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Writing a Speech

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Writing a Speech

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 8 September 1951, the signing of the peace treaty with Japan was held at the Opera House in San Francisco. Six and a half years of American military occupation came to an end, and Japan became a free nation. Japan's ambassador plenipotentiary, Yoshida Shigeru, signed the treaty document and made a speech from the dais. Yoshida's manner of delivering his speech, quite apart from its content, struck those from many nations assembled there as odd. As would have been entirely appropriate in Japan, Yoshida read his speech from a manuscript written curiously in india ink on long scroll. He unrolled the paper from right to left as he read it, a little at a time. The foreign press summed up this performance later with the phrase "Japanese plenipotentiary reads toilet paper."

International usage notwithstanding, it is customary in Japan for the Prime Minister to read his administrative and general policy speeches and to address the Diet by reading from manuscript. Prime Minister Kaifu recently made headlines when, in making a general policy speech on the afternoon of 2 October 1989, he "varied his reading from the original text with subtly different locutions in the Upper and Lower Houses, and exhibited 'individuality'" (*Nikkei Shinbun*, morning edition, 3 October).

There were more than twenty instances in his speech before the House of Representatives where he deviated from the text distributed in advance. Most cases minor, such as changing "Japan" to "our land," and did not particularly affect the meaning, but there were also major changes such as adding "fundamental" in "there are *fundamental* changes, such as *perestroika*, taking place in socialist nations that must be carefully noted." In regard to the consumption tax, "we will engage in an *even more*

detailed *consideration* ('policy' in the original) with respect to those in socially weaker positions."

About these changes, Kaifu remarked, "I find it wearisome to read without taking my eyes off the manuscript. Perhaps it's my lack of experience. I'll do better in the future."

It is customary for the Prime Minister to read speeches aloud word-for-word in the form distributed in advance to Diet members because the texts are the result of agreements in the Cabinet, but surely it is going too far to complain about "more than 20 instances ... where he differed from the text" of the kind just cited and compel a Prime Minister to promise to do better in the future. Unfortunately this phenomenon is not restricted to the world of politics.

On 28 March 1964, an *Asahi* evening edition headline reported that President Ōkōchi had used the famous phrase from J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism* "Socrates dissatisfied" in his commencement address at the University of Tōkyō. According to the article, the key passage in his address was as follows:

What is most essential for students graduating now is not to succumb to satisfaction with their path to success, but to correct Japanese distortions and prejudices in the areas of politics, economics, and culture. J. S. Mill once said, "It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied." To live by one's convictions makes one more human, even if it leaves one undernourished, than to close one's eyes to the wrongs in society and take sanctuary in the glory of a well-fed pig. When each of you graduates makes up your mind to be a dissatisfied Socrates, then will Japan become a truly good country.

But President Ōkōchi had actually not used the well-known aphorism that showed up in this headline. In the *Asahi* morning edition of 15 April, he commented, "I was amazed. Not only I—the many graduating students who heard my address must have been amazed to see the evening paper." He went on:

I listened to the tape just to be sure, but that part about Socrates simply wasn't there. And as I listened to the tape over and over again, I found myself thinking that my address was better for not having used that rather labored quotation.

It turns out that, because Ōkōchi was blinded by photographers' flash bulbs and television lighting, he misread the prepared text.

My eyes were irritated, and there was too much happening for me to read the manuscript. To tell the truth, I suppose I found the small characters too hard to make out.

The reason the words he did not utter nonetheless found their way into the newspaper was that the reporter used the prepared text verbatim. The commence-

ment address of the President of the University of Tōkyō is printed in the newspaper every year. They frequently contain aphorisms that gain popularity not only among the graduating students but also among the public at large. The previous year President Kaya Seiji said, "Do not just keep your education stashed away in your heads. Have the courage to do those little kindnesses that anyone can do," out of which sprung the "Little Kindnesses" movement. Prepared copies of the university president's valedictory is distributed the reporters ahead of time so that it can make the evening edition. And so it came to pass that a commencement address that wasn't there, embellished with a newspaper headline, became the focus of debate in the papers over the pros and cons of prepared texts!

2. THE STIFF-AND-FORMAL ORATORICAL STYLE

As these examples show, Japanese customarily address the public from a prepared text. The kind of vocabulary and writing style used in such texts is a stiff written norm called oratorical style.

According to Yanagita Kunio's *Sekenbanashi no Kenkyū* 'A Study of Chit-chat', Japanese used to be sparing in the extreme in their everyday language, making up for their restraint on special occasions or at ceremonies related to major human events, with a time-honored, pompous, stiff-and-formal oratorical style. It was "an old-fashioned way of talking, one-sided and long-winded, totally restricted in form; it was called *katari* or *monogatari* and was something quite different from the *hanashi* of everyday chitchat." That stiff-and-formal style still exists today, and Yanagita says of it,

It was, so to speak, a vestige, an effort to preserve the sound of the kind of formal speech one pricks up one's ears to at *Obon*, New Year's, and ceremonies related to good or ill fortune. The idea is to keep the language from being mistaken for everyday conversation. One gets a glimmer of it in the "*sezarubeken'ya*" or "*no shozon de aru*" way of talking (*i.e.*, replete with obsolete forms and outlandish vocabulary).

There's a *rakugo* monologue that illustrates Yanagita's point nicely:

Once a neighbor girl named Miyo was going to get married. A guy went to the celebration and, after drinking some of the *sake* provided, was feeling pretty good. Thirsty on his way home, he asked for some water of an old fellow running a nighttime noodle stand. The old vendor, thinking the drunk was sure to buy a bowl of *soba*, gave him some water and lent an ear to what the guy had to say. He never ordered any noodles but had plenty to say! "I remember Miyo when she was just a little girl, but today she knelt so formal and nice, and she said, '*Sate, kono tabi wa ...*' using words just like a barker introducing an acrobat. She's really turned into a fine young lady, Pop!"

This "barker introducing an acrobat" used the stiff-and-formal oratorical style. In

ordinary personal conversation, the listener would wonder, "Why so formal?" and be amazed at the out-of-place solemnity. *Hanashi*, as opposed to *katari*, is just ordinary speech—chitchat—and is accorded only the lowest social status. Everyday spoken language was never cultivated for public speaking because the lecture-like monologues in oratorical style were the rule for speaking before large numbers of people in formal situations.

3. FUKUZAWA YUKICHI'S EXPERIMENT

The Japanese word *enzetsu* 'public speech' was coined by Fukuzawa Yukichi to translate the English word *speech*. The first *enzetsu* were delivered at a public lecture series of the Meiroku Association, to which Fukuzawa belonged, in the Tsukiji Seiyōken building on 16 February 1875. On 1 May of that year, thanks to Fukuzawa, a hall for public speaking was completed on top of Mita Hill in what is now the Minato Ward of Tōkyō.

Fukuzawa had decided how the Mita Lecture Hall would be operated just a week before it opened. His methods for training in public speaking are described in *Mita Enzetsukai Nikki* 'Diary of the Mita Lecture Society', quoted in *Keiō Gijuku Hyakunenshi* 'The Centenary History of Keiō University', according to which, he required that speakers not only deliver oral presentations but also write out their talks in advance. The third Saturday of each month was for training: each member would "commit his cherished opinions to writing and then come and state them." A week later, Fukuzawa had the members "form groups of three, of which two are to put their arguments in writing in advance and present them as a public speech, having prepared to debate them." Whatever the effects this may have been on the quality of the speeches, it probably stands as the first attempt in Japan to bring some unity to the written and spoken languages.

In literature, however, it was the publication of San'yūtei Enchō's *Botan Dōrō* roughly a hundred years ago in 1884 (Meiji 17) that initiated the epoch-making drive toward unification of speech and writing referred to as *genbun itchi*. Development of a colloquial written style progressed in 1887 with Futabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo* 'Floating Clouds' and Yamada Bimyō's *Musashino*, and, in 1896, Ozaki Kōyō's *Tajō Takon* 'Sentimentality'. Still, Fukuzawa's experiment had preceded all that by a decade. In particular, unlike the efforts of literary authors, Fukuzawa's attempt had been a novel experiment in setting spoken language down on paper for the purpose of encouraging as many people as possible to talk, to convey their ideas to others, and to participate in the exchange of opinion.

This experiment led to his *Fukuō Jiden*, the autobiography he wrote in his latter years. Fukuzawa wished to put spoken words on paper and use them "as is" in a book, and so worked from shorthand transcripts. Nevertheless, every single page of the original manuscript has corrections on it; in many places bits of paper in Fukuzawa's hand are pasted in. The result is Fukuzawa's best attempt, through practical example, to show how the spoken language could be the basis of a collo-

quial writing style. Nevertheless, he insisted on scrupulous preparation for talks before large audiences. In this sense, he never quite freed himself from the traditions of linguistic expression of Japan.

4. THE SOLEMN STYLE OF *KANBUN*

The fact that writing in Japanese employs two kinds of written characters, *kanji* and *kana*, can surely be cited as one of its more striking features. A mixture of *kanji* and *kana* is currently the norm for written Japanese and I don't think this will change in the future. One of the results of this parallel usage of *kanji* and *kana* is the estrangement of written expression and spoken expression in communication.

Consider first the stiffness of writing in *kanbun*, or Sino-Japanese. Official writings show how the style and vocabulary of government bureaucrats remained unchanged from the Edo period to the end of the war. Back in February 1875, Cabinet Communication No. 17, a solid string of *kanji* broken by an occasional *kana*, urged simplification of official language! The very language of the document itself is difficult to start with, and no mention of any concrete measures to effect the simplification is made. Nor are there any indications that official writing got any simpler thereafter.

In June 1926, an "Article Relating to the Improvement of Statutory Form" appeared as a Cabinet Supplementary Directive. It said, to quote its essence from a government report of the time,

Not infrequently present-day statutes tend toward obfuscation. While it is sometimes the case that the cause resides in the complexity of the content, no small part comes from the manner of the writing. To make the effort henceforth to improve the form of statutes and to make easier the understanding of their meaning is, we believe, a reasonable way to respond to the demands of the times.

Special attention in this document was given to the need to mark *kana* with *dakuten* when required by pronunciation, to use punctuation, and to select easy vocabulary and locutions. From today's point of view, these "improvements" are things that should have been done as a matter of course, and it is surprising that there was no exhortation at all to use *hiragana* or colloquial style. As a result of this lack of official foresight, drafts of legislation, for example, continued to have a peculiar stock phrase that sounded like a line from a period-piece drama tacked onto them right up until after the war. The end would always be *ainari shikarubeki ya*, 'so be all the foregoing', with five *kanji* and no *kana* even though every word was Japanese, not Chinese. It was only in 1946 that this formula was replaced with the more colloquial, "We request permission to proceed as outlined above."

Public speeches tied to prepared text constructed from *kanbun* vocabulary and style can never be comprehensible. Even Fukuzawa's experiment in spoken language had no hope of success in making public speeches easier to understand be-

cause the written style on which the speeches were based was too stiff. And leaving aside the issue of speaking from prepared text, even extemporaneous speaking that uses solemn phrasing and heavy doses of Sino-Japanese words is hard to understand. Compared to the free-flowing speeches of the politicians of the various Western nations, Japanese public speaking is still as circumscribed in form, monotonous in tone, somber in wording, and keyed to the preservation of dignity as ever.

In short, there are two kinds of spoken Japanese: the language of everyday conversation and the language of public speaking. Even though we are content with "chitchat" in ordinary conversation, we suddenly adopt a different vocabulary and style for public discourse.

5. A UNIQUE "BROADCAST LANGUAGE"

The form of news broadcasts in the days of radio followed the public speaking tradition of reading from prepared text. The art was perfected by announcers and made the transition to television with almost no change—hence the difference in the vocabulary and style of the news from everyday conversation. No matter how conversational a tone the announcer strives for, his or her language, because it is grounded in writing, has a different auditory impact on the listener from ordinary talk.

Broadcasting stations have been making a variety of efforts ever since their inception more than fifty years ago to bridge this gap. NHK's *Hōsō Yōgo Inkai* or Broadcast Language Committee, an internal organ for the study of broadcast vocabulary and style that includes outside experts, is one example of how broadcasters have approached the problem. The Committee meets regularly and always works with real data. Its permanent arm is the *Hōsō Yōgo Kenkyū-han* (Broadcast Language Research Group), which operates within NHK's *Chōsa Kenkyū Kikan* (Investigation Research Organization).

To appreciate NHK's earnestness in trying to bring broadcast and vernacular language together, consider the situation in foreign countries that have permanently established a similar agency. According to the 29th Annual Report of NHK Broadcasting Culture Investigation Research, edited by Ishino Hiroshi and Shinohara Tomoko,

Seventy percent of broadcasting agencies set standards for broadcast language. With regard to the determination of standards more than 60 percent of them have a committee system or its equivalent.

Furthermore,

Sixty percent of broadcast agencies have set up special departments that respond to queries and complaints from listeners and viewers, but extremely few have independent language-specialist departments.

These figures come from responses from 39 broadcast agencies in 29 countries to a questionnaire sent to 105 primary broadcast agencies in 75 countries around the world, chiefly the member organizations of Asian Broadcasting Union and European Broadcasting Union. They show that, while there are departments that handle complaints, permanently established departments like NHK's broadcast vocabulary group, specializing in research on broadcast language, are rare.

Indeed, the phrase "broadcast language" itself implies the establishment of a special language for broadcasting distinct from everyday conversational language; perhaps this very concept is peculiar to Japan. The very term displays the anguish of wanting to use everyday discourse style yet being forced to specify a special vocabulary and style for broadcast use. News is the chief item for which broadcasters must take responsibility for vocabulary and style, and it has lately been heading toward something of a revolution: the appearance of "newscaster" news.

6. TELLING *KATARI* AND TALK *HANASHI*

A *kyasutā* 'newscaster' now anchors the news programs of all TV stations. The reporter who had heretofore merely put the news he had gathered down on paper behind the scenes now appears frontstage on the tube. He or she is no longer just an announcer, but something more.

Newscasters speak from notes; announcers used to read prepared text. Though their patter is not completely off-the-cuff, newscasters strive to make their talk sound that way. The great change in form—from "reading it" to "telling it"—can be heard in the linguistic structure of their talk.

I think that these changes are actually part of larger changes now occurring in everyday Japanese language usage, specifically in public speaking. At the risk of oversimplifying, I'd say we are moving from a reading-and-writing to a talking-and-listening culture, from public speaking based on reading prepared text to talking spontaneously. We are now right on the cusp of change between these two approaches, and news broadcasting is just the most visible sign of this transition.

7. THE VICISSITUDES OF TV NEWS

This process first became prominent with the arrival of Isomura on NHK's *News Center 9:00* in 1974. Until then, TV news reporters were much like radio announcers. Let me review the relevant history.

At 3:00 P.M., 1 February 1953, NHK broadcast its first TV news. The program was about the Adults Day ceremony in Muro, Nara Prefecture, held on 15 January and the Meibutsu Donto festival in Sendai on 14 January. Because processing film was no easy task, fast-breaking news was almost never broadcast on TV; what one saw was, in form and content, much like a newsreel. Announcers were perfect for providing voice-overs, reading serenely from prepared text.

But across the sea in the U.S.A., a few news announcers began to attract a

following among viewers around the end of the 1950s. They broke the mold and developed distinctive personalities. Soon reporters with individuality and a unique manner of speech were being sought after. This was the start of "newscasting" and ushered in a television renaissance. The American *Big News* of 1961 was a major, 45-minute production; several newscasters appeared on it to deliver individual mini-documentaries. An anchorman had the job of segueing from one to another and wrapping up the show. It was the beginning of news as show business.

In Japan *The Kijima Morning Show* started in 1964, followed by NHK's *Studio 102* in 1965, but genuine newscasting really began, as already mentioned, with the 1974 debut of *News Center 9:00*.

8. CHARACTERISTICS OF "BROADCASTER" NEWS

The character of *News Center 9:00* is well illustrated by the following statement of its second anchor, Katsube. It originally appeared in NHK Bunken, "*Terebi de Hataraku Ningen Shūdan* 'A group of people who work in TV'," published by *Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai*.

Out of the realization that it was a waste of the medium for an announcer simply to read a reporter's story on television came the idea for the new format. A single integrated newsgroup was formed linking on-the-scene reporters and cameramen here and abroad with a newscaster (Isomura), a director, an image editor, an announcer, and technical staff. Bidding farewell to broadcasting *à la* newspapers, this composite group sought to get the most out of TV's unique characteristics. With pictures and sound to back us up, we came closer to the real thing. By making on-the-spot reporting the basic rule and aiming to take the same kind of journalistic responsibility that by-lined newspaper reporters did, we fostered the upgrading of the quality and expressive impact of information. I think it marked a new epoch because the old distinctions among jobs were blurred, opening up new approaches.

These approaches were soon being pursued vigorously. For television, which until then had modeled itself on newspapers for news gathering, retained the radio announcer's voice, and relied on newsreel methods for imagery, it was a fresh start. Now the key principle was being on the scene, human involvement. Key functions were moved out of the studio. International news was delivered without delay.

Ikeda Yasaburō once said, "In the sense that announcers call themselves reporters (*kisha*) even though they are really narrators, they show a subconscious sense of inferiority: 'real' information is produced by newspaper reporters. How regrettable!" If he was correct, then, when broadcast announcers became newscasters, they finally achieved what they wanted.

Broadcast language has been under constant scrutiny since the beginning of broadcasting because of the great effect it can have on popular language usage, but most of the attention has had to do with the kind of language used by announcers. The rise of the newscaster has changed all that. We therefore need to consider

broadcast language once again to see what effect the “changing of the guard” from announcers to newscasters has had on TV news language.

9. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “WRITE” AND “SPEAK”

First, however, we need to say a few things about the differences between written language and spoken language in general. The basic nature of spoken language is its directness, its spontaneity, its emotionality; we “say it without thinking” or “blurt it out, not realizing we’re saying it.” By contrast, written language is conscious, reasoned, reflective. There is an instability in the psychology of spoken language not present in the action of writing, which involves a much greater sense of self-consciousness. Written language is crafted by the writer. We’re not likely to say “I wrote it without thinking” or “I wrote it, not realizing I was writing.” It’s impossible to write without, to some extent, self-consciously adopting a stance or pose.

Taking a stance requires adopting a basic structure of introduction, expansion, shift, and conclusion. If the writer wishes to proceed rationally and without distraction, a linear development from introduction to conclusion is natural—the passage from introduction to conclusion is essentially from cause to result, a form that follows logical order and capitalizes on the potential of written language. In this mode, the conclusion comes last.

Exposition in spoken language, however, is not always from introduction to conclusion. Rather than explaining things chronologically, living speech always prefers to put the conclusion or main point first and to fill in what leads up to it afterwards. When it comes to reporting about a disaster area, for instance, one is frequently disorganized, rattling off whatever one has seen or heard. The result is vivid and gives an intense sense of reality. An exposition that does not give a sense of rigid structure is more natural in spoken language and tends to be compelling. When there is time to structure the words tightly, the overt form may be talk but the style ends up close to writing. Something in the style changes and prevents bringing to life the expression of real feelings. Something read, despite the oral presentation, can’t help reflecting written language; making it sound natural is no easy job.

Consider by way of analogy a voice-activated word processor. Using such a machine seems easy: you talk, and the machine turns the words into writing mechanically. But you’re talking to a machine, not a person. Each word must be pronounced distinctly. If the ends of words are slurred, the machine won’t catch them. Writing set down using this kind of technique is nothing but an imperfect aggregation of sentences. The problem lies in the fact that the sentence structures of written and spoken language are different. You’ve got to compose written-language-like sentences mentally before speaking them into the microphone; if you use an everyday talking tone, lots of corrections will need to be made by hand later.

Conversely, when drafting a text to be spoken, you must avoid the expressions, arrangement, and structuring of written material. Somehow, you must physically

write yet keep a speaking voice in mind. You must, unconstrained by consciousness of the sentence as a unit, think in a spoken-language style that doesn't jar the ear, even if the result looks incomplete as writing. Writers are often advised to keep sentences short, but too much attention to sentences is actually a hindrance to creating good spoken language style.

10. THE SECOND PERIOD OF UNIFICATION OF SPEECH AND WRITING

Now I've already remarked that Japanese customarily speak from prepared text when addressing a large number of people. Talking to someone closely related can be done lightheartedly, but circumspection is required for utterances in a public place where an indefinitely large number of people are listening. Thus there are few if any occasions in Japanese society for speakers to learn how to talk off-the-cuff. This is a surely the cause of Japanese ineptness in public speaking.

Recently, however, there has been an increase in the number of people who speak skillfully. They have come to like speaking. Though a bit out of date, let me cite an NHK survey done eleven years ago using 3,600 respondents over 16 years of age throughout the nation. The survey found that 44 percent answering affirmatively to the question "Do you like to talk?" By gender, this comprised 66 percent of the females and 52 percent of the males questioned. To the question "Do you like witticisms and jokes?" 53 percent responded affirmatively (80 percent of the females and 79 percent of the males). These results show a taste for self-expression that makes conversation fun. Japanese are taking such pleasure in talking and joking that we might say we live in an age of garrulity. Perhaps this desire for expressiveness will accelerate the creation of a new style of public speaking:

Changes are also occurring in written language style as well. Take, for example, the writer Shiina Makoto. His style is highly individual; it drags out private monologue endlessly, and has been dubbed, among other things, *Shōwa Glib Style*. Here is an example:

I've got a paper bag that says "Kinkadō High Class Rice Crackers" that I take when I go to the *tokiwa* folksong teacher's place in the fourth section of East Koganei, but the *Spring Practice Jiuta Hanazukushi Part One, Vol. 2* right next to it—well, now there's a fine book for you, stitched rice paper, and quite a load to carry! Then there's a *furoshiki* I bought just the other day at Kyōei Shopping Mall's 15th anniversary celebration, and, though I hardly use them, the polka-dot hand towel and dance fan the teacher in East Koganei made me buy for when I dance to folksongs—they sort of shine inside the bag—and the passbook I got from Saitama Bank and—I have no idea why—four vinyl bags full of holes. Next to them are some matches from the shopping center *sushi* place I go to sometimes, plus another boxful advertising the neighborhood convenience store, and some more labeled *Tengu Brand, Manicure Set Economy Pack* that I got from my daughter a long time ago. Then there's a *Guide to Three-Step Savings Deposit Insurance* from the Daidō company and a color photo

my son took for me at New Year's" (*Kibun wa Dabodabo Sōsu* "The Mood Is Dabodabo Sauce").

Take another early work, *Hankei Go-kiro Rupo* 'Report on Everything within a Five-Kilometer Radius'. It gives the impression of somebody chattering on and on about utterly minor, personal things. I suspect this loquacity and verbal luxuriance are two of the characteristics of present-day Japanese. How removed we have become from the days when modesty and bashfulness were ethical virtues and the model sentence was one of simplicity and significance!

Clearly, we are witnessing a convergence of written and spoken language. There are an increasing number of people who write as they speak, or, to put it another way, cannot write except in the tone they use in speech. Consequently, the emergence of a new manner of public speaking, rooted in the vernacular and free of the musty traditions of the past, cannot be far behind. And broadcasting, specifically TV newscasters, will surely provide the model for this new style, for people increasingly get their information from television. According to a 1989 NHK survey based on 1,800 respondents aged 16 and above living within 100 kilometers of Tōkyō, 68.5 percent chose "announcers" when asked, "Which of the following means Standard Japanese to you?" To the query, "How did you first learn the name *Heisei* (the reign name for the newly enthroned emperor)?" An overwhelming 79.5 percent answered "watching television."

Newscasters have adopted a conversational form, setting a model for public speaking, and taking vernacular usage to new heights. We can even say that Japan is going through a second unification of speech and writing (*genbun itchi*) comparable to the first, which occurred during the early Meiji period. How this unification will proceed is, of course, still unclear, but, in view of the fact that spoken and written language are nearly identical in many foreign countries, a consideration of the situation overseas may be instructive. Our task is nothing less than to fashion a new spoken language appropriate to the 21st century.

