Variations on a Theme

Cultural Encounters Reflected in Japanese Bilingual Dictionaries of the Nineteenth Century

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Bilingual dictionaries provide a concrete space for the languages of two cultures to meet. Here a dichotomy is clearly established between two languages based on an expectation of equivalence. In bilingual dictionaries compilers assume difference, but more importantly they expect to find equivalents. Regardless of the specific purposes of bilingual dictionaries, one common reason for compiling and publishing them is to bridge a gap of understanding and facilitate communication between different groups of people. However, by making lists of words or phrases in one language and aiming to match each entry with a word or phrase of equivalent or similar meaning in a different language, the compiler is assuming that there is an equivalent. In reality, many compilers have been frustrated by the lack of equivalence, but have overcome the frustration with approximations and multiple suggestions, because without some expectation of finding words and phrases with similar meaning in the target language, it would be fruitless to set out to compile a bilingual dictionary. The assumption is that any two linguistic cultures match.

Cultural encounters take various forms, many of which involve communication between different language groups. Communication between speakers and writers of different languages requires either a common language or the understanding of the other language. In 19th century Japan, initially only official Japanese interpreters had permission to bridge gaps in communication, but by the end of the century the number of Japanese people who were familiar with other languages than Japanese had drastically increased. Part of the reason for the increase was the availability of bilingual dictionaries, which responded to specific problems of communication identified as linguistic. The lexicographers found where, when, and how language was a tool as well as an obstacle to communication. The bilingual dictionaries contribute to our understanding of how cultural encounters were and still are perceived, because many of the people who participate actively in encounters consulted bilingual dictionaries at some point in time.

Many of the aspects of cultural encounters are reflected in bilingual dictionaries, and in their concreteness, these dictionaries define as well as serve cultural encounters. This article identifies and discusses three types of bilingual dictionaries in Japan – each served a different purpose and defined different types of cultural encounters in the 19th century. 1) Japanese-Dutch dictionaries of the first half of the century provided access to European knowledge. 2) English-Japanese phrase books of the 1860s introduced a language of commerce new to Japan. 3) The Ainu-Japanese dictionaries of the late 19th century reflected the needs of agricultural settler communities among an indigenous population in a newly integrated northern Japan. Regardless of their differences in time and space, I will argue that these three types of dictionaries all illustrate how bilingual dictionaries preserve the idea that cultural encounters should be seen as dichotomies. Bilingual dictionaries ignore the possibility that encounters with an Other foster hybridity as described by Brimnes or take place on a middle ground as Walker and the New Western Historians suggest (Brimnes 2002; Walker 2002).

Early Japanese Bilingual Dictionaries

Buddhist monks and Christian missionaries compiled most of the early examples of bilingual dictionaries used in Japan. Buddhist monks arriving in Japan from the 5th century brought with them written texts in Chinese and later also dictionaries and encyclopedias to help the understanding of these texts. One example was the *Honyaku myogishu* or *Fan I ming I chi* compiled by Fa-yun (1088-1158), which was published in Japan in 1628 and includes lists of Buddhist words in Sanskrit. Christian missionaries compiled dictionaries in the belief that potential converts would most easily understand and adhere to God's Word if it was relayed in their native tongues, an idea that had gained further credence in the wake of the Reformation. The first Latin – Japanese dictionary dated back to 1440. As for the first Portuguese-Japanese dictionary, there seems to be some disagreement. According to Boisson, et.al. and Nakao, the first bilingual dictionary between Japanese and a non-Asian language was printed in Nagasaki in 1603. It was the *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam*, a Japanese –Portuguese dictionary which had been compiled by Jesuit missionaries in 1563 (Boisson 1991: 287; Nakao 1998: 37). According to Seeley, Portuguese Jesuit missionaries published the *Rakuysh* dictionary in 1598 (Seeley 1991: 135).

In the 19th century, the scholars of technical matters covered in Western books compiled dictionaries to be able to conduct further research. Christian missionaries compiled dictionaries to convey their message to speakers of all the languages of the world. Merchants had to negotiate contracts and exchanges from which they could benefit and on which they relied for their livelihood. In 1809, the Tokugawa government allowed for Japanese interpreters of Dutch to learn English and Russian and encouraged their compilation of dictionaries to accommodate needs for oral communication and an increasing number of translations of so-called Western ideas. The interpreters were inherently between two language groups. Among them were the Japanese

interpreters of Ainu languages employed by the fisheries in what is now Hokkaido, the interpreters of Dutch trained and based in Nagasaki, and returned shipwrecked fishermen who had taught Japanese in Irkutsk or St. Petersburg.

The bilingual dictionaries ranged from short lists of words and their equivalents in one other language to phrase books and compilations of more than a thousand pages. The phrase books contained whole sentences and expressions. The word lists were typically arranged according to topic and furnished the user with a resource for communicating his or her intent pertaining to the included topics. The topics were usually identical to those that had been employed by Chinese lexicographers for centuries, such as climate and people. The goal was not to have long philosophical conversations. The words of the dictionaries and the sentences in the phrase books aimed instead to help the users achieve very concrete goals, such as to purchase or sell an item, sign up for language study, or understand a text.

Reflecting the growing span of Japanese international interaction, the bilingual dictionaries included more languages. During the 19th century, the compilers of bilingual dictionaries identified a diverse Other beyond China. Countries beyond China had not been unknown to the literate elite of Japan. Earlier encounters as well as imports of ideas such as Buddhism from India in the 6th century, the arrival of catholic missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries, and from the 17th century, the Dutch delegation on Dejima in Nagasaki harbor, had provided them with a frame of reference. However, few had been in direct contact with people who spoke other languages or had seen texts written in languages other than Chinese. In the 19th century, new situations required communication in a variety of languages. The lexicographers of the new bilingual dictionaries located problems, which occurred in the encounter with the foreign. The problems ranged from attempts at translating foreign ideas into Japanese to misunderstandings when Japanese settlers in Hokkaido tried to communicate with their Ainu neighbors.

The Dutch – Accessing European Knowledge

Shortly after the end of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), historians coined the term *sakoku* [closed country] to refer to the Tokugawa policy of seclusion vis-à-vis the Europeans. This policy allowed for only the Dutch among the Europeans to trade with Japan. Most of the trade and encounters between the Dutch and the Japanese during the Tokugawa period took place in Nagasaki and during Dutch official visits to the Tokugawa capital of Edo. Besides artifacts the Japanese coveted Dutch knowledge – especially technical. (Morris-Suzuki 1994) Initially, the Tokugawa government controlled the encounters and the transmission of artifacts and knowledge very carefully. In the first half of the 19th century, however, the government commissioned official interpreters to compile several bilingual dictionaries, in order for Japanese who were not trained interpreters to access European knowledge. The government further allowed provincial lords to commission their own dictionaries, thereby allowing for less centrally controlled contact. The provincial lords found the investment in the compilation of Dutch-Japanese dictionaries worthwhile, because access to foreign knowledge and ideas could give them a competitive edge domestically.

In 1810, the lord of Nakatsu province, Okudaira Masataka (1781 – 1855) commissioned *Rango yakusen Nieuw Verzameld Japans en hollandsch Woordenboek* [Dutch Translation Dictionary – New Japanese – Dutch Dictionary]. The dictionary has a preface in Dutch followed by an introduction in Japanese, explaining the layout and technicalities of the dictionary. The Japanese Imperial interpreter, Ba Sadayoshi, wrote the preface, where he explained the background for the compilation.

> The world has from olden times been divided in four parts; Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, with inhabitants of different nature, character, and language…. The Europeans are like stones as opposed to the Asians who are wood. Because stone is heavy, it sinks and remains still, as opposed to wood which is light and drifts, the Europeans [by remaining still] managed to discover wondrous things whereas the Asians[, who drifted,] rarely did so.[In order to make the wondrous discoveries of the Europeans accessible to the people of his *han*,] the daimyo of Nakatsu had undertaken to learn Dutch so that he could find the useful and reasonable arts as he proused through the European books and thereby make his many subjects knowledgeable and capable (Okudaira 1810: 1).

Ba declared the premise of his bilingual dictionary to be an inherent difference between continents. European knowledge made the subjects knowledgeable and capable – qualities that provincial lords valued already at the beginning of the 19th century as competition was fierce for market shares of the large market in the capital as well as the markets in the castle towns throughout the country. Each domain had patents on technological innovations used in the production of foods, materials for clothing, *sake* production, or technology used for the building of equipment or tools. (Wigen 1995; Morris-Suzuki 1994)

Dutch-Japanese dictionaries served the Japanese need for accessing European ideas and defined the encounter as a predominantly one way benefit to the Japanese. Furthermore, the encounter was mainly with written material as few Japanese people apart from government interpreters ever met Dutch people in person. In the search for equivalents for technical terms, the compilers often coined new terms in Japanese by compounding old characters.

The International Language of Commerce – New to Japan

In the first half of the 19th century, due to the official policy of trading with the Dutch, Dutch was the language of commerce and the shogun only entrusted selected official Japanese interpreters to enable communication. In 1809, the Tokugawa shogun allowed for interpreters to learn Russian, English, and French, because he realized the importance of these languages in the world. In 1811, Motoki Shōzaemon (1767 – 1822), an interpreter of Dutch and the son of another Dutch interpreter, Motoki Yoshinaga (1735 – 1794), published the first English-Japanese dictionary in Japan, *Angeria kygaku shsen*. He had learned both French and English. In 1814, he published

Angeria gorin taisei [A Compilation of English Words] under his other name, Motoki Shei. In 1817, he published the first French textbook under the title *Futsursatsujihan* [French-Russian-character Dictionary] and *Eifutsuran taiyaku gorin* [English-French-Dutch Translation Dictionary] (Okimori 1996: 365).

Later Motoki wrote *Gunkan zukai* on marine engineering and *Kaigan hojutsu biyo* on coast defense, which reflected his real interest. In order to consider British and French experiences and views on relevant techniques and technologies, he and others needed to be able to read materials written in these languages. Prior to 1817, bilingual dictionaries necessary for his research in French and English for his subsequent publications had been unavailable and he had had to fill the gap first.

Besides Japanese interpreters, foreign missionaries constituted the most important group of compilers of bilingual dictionaries. As had been the case with the first Latin – Japanese and Portuguese – Japanese dictionaries of the 15th and 16th centuries, the first English – Japanese and Japanese – English dictionaries were compiled by Christian missionaries. The British missionary from the London Missionary Society, Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857), published *An English and Japanese and Japanese and English Vocabulary* in 1830 and in 1835 he published *A Comparative Vocabulary of the Chinese, Corean, and Japanese Languages*. Translated under the title *Translation of a Comparative Vocabulary Corean, and Japanese Languages: to which is added The Thousand Character Classic in Chinese and Corean; the whole accompanied by Copious Indexes, of all the Chinese and English Words occuring in the work* it was published in Jakarta under his pen name Philo Silensis. Medhurst wrote in his preface that "[…]should the advancement of knowledge and religion in those dark regions of the earth be in the smallest degree forwarded hereby, the translator's end will be abundantly answered" (Medhurst 1835: I) He emphasized not only the importance of the dissemination of religion, but also of knowledge. Medhurst's lexicographical works were an integral part of his life's work as a missionary.

A Phrases Book for Merchants

One of the most famous non-Japanese lexicographers of Japanese-English dictionaries was James Curtis Hepburn, A.M., M.D.(1815 – 1911), an American missionary, medical doctor, and linguist. He came to Japan in 1859 and returned home in 1892. He completed *A Japanese and English Dictionary; with an English and Japanese Index* in 1867. The seventh edition was entitled *A Japanese-English and English-Japanese Dictionary* and published in 1903. The index was entitled "An Index; or, Japanese Equivalents for the Most Common English Words." He used the words 'equivalents' and 'common', which impressed upon the user or potential buyer that there were equivalence between languages as well as the claim that this dictionary would enable the user to communicate successfully in 'common' situations (Hepburn 1903). Where Motoki Shei had had marine engineering and coastal defense in mind, Medhurst and Hepburn had other goals, which they could only pursue by compiling a dictionary that would fill a gap in existing tools for missionaries.

Besides technology and missionary work, commerce soon became an area in which dictionaries were indispensable. By 1862, the need for communication between merchants had increased sharply in the wake of the unequal treaties, which had forced the shogun to open a number of ports to commerce. The compiler of *Wayei shwa* [Japanese- English Commerce Talk] was not listed on the title page. In spite of the title and the content targeting merchants, the compiler's opinion about merchants seems to have been somewhat derogatory. On page 12, he included phrases such as 'The merchants have an improper manner of speaking' and 'Many merchants cannot read official writing' (*Wayei*, 1862: 12). Nevertheless, most of the vocabulary and phrases pertained to commerce and the intended buyers of the phrase book were merchants. Most of the book consists of a continuous dialogue with phrases about credit and cash payment, seals, contracts, silk, copper, oil, rape seed, and sharks.

The rest of the book consists of conversations or dialogues between a Japanese and an English speaker. Under the topic 'speaking' are sentences such as 'What is it?,' 'Have you said anything?,' 'Have you understood me?,' and 'He speaks falsely.' An indirect advertisement for the book is included on page 7 'Learn the English language and you can speak with all.' The idea of only having to learn one language, instead of the numerous languages spoken in Yokohama and other open ports, in order to communicate with all the foreigners must have been appealing (*Wayei*, 1862: 7).

The phrase book for merchants reflected the class ambivalence in Japan at the time. The Tokugawa official class system placed the merchants beneath samurai, farmers, and artisans, but by the 19th century, the merchants had gained influence through their riches gained at the expense of the samurai and farmers. Furthermore, the Americans and Europeans were interested in trade and here the skills of the merchants, which they had learned at their merchant academies, became essential. Therefore, the market for bilingual English-Japanese dictionaries and phrasebooks included merchants with specific needs, which were met, for example, in the phrase book quoted above.

The English-Japanese phrase book served and defined a predominantly verbal encounter where the parties negotiated terms of trade agreements for the exchange of goods. This reflected a two-way communication with both sides having an interest in the exchange. Compilers coined new terms in Japanese, but increasingly borrowed words, which they transcribed phonetically with old characters. Howland analyzes examples such as the two terms for liberty; *riberuchi* – a phonetic transcription of the word liberty borrowed from English and *jiy* – a compound of two old Chinese characters for similar if not identical concepts (Howland 2002).

The Geographical Periphery: Assimilation or Hybridity

The encounter with the Ainu was not new to Japanese history in the 19th century. The Ainu is a distinct population indigenous to the Japanese islands. However, in the 19th century more Japanese people encountered Ainu and the encounters took new forms. Whereas the

encounters from prehistoric times until 1600 had been a mixture of friendly exchanges, intermarriages, and wars, the 17th-19th century encounters were characterized by seasonal employment of Ainu in the fishing industry administered by the Matsumae family, which provided fish meat as fertilizer for Japanese agriculture (Howell 1995). The 19th century encounters came under the government scheme of Japanese nation-building with an aim to assimilate the Ainu into Japanese from 1799-1821 and again from 1868. The assimilation policies included teaching Ainu children Japanese history and language. Furthermore, the land of the Ainu on the northern island of Hokkaido was fertile and vast, perfect for the expansion of Japanese agriculture. The Meiji government (1868-1912) encouraged not only Ainu to become farmers, but also Japanese farmers from overpopulated areas to help develop the northern frontier as settlers among the Ainu.

In 1890, the Japanese, Watanabe Zenji, published an Ainu-Japanese dictionary, *Hokkaido Dojin Tsūgo* [The Language of the Hokkaido Natives], with the stated purpose of providing Japanese settlers in Ainu communities with a means to communicate with their new neighbors. Watanabe envisioned that his dictionary or word list would be essential to the new settlers in Hokkaido:

> Recently, […] it seems that more settlers come every day[…]in Ishikari, Kitami and Tokachi. They aptly adapt the fertile plains of the open country of mid-Hokkaido to the cultivation of new land, cattle raising, and silk worm culture. […]. The people who now desire to cultivate new land, raise cattle, and grow silk worms on these plains will meet with many obstacles if they do not understand the language of the socalled "Aino" natives (Watanabe 1890: 1).

He continued by emphasizing that his lists of words were meant for the people "who do not think of it as an inconvenience to learn a little now," and he declared, "I present the people who wish to make friends in Hokkaido with the help of a dictionary (*tebikikusa*)" (Watanabe 1890: 2). Watanabe wished to meet a need that had not been obliterated by the linguistic assimilation policies (1799-1821) of the Japanese Tokugawa government in the beginning of the century or those of the Meiji government initiated in 1868.

Watanabe argued that there was linguistic confusion in Hokkaido because of the rapid change and influx of new words of the settlers, who in turn borrowed local Ainu words. Under the topic heading 'names of things', Watanabe wrote:

> Although heretofore names existed for things produced in Hokkaido, many words imported from *naichi* [the rest of Japan] for the same things were used. Nevertheless, in the interim original names have changed and there are people who use undefinable (*isshiy*) words, for example […], *unma* for *uma* [horse], *tanbako* for *tabako* [tobacco]. Further, in extreme cases, *naichijin* use native [Ainu] words and, on the contrary, natives recite *naichi* words. Little by little it has reached a point where [we] loose the distinction between guest and host. For example, it is so that *naichijin* who have lived in Tokachi for many years, say something like *serenbo* for chimney and natives say *kiseru* [Japanese for pipe] instead (Watanabe 1890: 10).

Watanabe recognized the hybridity of the encounter between the Ainu and the Japanese reflected in language usage, such as the multitude of Japanese place names with Ainu roots and the mixed language use in Ainu villages with Japanese settlers. Nevertheless, in his dictionary, Watanabe ignored the confusion he described.

In establishing the differences between Japanese and Ainu languages, Watanabe explained how Ainu place names gave very specific information about the place named.

Under the subdivision entitled universe the editor noted that place names in Hokkaid come from the languages of the natives. He explained how natives name places after such aspects of topography as the size, degree of humidity, and river conditions. For example, the meaning of Sapporo is 'dry plain,' that of Noboribetsu is 'big river,' and that of Tetona is 'swamp.' This way the names themselves tell about the nature of the place (Watanabe 1890: 4).

The emerging linguistic interest, inspired several works on the Ainu roots of Japanese place names by Basil Hall Chamberlain, who established the linguistics department at the Imperial University in Tokyo, and several works by Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962), a Japanese folklorist, who recorded diverse customs, forms of language, and livelihoods of communities throughout Japan. The previously unrecognized Ainu roots of many Japanese place names bore witness to the long history of encounters between the two language groups, but also to the hybrid results of these encounters.

Watanabe's assessment of the Japanese language skills of the Ainu could be interpreted as a negative evaluation of the attempts to teach Japanese to the Ainu. Watanabe saw a concrete need for his dictionary to enable communication. Watanabe's efforts reflected the shortcomings not so much of the Ainu languages as of the Japanese assimilation policies. Moreover, he commented on evidence of hybridity rather than assimilation. However, he did not include the hybrid words as hybrid. He designed his dictionary to meet the needs of two-way, predominantly, verbal communication about everyday life in a farming village. Settlers arrived also to communicate agricultural expertise to the Ainu and seem to have arrived at a similar conclusion as the missionaries that a message is most effectively communicated in the mother tongue of the intended recipient of the knowledge.

Conclusion

In the 19th century, it was predominantly Japanese who financed and actively compiled the Japanese bilingual dictionaries although the first 68 years of the century has often been referred to as part of the period of Japanese isolation. Apart from European missionaries, it was predominantly Japanese people who financed and compiled the dictionaries that served and defined the cultural encounters of the Japanese during the 19th century. As concrete manifestations of encounters, the dictionaries in this article hint at the complexities and inconsistencies of the most common interpretations of the encounters. The encounter with the Dutch took place in spite of official

policies of closedness, commerce was central to the history of 19th century Japan in spite of the lack of respect for this trade, and the Japanese language skills of the Ainu were limited in spite of long periods of active implementation of linguistic assimilation policies.

Time and space constituted the variations on the theme of cultural encounters reflected in the bilingual dictionaries. The two first examples of bilingual dictionaries both involved European languages, whereas the third involved the neighboring Ainu languages. Japanese people had been in continued contact with Ainu for more than a thousand years, with the Dutch for about 300 years, and with the English less than 50 years. In considering the entries and time of publication of the bilingual dictionaries, the compilers addressed specific needs, which they discussed in their statement of purpose. They all saw it necessary and worth the effort to compile bilingual dictionaries to bridge a communication gap caused by language differences, whether to communicate knowledge or to facilitate commerce or everyday communication. However, the compilers ignored the time factor as well as the question of proximity of the languages, when they defined the encounters as dichotomies. Regardless of how many years two language groups had been in contact or how close the languages were located geographically, the dictionaries did not include a special category of common words, whether newly coined or borrowed.

The function of bilingual dictionaries is to facilitate communication between members of specific sectors of different language communities, i.e. merchants, engineers, and religious believers. Due to the concrete nature of bilingual dictionaries as a tool for communication, these dictionaries implicitly or by default define the nature of the meeting of members of different language communities as a dichotomy instead of a hybridity. The Japanese encounters of the 19th century led to the coinage of many new words. However, the bilingual dictionaries did not define these new words as hybrid results of the encounter between the two languages. The encounter with the Dutch and English languages had resulted in the coinage of many new terms and borrowings into the Japanese language. In the case of the Ainu, Watanabe even explained how the encounters had led to hybrid uses of language, an abundance of Japanese place names rooted in the Ainu languages, and coinage of new Ainu words, however, they were not included in his list of entries. Despite the hints at complexities of encounters, the bilingual dictionaries defined encounters between language groups, not as middle ground or hybridities, but as encounters between two distinct languages, which concretely could be seperated into two columns of equivalents with no need or room for a middle column.

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