it is a mess, albeit a lovely one. However, structure does exist within this chaos, and once you establish what it is, life will be a lot more meaningful.

So, treat the essay below as a mini example, an encapsulation, if you will, of what you can expect.

Without conjugating the verb

A Japanese sentence has no subject. This does not mean that Japanese is a language like Latin. In Japanese, we can play with all the personal pronouns in context without using the subject and without conjugating the verb. We utilize the infinitive of the verb as both the subject and the conjugated verb.

For example, the infinitive of *iku* (行く), meaning *to go* in English or *aller* in French, embraces all of the following: *I go, you go, he goes, she goes, we go, you go, they go / je vais, tu vas, il va, elle va, nous allons, vous allez, ils vont, elles vont*. It is possible to express similarly all the grammatical variations by using one past form of a verb. In other words, you can translate the conversation of “A: *Itta* (行った)? B: *Un, itta* (うん、行った)”, as “A: *Did I (you, he, she, we, they) go?* B: *Yes, you (I, he, she, we, they) did*”. One can surely appreciate this level of semantic flexibility. Usually, it is the context that determines the intended meaning of a passage.

A phrase in which all the persons except you can exist

The above explanation that Japanese is highly dependent on the context may lead to some misunderstandings. Let me make it clear that despite the perceived interpretive latitude, we can easily specify a grammatical person in Japanese, even without a context.

For example, recently, a fellow teacher asked me to translate the following phrase into French: *Nanajussai ni narimasu* (70歳になります). Although this is a commonly used expression in Japanese conversation, I answered as follows: *J'ai [Il a, Elle a, Nous*

avons, Ils ont, Elles ont] 70 ans, or Je vais [Il va, Elle va, Nous allons, Ils vont, Elles vont] avoir 70 ans. (I am [He is, She is, We are, They are] 70 years-old, or I (He, She, We, They) will be 70 years-old.)

Quite obviously, he was not satisfied with this vague answer. He asked me again whether this phrase could be translated as *Vous avez 70 ans* or *Vous allez avoir 70 ans*. I replied in the negative. If this were an interrogative statement, it would have been possible to translate it as *Avez-vous 70 ans?* or *Allez-vous avoir 70 ans?*. But since it is a declarative sentence, we cannot restrict it to a second person singular or plural subject. He gazed at me and asked *Why?*, a question I could not answer.

In addition, in Japanese there is the problem of word order. One can shift transition words and phrases without changing the meaning of a passage. As Japanese is an agglutinative language, one can select, relatively freely, certain sentence patterns consisting of subject-object-verb (SOV), object-subject-verb (OSV), or verb-subject-object (VSO). Of course, such changes are not readily accepted in English. If the subject and object of *A dog bit Tom* are interchanged, the meaning of the passage changes quite dramatically. Although the words corresponding to each sentence item are *Tom, bit*, and *a dog*, once this is re-arranged in a text, the meaning is derived from the relative positions of the sentence items, i.e., the subject, verb, and object. Even if there is no inflection that shows the rank of a noun in present-day English, it causes no confusion because the word order is decided.

Pessimism with regard to a native language

During the period of Japan's modernization, the fact that the Japanese had no linguistic brethren was seen by the country's leaders as a liability. Even today, there are a number of intellectuals who are very critical of the ambiguity of the Japanese language.

Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français, the well-known quote by Antoine de Rivarol (*De l'universalité de la langue française*, 1784), is habitually invoked. During the post-war confusion, Shiga Naoya, one of the greatest Japanese writers, stated the following:

“In order to spare the future generations of Japanese children from the trouble of dealing with the peculiarities of their native tongue, we had better change Japanese into French, because this language is the clearest and the strongest in the world.” (*Kokugo mondai* / Problems related to the reform of the Japanese language, 1946, Kaizosha)



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A one-time minister of education also said in all seriousness that we ought to change Japanese into simplified English if Japan aspires to catch up with the West (Mori Arinori, *Education in Japan* — “a flagrant instance of this dangerous superficiality”, 1873, Japan Weekly Mail). The opinion that Japanese should be written using the phonetic alphabet, rather than Chinese characters, exists even now. The complexity of written Japanese, which uses Chinese characters, hiragana, katakana, and the Roman alphabet, is a target of criticism by those who search for efficiency and advocate *internationalization*. However, these views reflect a strong belief that the West and Western linguistic landscape should be the point of reference. Such a notion is obviously useless for any sort of serious discussion; in other words, the ambiguity of the Japanese language is not necessarily a drawback.

By the way, where are you?

I apologize for the abrupt question but what do you visualize when reading the following text? In other words, what is your viewpoint?

国境（くにぎかい）の長（なが）いトンネルを抜（ぬ）けるとそこは雪国（ゆきぐに）であった。夜（よる）の底（そこ）が白（しろ）くなった。

Kunizakai no nagai tonneru o nukeruto sokowa yukiguni deatta. Yoru no soko ga shiroku natta.

The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay under the night sky.

These are the opening lines of *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*, 1948, Sogensha), written by the Nobel Prize writer Kawabata Yasunari; the novel has been translated into English by Edward Seidensticker (1957, Unesco translations of contemporary works).

Now, are you, the reader, in the train or outside the train? Your answer is probably the latter. However, most Japanese readers would feel the opposite. While reading *Snow Country* in Japanese, you imagine the scene of a snow-covered country unfolding outside a train window. Yet, in English, you might be a photographer, capturing the sight of the train emerging out of a tunnel.

Traduttore, traditore

Let me digress slightly here to point out a trivial translation mistake that is said to be responsible for the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In 1945, the Japanese government received an important document from the United States. The document contained information about the development of a new

weapon of unprecedented power, and the Allied Forces demanded prompt surrender if Japan wished to avoid the impending destruction. Our government responded through the international organization as follows: *Our answer would be left pending until we discussed this issue at the cabinet meeting.* The underlined part was translated as *ignored* and, as a result, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were annihilated. (cf. Torikai Kumiko, *Rekishi o kaeta goyaku* / The mistranslation which changed history, 2001, Shinchosha.)

This episode differs from the example of varying viewpoints in the translation of *Snow Country*. The point I was trying to make is that the *I* is always hidden in Japanese text. In other words, in Japanese, a purely objective description cannot be easily achieved.

A language in which *I* builds a very inconspicuous nest

In Japanese, the *I* usually intrudes. For example, if we literally translate *she is happy* as *kanojo wa shiawase dearu*, such a rendition would be unnatural. This is because the following points are included in this sentence: Why is she happy? Who determined that? Is this *third person* objective? How can I confirm if others are happy without having a clear understanding of whether I myself am happy or not?

In Japanese, even when describing the actions of the third person, the *I* is *lurking in the background*, precisely to avoid such complications. In order to describe one's happiness, a frame of reference is needed. Therefore, a more natural translation would be something like *kanojo wa shiawase sooda*.

This *interference of the I* in spoken and written discourse in Japanese takes the form of the pervasive qualifier *I think*. Non-Japanese speakers believe that the Japanese are never sure of what they say and try to avoid responsibility in this manner.

Conversation at cross purposes

If a perfectly natural, spontaneous Japanese conversation is translated into English without any explanatory comments, it is unlikely that it will make much sense. Let us look at a few examples from a proverbial street corner:

- Good morning! Where are you going?
- Hello, the weather is good... just for a moment.
- Well, it's fine today. Take care.
- Thank you.

It appears that there is some mysterious pragmatic play at work. The question *Where are you going* is answered with the non-sequenter *just for a moment*. In Japanese,



cherry blossoms (sakura)

urgent task for the nation, which had been isolated until then, was the assimilation of the latest scientific knowledge from European countries. It was evident that the Japanese military organization and the production and application of their weapons were modeled on those of France. Thus, the Japanese army, modernized and equipped with the latest arms, proved their power by their victory against Russia in 1905. Some words of French origin that were imported through military services, like *manteau* or *camouflage*, are still used by the Japanese in their daily conversations.

Japanese people in the Meiji era readily adopted and assimilated French products. Some endeavored to report the political system and culture of France in order to modernize the Japanese way of politics. Nakae Choomin, one of the most important democrats in our history, presented Rousseau's *contrat social* (*social contract*) to start the liberal democratic movement in Japan, which had been keeping hierarchical society under a constitutional monarchy (1883). The influence of the movement was so widespread throughout Japan that many elements of modern political systems, such as free elections, liberty of expression, and freedom of press, were finally established, thanks to the continuous efforts of Nakae and his colleagues.

Besides, the Japanese people were greatly interested in other aspects of French culture, like music, literature, architecture, and food. A treaty of commerce was signed by the two countries in 1857, which marked the beginning of prosperous trade. An increasing number of French products were imported, which resulted in a positive image of France among the Japanese.

So far, we have seen how the Japanese people came to like the French language and culture. Initially, we learned French to understand the scientific knowledge and modern thoughts of the French, and then, increasing commercial exchanges have strengthened our concern with regard to learning the language. All the while, of course, we have been making advances in the comprehension of the language, and we are now able to produce better French-Japanese dictionaries as well.

The original translation of *dictionary* in Japanese was *jbiki*, which means *a tool to look up characters*. We can imagine that *characters* signified Kanji (Chinese characters); therefore, ancient dictionaries were presumably used only to trace, without error or hesitation, the correct form of these difficult letters. Dictionaries for European languages, however, need much more, because their grammatical system and ways of thinking are completely different from

those in Japan.

According to Sakurai Takehito, previous studies have held that the primary reference for *Futsugo Meiyō* was P. Agron's *Nieuw hand-woordenboek der Fransche en Nederduitsche* (1828). He says, however, that "the *Kaihan Kenkai Motocho*, a record of publishing at the end of the Edo period, indicates that *Futsugo Meiyō* was based on *Dictionnaire portatif français et hollandais et hollandais et français*, published by Abraham Blusse Jr., also in 1828." (The Source Book and the Compiling Process of *Futsugo Meiyō*, in *Kokugogaku: studies in the Japanese language*, 2003, The Society of Japanese Linguistics.) He compares these dictionaries to reveal that "about 80% of the entries in *Futsugo Meiyō* were borrowed from Blusse's dictionary, with a certain percentage of the remaining entries coming from Agron's work." His study also reports that Blusse's and Agron's works influenced equally the explanations of entries in *Futsugo Meiyō*, and that Murakami used the *Doeff Halma Dutch-Japanese Dictionary* (1833) or its revised version *Oranda Jii* (1855) to translate the explanations into Japanese.

As it was natural among scholars in the early days of Japanese modernization, Murakami's main concern in compiling *Futsugo Meiyō* was to simply replace French words with Japanese words. Since then, there have been a number of improvements in the newer French-Japanese dictionaries: there are more detailed definitions of words, rich examples involving the use of natural phrases, grammatical explanations of articles that do not exist in Japanese, and the like. French studies in Japan made some achievements that could not be ignored even by the French people. For example, Matsubara Shuuji conducted an in-depth study of French articles. His *Essai sur la syntaxe de l'article en français moderne* (1932, Librairie du Recueil Sirey) was well-known in the French academic milieu.

Features of our upcoming dictionary

Today, there are many kinds of French-Japanese and Japanese-French dictionaries in Japan. Most of these assume the user to be Japanese learners who are beginners in French, probably at the university or college level. On the other hand, we now know that many foreign people are interested in various aspects of Japanese culture, such as the classic literature written by medieval aristocrats, traditional Japanese foods, or new forms of art like video games and animation. Sometimes, amateurs of Japanese culture are disappointed when they try to look up a Japanese dictionary: the writing is so complicated that they can rarely read

it. Most of the dictionaries published in our country, indeed, do not provide the pronunciation of words. Therefore, foreign learners need to have prior knowledge of how to read thousands of kanji characters (Japanese students spend more than nine years to master this character set).

An advantage of our new dictionary resides in this point. All the kanji characters are accompanied by their pronunciation in hiragana, the easiest character set in Japanese. Further, all Japanese words and phrases are rewritten in the Roman alphabet to provide readers with a direct means to pronounce them. If other dictionaries present a phrase as:

you promised 君は約束した,

in ours, you will find the following style:

you promised 君 (きみ) は約束 (やくそく) した kimi wa yakusoku shita

Thus, any user may appreciate this and be able to experience the joy of pronouncing Japanese words.

In our new Japanese-French dictionary, the headwords are carefully selected by highly experienced and qualified Japanese language specialists, in order to give a very natural and up-to-date vocabulary of our tongue. So, one will come across many particular Japanese expressions, which have not been chosen by other Japanese-French dictionaries (because it is difficult to translate them into French). A fine example is *umeboshi no onigiri* (rice ball with pickled plum), a very popular dish consumed in everyday life, which, however, most of the old Japanese-French dictionaries do not include. In the Japanese-French part of the dictionary, these expressions are properly translated by French native speakers living in Japan who are well acquainted with the local way of life.

Lastly, this dictionary provides a detailed explanation of the different meanings of kanji. For example, when they translate 画 (*kaku*), other dictionaries may simply indicate that this character means *strokes of writing*, although it is well known that almost every kanji character has many different meanings. For example, 画 can refer to a *project*, *section*, or *square*. Incidentally, coinage is one of the characteristics of Japanese language activity. We frequently combine plural kanji characters to form a new word. So if you do not grasp the original definitions of the characters, you will be unable to understand the coined words, which are constantly being invented. I am positive that our dictionary will be very useful in this respect.

Japanese, having no declension of nouns or conjugation of verbs by subject, is a rather easy language as far as grammar is concerned. Nevertheless, writing is an

altogether different issue. The Japanese script has three different types of character sets. A writer has to choose an appropriate set to write each word, and finally combine them to form a phrase. So, even if you completely mastered the 52 hiragana characters, you might still be unable to write a birthday letter to your friend.

So, what does this all mean?

I do not wish to convey the impression that Japanese is an impossible language to master. Despite the complexities I described above and in spite of the oft cited belief by many Japanese that only someone raised in the Japanese culture can acquire the socio-cultural background necessary for the acquisition of this language, it is not an impossible task. It is certainly difficult, but this is what makes the learning process all the more satisfying.

Japanese is rightly perceived as a language of many layers. Just when you believe you have adequately mastered it, there is a whole new dimension to be discovered. Just when you think you have gained a very thorough understanding of the Japanese culture and customs, another realm, equally important, yet seemingly contradictory, will be laid in front of you. This depth of socio-linguistic knowledge baffles both novice Japanese language learners and experienced Japanologists.

On the surface, too many factors conspire to make the study of Japanese a challenge not for the fainthearted. To become reasonably proficient in Japanese, one has to memorize several thousand Chinese characters and innumerable combinations thereof, in addition to the two phonetic systems of hiragana and katakana. If you want to master Japanese, you have to learn the customs and traditions embedded in the language over the long history of Japanese isolation from the rest of the world. During this period of over 200 years, a very intricate network of linguistic patterns, honorifics, and metalinguistic notions evolved. What makes matters worse is that Japanese does not really have linguistic brethren. The language, like the nation itself, is very much an island. Few parallels can be identified with other languages, and Japanese people offer little help in this regard. In fact, many of my countrymen take pride in asserting that Japan is different, and that non-Japanese, no matter how talented, cannot really aspire to become experts in the language. Of course, history has shown otherwise. We are surrounded by a global network of people who are excellent Japanese speakers. In this sense, the island has been conquered and the code broken.



cherry blossoms (*sakura*)