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PREFACE

The present volume is the outcome of a two-day conference hosted by the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka: 'Research Writing in Japan: Cultural, Personal and Practical Perspectives' (15-16th March, 2003). This conference was planned and prepared on short notice after an unexpected funding opportunity became apparent in January, 2003. The fact that many people were willing to come and speak just a few weeks after being first invited was perhaps a measure of interest in the theme. Twenty participants arrived from around Japan, and about ten more were mainly from within the Kansai region.

Represented were commercial and non-commercial publishers, commercial editing and translation companies, an overseas-based language service company, university students, teachers and researchers, and others. Most of the participants were foreigners working in Japan and involved with research writing in some way, but several Japanese students, researchers and others also attended.

To an outsider, the haste involved in bringing together this mixed group of people may have suggested something like an emergency meeting. In fact, in the present academic climate of Japan, there is a need for some sense of urgency. All academic institutions, public and private, are currently facing large demographic, economic and political changes that are largely beyond their control. In response to these changes, and also as a perpetual ethical responsibility, researchers must seek ways to improve their work and their ability to convey the results of research to others. For most researchers, this means giving more attention to the presentation of research in printed publications, in electronic media, and in university classes.

In the fiscal year of 2003, according to the Japan Information Network (<http://jin.jcic.or.jp/stat/stats/16EDU29.html>, Internet, 5th December 2003), there were a total of 702 national, public and private universities, in Japan. There are also many independent research institutes and company research centres. Research in Japan is carried out in a myriad of different disciplines, specialisations, and organisations. Most research results are presented in Japanese, but English and other languages are also used. The result is an enormously diverse range of linguistic challenges for research writing.

Even when research is not intended for public access or use, it still matters whether or not the results are well written and well presented. This point gains significance when it is realised that spending on research at private companies far exceeds the spending on research in universities and independent research institutes. In 1998, for example, spending on scientific research in private firms was 10.8 million million yen, or 67% of total national spending on research, and a little more

than double the 5.3 million million yen (33% of total) spent on research at all universities, colleges, and independent research institutes (see MEXT¹⁾ *Statistics - Science*, www.mext.go.jp/, Internet, 12th Sept. 2003).

The main aim of the 2003 conference was to draw attention to writing itself as the primary means for transmitting research results. This seemingly obvious fact appears to have been neglected in discussions of how to improve research in Japan (and in other countries also). Since at least the early 1990s, the Japanese Government has been considering how to evaluate and improve the conduct of research, and new systems for self-evaluation and third-party evaluation of individuals and institutions are being introduced. Attention has also been given to improving systems for gathering and distributing published research (see MEXT, *White Paper Database*, www.mext.go.jp/, Internet, 11th Sept., 2003). In summary reports of higher-level policies, there is no evidence of attention being given to the quality of research writing. This might be simply a matter of omission in the reports. Alternatively, it might mean that policy makers have assumed that good research leads automatically to good writing, and that they only need to consider the quality of research. In fact, to anyone familiar with the highs and lows of academic writing, it is clear that good writing can make even the most obscure and difficult subject a pleasure to read about, and that poor writing can make good research unintelligible. Good writing can also disguise poor research, to some extent, but to encourage this is not our goal. Ultimately, the responsibilities for good research and good writing lie not with policy makers, but with researchers themselves.

In the present volume, readers will find a wealth of practical advice about the writing, editing, translating and publishing of academic research in Japan (Akamine, Flint, Goel, Hara and Fukuno, Kobayashi, McCreery, Riggs and Murray, Ohgai, Takeda, Weisburd). There are also many observations concerning the history and use of English and Japanese languages by students, researchers, and in academic publishing (Akamine, Bradford, Eades, Kobayashi, Kotani, Takeda, Temese, Yakai). For many researchers in Japan, the article by Riggs and Wilkinson on SWET (the Society of Writers, Editors and Translators) may be a useful introduction to the diversity of professional language services that are available in this country.

The volume opens with three articles that offer perspectives on the difficulties faced by academic, critical, and scientific writers in Japan (Part I: Eades, Isherwood, and Weisburd). In Part II, we can learn about the first-hand experiences and personal perspectives of students and researchers who have been involved with research writing and publishing in a variety of contexts. In Part III, professional language services in Japan are introduced by two authors who are relatively new to the industry, and then by further authors who have had long experience. In Part IV, the volume concludes with two articles offering speculation about the social and

cultural contexts of research writing (Matthews), and a more measured overview of how cultural factors influence research writing and translation, and how educational reforms in Japan might influence research here in the future (Goodman). Since the volume is targeted at readers inside Japan and abroad, we have provided titles and abstracts in Japanese and English for all articles.

The 2003 Conference on Research Writing in Japan may have been the first attempt to look broadly at research writing in Japan, with broad participation by students, researchers, publishers, and language service professionals. Among the participants there was general agreement that it would be useful if similar or related conferences can be held in the future, in different locations and with different organisers. With a conference series, it would be possible to explore themes and language areas not covered in the first conference and this volume. A conference website (see www.researchco-op.net/conference.html) is being maintained to provide a public record of the 2003 conference, a forum for communication about the present volume, and to encourage enquiries about possible future conferences. The volume editors can also be contacted directly by email or post.

Finally, we thank Professor Yasuhiko Nagano and our other colleagues at the National Museum of Ethnology for encouraging and assisting with the organisation of the conference and this volume. We are also grateful for the advice and participation of several members of the Society of Writers, Editors and Translators (SWET). Special thanks are due to our conference assistants (Junko Miyazaki, Machiko Ogawa, and Nobuko Yanai), the expert interpreters provided by Linkage Convention (Kyoto), and the staff of the Publications Office, National Museum of Ethnology. We also thank all the contributors for responding so positively to our many requests during preparation of this publication.

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1) Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan (now referred to as *Monkasho*, formerly known as *Monbusho*).