

Introduction

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Translation and Interpretation in Japan

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Introduction

In Japan, translation is an important and intensive activity — the number of literary, technical, scientific and other texts translated into Japanese every year is quite impressive. It is also a very interesting activity for Western observers because of its very different linguistic, cultural and technical environment and parameters.

And yet, very little is known in the world about the Japanese translation scene. This is mainly due to the language barrier, but also to the fact that Japanese translation practitioners and theoreticians, who write thousands of pages on the subject in Japan every year, apparently have little motivation to write for non-Japanese readers, or indeed to look at translation as it is practiced elsewhere.

We believe interesting facts and ideas can be picked up from the study of translation in Japan and from/into Japanese. We also believe the Japanese have something to gain from contacts with the international translators' community.

This special issue of *Meta* is an introduction to the Japanese translation scene. It is necessarily a very incomplete overview, but the articles presented here do highlight some of the most interesting features of Japanese translation, in particular some linguistic and sociolinguistic peculiarities which may broaden the horizons of Western theoreticians and possibly challenge some well-established ideas.

The preparatory work for this special issue was conducted in Tokyo during a recent one year JAPAN FOUNDATION Research Fellowship. I am deeply indebted to the Japan Foundation, as I am to Japanese colleagues whose support was most valuable, in particular Profs. Moto MIHO and Mitsuko SAITO of the International Christian University of Tokyo and Messrs. Tatsuya KOMATSU and Masumi MURAMATSU of Simul International Inc.

This special issue comprises six sections :

In the first section, which is linguistically oriented, Yuzuru KATAGIRI presents some important traits of Japanese which are not found in Western languages. Daniel GILE lists specific factors which oblige translators of Japanese informative texts to be even more analytical in their approach than translators working from Western languages. This section ends with an article by Fujiko HARA, who looks at linguistic and sociolinguistic factors affecting interpreters working from Japanese.

The second section is devoted to written translation. Tsutomu SUGIMOTO introduces the subject with a description of the beginnings of translation from Western languages in Japan and of the important role of Dutch medicine in this respect. Akio FUJII explains the translator's "gatekeeper" functions through the example of news translation. Osamu KANAMORI writes about the life of Japanese free-lance translators, whose social status is still far from well-established. William A. LISE's more descriptive account of technical translation in Japan also suggests that the Japanese professional translation market has not reached maturity yet. Last but not least, Adrian J. PINNINGTON compares the "minimalist style" and the "maximalist style" in English translations of Japanese poetry.

The next section is devoted to interpretation : Sen NISHIYAMA recalls the beginnings of conference interpretation in Japan, from the post-W.W. II period to the Apollo missions. Masaomi KONDO reflects upon the social status of conference interpreters in Japan, which is distinctly lower than that of their Western counterparts. Daniel GILE explains why it is so difficult for Western conference interpreters to reach a professional comprehension level of Japanese. Michihiro NOHARA writes about the specific case of liaison interpreters working for Japanese contractors in North Africa.

In a one-paper section on terminology, Masanobu FUJIKAWA discusses linguistic aspects of terminological issues and lists historical milestones in the development of lexicological and terminological activities in Japan.

In the following section, Toru SHIMIZU presents a rather original view of the role of translation : he considers that the changes Japanese undergoes through translation from foreign languages do not result in erosion, but rather in an enrichment of the language. In a totally different type of paper, noteworthy because of the rarity of sociological and psychological studies of translators and interpreters, Atsuko SUZUKI attempts to identify psychological characteristics of translators and interpreters.

The special issue ends with a synopsis of the idiosyncrasies of Japanese publications on translation and interpretation and two bibliographical lists by Daniel Gile.

We hope these articles will whet the readers' curiosity about the Japanese translation scene. We also hope that, through this special issue, Japanese colleagues will realize that the world is interested in them and will be encouraged to contribute more to *Meta* and other translation journals.

DANIEL GILE
Editor of the Special Issue