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A Translation of 'Linguistic Environment in the Kyushu Seaside Area,' by T. Wakaki in Approaches to Environmental Studies: Viewpoints of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Masako Matsuda

Introduction

‘Linguistic Environment in the Kyushu Seaside Area’ by T. Wakaki is included in the section called 'Linguistic and Semiotic Environment,' Chapter Three of Approaches to Environmental Studies: Viewpoints of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (2001) edited by Environmental Policy Course of the Faculty of Environmental Studies, Nagasaki University. T. Wakaki made a presentation based on this essay, with a translation by M. Matsuda, during the ‘US-Japan Cross Cultural Seminar: Language, Folk, and Environment,’ a joint seminar between Carleton College, U.S.A., and the Faculty of Environmental Studies, Nagasaki University in 2001. Both the author and the translator agreed that it would be significant to introduce history of various aspects of linguistic environment of Nagasaki in English.

1. The Linguistic Environment in the Kyushu Seaside Area

On occasions such as diplomatic negotiations to keep peace among nations, or individual negotiations and business transactions, mutual understanding of each other’s language is considered most important and essential. However, what is represented by a different language with its own sound system, characters, and signs can be understood through translating the language or transferring its codes. Transactions are made possible in business negotiations, once the different rules, promises, and conditions of each culture are understood mutually across borders, in order to make a contract.

For example, let’s take some aspects of the historical and linguistic environment in the Kyushu seaside area. There were close linguistic relations in Japan with Ancient China and the Korean Peninsula. In the latter half of the 16th century, negotiations began with European countries: Portugal, Spain, Holland, England, and South East Asia. As a result, the different languages of East and West came into contact for the first time. The following timeline traces the rather complicated process:

1) Portuguese and Latin – 1550: Francisco Xavier visited Hirado. (Hirado Harbour was opened.) Interpreters of Portuguese are Nishi Kichibe and others; of Dutch Takasago Chogoro and others.
2) Spanish – 1584: Franciscan and Augustinian missionaries landed at Hirado. Matsuura Shizunobu began trade with Ruson with the aid of the Spanish.
4) English – The ship captain of Liefde, William Adams, was invited to be a councillor for making policies toward Western countries, and he made efforts to open trade with England.
5) Chinese – 1562 (The age of authorized trade with the certificate of ‘Red Seal’); a Chinese ship came to Tomachi beach 1603; interpreters of Chinese were founded to translate the Nankin, Fukushu, and Senshu
dialecets.

6) Siamese—1644; Morita Chosuke was an interpreter.

7) Tonkyn—1655—1657; an interpreter of the Tonkyn dialect, Tonkyn Kyuzo.

8) Mogal—1672; interpreters of the Mogal dialect are Shigematsu Juemon and Nakahara Den-emon.

9) Korean—1607; a correspondent with Korea, Kou Gu Sei (1617-)

10) German—1771; written translation of letters (Imamura Gen-emon, et.al.)

11) Russian—1805; the Russian ambassador, Rezanov, came to Nagasaki. Baba Sajuro translated Russian for Rezanov.

12) French—1808; a Russian ship came to Matsumae, Hokkaido, carrying a document written in French rather than Russian. Hakodate magistrate sent it to the Nagasaki magistrate and the Dejima captain translated it. It was after that, that the interpreters of Dutch began studying French, too.

2. Translators

Communication between Western and Eastern languages was established with the aid of interpreters. Working as professionals in foreign languages, they made the Kyushu seaside area a most interesting scene for cross-cultural exchanges. For about 300 years, 12 or 13 different languages were used in the Kyushu seaside area through foreign interpreters of Japanese in trade and diplomatic negotiations, and translations of diplomatic documents, books, papers and letters. It should be noted that such a very rare linguistic environment was created, even against a unique, historical background of isolation in the Edo era.

Since many interchanges had accumulated between the Chinese and Japanese over the years, the interpreters of Chinese were the earliest. They have a long history in their occupation of having received and entertained Chinese guests of high rank ever since the ancient days of Chikushi (Hakata Korokan era).

The interpreters of Portuguese and Spanish the so-called "southern barbarians" appeared next, and later came the "red-heads" as the English and the Dutch were called. Among the professionals of Portuguese and Spanish, some took part in Christian missionary works, interpreting for priests in addition to helping merchants in their trade. In 1639, when the isolation policy became more severe, interpreters in Hirado moved to Nagasaki, where not a few later changed to specialize in Dutch rather than Portuguese. After the Dutch settled in Dejima, their language became the prevalent Western language used in Nagasaki.

Regarding the relationship with China, there were two sea-lines for ambassadors to Sui and Tang in ancient days; the northern route via the Sea of Genkai along the coastline of the Korean Peninsula, and the southern line via the Goto Islands, the East China Sea to Taiwan, and the mid-south coast of the Chinese Continent. After the days of sending delegates to China, the trade with Sung and Ming was so active that mutual exchange and influence in culture and language continued until the Tokugawa era (17c to 19c). In 1603 interpreters of Chinese were organized as public officials under the control of the Nagasaki Magistrate, and Chinese Houses were built in 1689 as an equivalent for China of Dejima for Dutch. In addition, interest in contemporary China was aroused among people and knowledge of China became widespread, setting off a period notable for the adoption of overseas cultures. Three temples in Nagasaki, Kofukuji, Fukusaiji, and Sofukuji, became parish temples for Chinese people. Ingen, a Zen priest, came to Japan and founded Manpukuji Temple in Uji near Kyoto as the head temple of the Obaku Zen sect. Obaku style and Tang cultures in languages and pictures were widely received as well as Dutch culture in Dejima, and Chinese influence spread and even created the fashion of the "Bunjin" (cultured people) taste.

After resigning from his office as Nankin interpreter, Okajima Kanzan (1673-1728) went to
Edo (Tokyo) and joined the school of Daigakunokami, the President of Shogun’s College, Hayashi Seiu. In 1711 Kanzan attended the interview with the Korean Ambassador held by scholars of Shogun, where it was evident that he had a good command of Chinese. Later he was invited to be a language teacher in a private school of Ogyusorai. Also, he worked at Kogido School in Horikawa, Kyoto, teaching conversational Chinese. Kanzan compiled dictionaries of spoken Chinese and a Chinese dictionary of slang, and translated novels of Suikoden, adventure stories. In the course of this Chinese boom, reading circles of hakaruwa, Ming short stories, and so-called vulgar scenario-like novels became popular, and as a result their influence brought birth to "yomihon" in Japan, novels in a new genre. Combined with the encouragement policy of absorbing Western technology at the time of Kyoho, linguistic exchanges in the Kyushu seaside area promoted absorption of overseas cultures.

In 1617, an interpreter of Korean, Kou Gu Sei, came to Japan as the second, third, and fourth Korean ambassador. He compiled a dictionary for learners of Japanese, Shokai New Language, which was published after 40 years. It features a way of contrasting Japanese and Korean so that the learner can read and translate at the same time. In 1592 he had been taken to Japan as a war prisoner during the Japan-Korean war of Bunroku, and had studied Japanese during his stay of ten years. This time coincided with the time of the Jesuitic missionaries, therefore, Kou’s Japanese dictionary reveals traces of vocabulary and phrases of the Azuchi and Momoyama era.

European countries such as Spain, Portugal, Holland, and England sailed from their countries via Southeast Asia or the Cape of Good Hope, and people in Kyushu came into contact with their languages. The influence of the so-called “southern barbarian” cultures of Portuguese and Spanish spread widely and accumulated in Yamaguchi, Bungo, Hirado, Goto, Ohmura, Shimabara, Amakusa, Nagasaki as well as Osaka district. Among others, a Western style printing machine was brought to Japan for the first time, and papers of Christianity and Japanese stories were printed with it. They are extremely precious in history of religion, language, printing and information culture in terms of their density of contacts with Western languages, and the accurate and high level of translation.

The historical backgrounds of these days included the disturbances caused by wars in the Azuchi and Momoyama era, when the feudal lords were willing to introduce Western military technology, and later the Christian rebellions in Shimabara and Amakusa in the Edo period. The Shogun, worrying about Christian influence, enforced the isolation policy in 1641, forcing the Portuguese to leave Japan. Only the Dutch were allowed to stay in Dejima, and through them, people tried to absorb information about Western medicine and other technological advances. Dutch studies became the medium of studying Western sciences. Accordingly, interpreters of Dutch were organized as public offices in Nagasaki.

From China, many priests of the Obaku sect came to Nagasaki one after another to escape from the wars which resulted in the change of the dynasty from Ming to Ching. Chinese Houses for Chinese merchants were built near Dejima, and the environment of absorbing Chinese culture greatly changed.

It is fairly difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of interpreters of Chinese and Dutch, however; scholars believe that there were approximately 300 in total. Although the levels of abilities in conversation and linguistic knowledge depended on individuals, it is notable that professional groups dealing with languages existed as public officers, which denotes that Nagasaki was historically advanced in terms of a multi-linguistic culture.

In 1796 the interpreter of Tonkyn dialect, Gi Gozaemon, submitted to the Nagasaki Magistrate 5 volumes of dictionaries for
conversation, *Yakushi Cho Tan Wa*. He was ordered to do so in case of emergency, when he was made redundant from his office because the number of Tonkyn ships coming to Nagasaki decreased. Gozaemon compiled his dictionaries and others, *Tonkyn Ishi Soushuge, NanShi Shuge*, which were handed down from his ancestors, using special characters which were difficult to read without referring to codes, “Gishi Kana Characters.” He did so because he tried to keep the occupation as a public interpreter only to his family.

As for Dutch, *A Dutch-Japanese Dictionary* (about 1770) and *A Dutch-Japanese Translation Dictionary* (1812) were produced. Studies of English and French advanced, and dictionaries and translation of grammar books were published. After the Kyoho Reform, Shogun took an active policy to encourage the absorption of Western studies. Keen interest in Western culture resulted in the import of books in their languages, publication of books imitating their originals and translation, and continued until the Meiji Restoration.

Cross-cultural exchanges revealed themselves in various aspects of linguistic interchanges in diplomacy, trade, scientific studies, and cultural phenomena. In Kyushu and Nagasaki, where negotiations and contacts with overseas countries took place, the diverse linguistic environment developed as mentioned above. It was the result of historical incidents and individual exchanges as a background of multi-language culture. The contacts and frictions with other languages caused the existing Japanese language to change in sounds, vocabularies, and grammar.

3. Vanishing Languages

Everybody worries about the conservation of some endangered species such as whales, Japanese crested ibises, and Pandas. What about languages - languages which are being used in everyday life (natural languages)?

In modern Japan, movements grew to abolish dialects and spread “the standard Japanese” in line with encouraging unification of the written and spoken language. In 1895 the Tokyo dialect was chosen as the standard, and since then a national language policy to use this dialect as a standard for national public language proceeded. The start of radio broadcasting in 1925 and television in 1953 marked the beginning of the nation-wide spread of mass media, and development in mass communication has made people conscious of the differences between the standard Japanese and dialects.

Let’s turn our eyes to the world here. It is estimated that more than half of the 3000 languages in the world or 6000, if languages of minority nations and tribes are included, will disappear during the 21st century. This means that from 20 to 30 languages are vanishing annually. As has been pointed out, a language consists of a basis of a nation, a race, and culture, however; we might sometimes be too indifferent to the problems of languages and their environment. In the International Congress of Linguists held in 1997 in Paris, how to cope with endangered languages was one of major themes, aimed at arousing people’s awareness of the issue.

In 2001 the United Nation’s environmental forum at the ministerial level was held in Nairobi, and it was reported that more than 2500 languages are in the critical situation of dying out because of cultural globalisation. Also, “the linguistic war” in Belgium, which has continued for more than a half century, is throwing complicated questions concerning politics, national borders, races, cultures, and religions.

Cultural globalisation threatens minority languages to disappear, which in turn will result in erasing from our collective memories the diverse cultures that produced them.