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Towards a Cultural Understanding of Research Writing, Translation and Editing

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Towards a Cultural Understanding of Research Writing, Translation and Editing

Roger Goodman

University of Oxford

リサーチ・ライティング、翻訳および編集への文化的理解

オックスフォード大学

Abstract

This paper summarises some of the themes that have underlain the arguments in many of the other papers in this volume. In particular, it discusses how translation is a historically and culturally contingent practice and that readers' expectations of academic books depend on where and on when they read them. For a variety of reasons, however, there is increasing pressure in Japan (generally under the banner of a 'global standard') for academics to produce work which mirrors the style of research in the US and the UK. The reasons for this can be best understood in the context of current debates in Japan about the need to reform higher education and, in particular, the quality and quantity of university research. The reforms which are proposed as to how university research should be evaluated in the future are likely to have a major effect on the role played by, and status of, both translators and editors in Japan over the next decade, as they help Japanese scholars write publish in this new academic style in English and other languages.

本論文は、本書に収められた諸論文の根底にあるテーマのいくつかを要約している。とくに、翻訳がいか
に歴史や文化に左右される作業であるか、そして、いつその本を読むかによって読者の期待するものさ
えもが変化するることについて論じている。現在、日本では、米国や英国における研究スタイルを反映し
て、研究成果を出版させようとする圧力が増加してきている。その背景には、高等教育改革の必要性、と
くに大学における研究の質と量についての議論の高まりがある。研究活動を、今後いかに評価していく
べきかに関して提案されている諸改革は、翻訳家および編集者が日本の研究者たちに協力し、英語または
他言語で文章作成をおこない、出版していくことへの機会増大を予見しており、ちかいう将来における
翻訳者と編集者が果たす役割と社会的地位の向上に影響を与えることと思われる。

The Cultures of Academic Writing

I can well remember a long meeting in the spring of 1991, with a senior editor of Iwanami Shoten and a well-known anthropologist at Hitotsubashi University, in which we discussed the Japanese translation of a book I had recently published in English about Japanese returnee school children (Goodman 1990). We considered

the potential market for such a book, the most appropriate title, a timetable for the translation and the role that I, the original author, would play in checking the final version. The part of the meeting that I remember best, however, concerned the question of how to make the book more readable for a Japanese audience. This involved some cutting out of sections, such as a description of the Japanese education system, which would be obvious (*atarimae*) to a Japanese audience. Mainly though, as I came to realise, the process meant subtly altering the structure, line of argument and style of the text itself.

The biggest problem with direct Japanese translations of western academic books, the Iwanami editor explained, was that they tell the reader too much too soon; the reader has no chance to try to guess the conclusions that the author is going to reach. In the case of the English language version of my book, he pointed out, the whole story was told in the first nine pages. These summarised not only the individual chapters of the book but also its main conclusions. When the Japanese version (Goodman 1992) appeared a mere nine months after this meeting, this first chapter had completely disappeared along with most of the careful signposting I had inserted at the start and end of each chapter telling the reader what I had just told them, and what I was about to tell them. Instead, the Japanese version read much more like a detective story, chronicling the various ways through which I explored my key research question (why was there so much interest in the returnee school children in the 1980s, when there were numerically so few of them?), before coming up with something approaching an answer in the final chapter.

Although I had published a short translation of my own (Matsui 1987), and had used Japanese-language sources extensively during my research, this episode was my first real experience of the 'culture of translation'.

My second eye-opening experience was seeing the same process in reverse. A leading publisher asked me to review for possible publication the English translation of a well-known book written in Japanese on debates about post-war Japanese society. I had read much of this book in Japanese, and had enjoyed it, and so I looked forward to the idea of reading an English-language version of the whole text. When the manuscript arrived, however, I found it quite unreadable. The argument not only went in different directions between successive paragraphs but even between successive sentences and indeed at times, as far as I could follow it, even within the same sentence. There were long and apparently unhelpful digressions that often seemed far from the main topic of the book.

Only at the end of the book did the whole piece seem to take on any recognisable form but, by that time, I was sure, any English-language reader would have long given up on the whole thing. The problem, I was sure, lay with the translator, so I went back to the original only to find that the translator had translated everything that was there faithfully, though not always elegantly. The

manuscript in my opinion was not publishable as it stood and, assuming there were other trial readers, I was not the only one to hold such a view since, several years later, it still has not been published in English by that or any other publisher.

I describe the two incidents above not to suggest that there is anything inferior or superior in a western or a Japanese academic style of writing, but to make a point that has been made repeatedly throughout this volume, namely that translation is a culturally-sensitive art and not a science. Indeed, I have come to think over the past few years that the way of writing a book which my Iwanami Shoten editor insisted upon is actually much closer to the reality of how we do research than the super-polished version that western publishers demand.

Doing research is in fact like a detective story as we prod and push in a number of different areas, trying out ideas and hypotheses, and often unsure of what we are looking at or looking for until we begin gradually to form some ideas about the object of our study. The idea, as western academic styles of writing would pretend, that we knew what we were looking for - and how to find it - from the beginning of any project is both unrealistic and misleading; it could only be true with the most banal of projects. Yet this dominant paradigm of how we should structure books in the English-publishing world not only preconditions authors in how to write but of course readers on how to read, including - as I realised when I finished the English version of the Japanese book described above - myself.

A second point that can be taken from the episodes above is that, even if it is difficult, cultural translation of academic discourses is not impossible. When I was reading the original Japanese version of the book described above, I was reading it within a Japanese academic framework. It had not bothered me that it was discursive because I felt that I was picking up interesting material along the way, and I trusted the author to leave me with something to think about at the end. Indeed, I quite like the way that some Japanese academic authors (just like Japanese novelists and film-makers) often leave their conclusions relatively open so that the reader can interpret their data as they wish, unlike western academic books which are typically very dogmatic, insisting on how the data and arguments should be understood.

The distinction between western and Japanese academic discourses outlined above is, of course, something of a caricature. For example, I had another meeting recently with a senior editor from Akashi Shoten and the translator of another of my books (Goodman 2000, 2004) where there was much less (though still some) discussion about altering the structure for a Japanese audience.

Moreover, Japanese authors do write in a variety of styles depending on their intended audiences. Very often an academic and a non-academic version (generally known as a *keimōsho* - 'light reading version') of the same book will appear. The former more closely resembles the closely argued format of western academic

discourse, while the latter relies more on anecdote and insinuation to win over its readers.¹⁾ When, in their papers, Isherwood talks about 'academic conventions' in Japan and McCreery about 'the cool, argumentative and objective' style of the academic writer, it is important to remember that these conventions and styles are constantly changing and may be culturally specific. Eades introduces this idea very well in his paper when he refers to a dominant method of discourse in US and UK academic journals that currently privileges references to current theoretical ideas over empirical data. This often disadvantages the non-native author who cannot confidently employ the fashionable jargon or cite enough of the 'relevant' literature.²⁾

Effects of the Audit Culture

If academic cultures are not static, how and why do they change? As Thomas Kuhn (1962) long ago pointed out, intellectual paradigm shifts take place frequently in academic thinking, leading people to realise the social constraints on their previous modes of thinking and to develop new paradigms which, while of course likewise socially-constrained, during their period of domination, also appear to be both 'natural' and 'correct'. The development of more explicit reflexivity in academic writing was one of these shifts in the 1970s in anthropology, and in the 1980s in sociology, under the guise of post-modernism. (Modernism being the view that there were such things as social facts that could be objectively collected and analysed apart from the researcher who observed them.)

Other triggers for changing intellectual modes of production, however, can be external. The Internet and development of e-mail has had a profound effect on the way academics in some disciplines undertake research (with so many journals on line, I can go weeks without setting foot in a library in Oxford these days); get feedback on research (if I go away for more than a week then I am likely to come back to an in-box full of drafts of papers from students and colleagues to read and comment upon, and I am equally guilty of inflicting my drafts on others); and even disseminate research (a recent letter from the publisher Routledge asked me to sign a paper giving permission to put online as e-books the three books of mine they have on their list, while also informing me that in any case I had already signed over the rights to do this even though one of the books was delivered long before I had ever used the Internet!).

More serious than technological innovations, for the means of academic production, are changes in the modes of academic appraisal. It is difficult to ignore the new conventions when one's livelihood is affected by them. The effect of introducing the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the UK in the late 1980s, discussed by Eades (this volume), has been one such means of changing the way that academics think about how they do their work. Since it looks increasingly certain that a very similar model will be introduced into Japan in the near future, it

might be worth spending some time thinking about what the effects are likely to be for academics, translators and editors.

As is well known, much Japanese research takes place in research groups (*kyōdō kenkyū*) rather than individually. This is probably not because of any culturally-programmed desire to work together in Japan (though schools certainly do better at socialising joint work than do schools in the UK and US) but due to institutional features in the research funding system.

At least until recently, it was difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to apply for government research grants as individuals; instead they had to apply as members of a research team. If possible, this team should involve foreign scholars. Of course, academics found many ways around these measures. In anthropology, for example, scholars doing research in a particular area of the world would agree to put in a joint proposal. Once they had received it, there might be relatively little actual collaboration: after traveling to the one part of the world at the same time, they would then go off and do their own thing. Foreign scholars, similarly, would often be ‘sleeping’ members of research teams, sometimes, as I have discovered myself, not even aware that they were part of a submission until, or unless, the application was successful. While the criteria for what would be a successful application were not always clear (to me, in any case), it does appear that bringing together as wide a range of scholars from as many different institutions as possible was seen as an advantage.

The recent Centre of Excellence (COE) exercise which was held in 2002 and 2003 in Japan, therefore, may have a major effect on this particular established way of doing research. Here, for the first time, institutions were competing against each other, and they were competing for very large amounts of money indeed. As expected, the bulk, though not all, of the awards went to the top former Imperial universities of Tokyo and Kyoto. In the UK, the Research Assessment Exercise quickly led to virtuous and vicious circles (leading universities get more money to do research, then produce better research for which they are rewarded with bigger pieces of the pie, while the opposite happens at non-leading universities). From this example, we can be pretty sure that introducing something like the RAE in Japan will lead to an increasing separation between ‘research’ and ‘teaching’ universities, where excellence in one or the other direction is given more status *a priori*. Since Japanese university academics have already tended to see themselves much more as researchers (in the German mode) than as teacher-researchers (as in the Anglo-Saxon mode) or as teachers (as in the Latin-American mode),³⁾ so this will lead to the development of the strongest researchers (a) wanting to be recognised for their individual research skills and (b) wanting to ‘sell’ those skills to the leading research universities.

In the UK, in the year before each RAE, there develops a soccer-style transfer

market for leading academics, with institutions trying to buy up or retain the last four years' of publications of such scholars (so that their publications can be cited in the RAE submission). Higher salaries, promotion and other incentives are offered in return. This type of academic competition has made collaborative relations (with their attendant anxieties about who gets credit for what) increasingly complex.

The RAE was designed to have a major effect on the quantity and quality of academic production in the UK. Academics must produce four major pieces of work every four to six years to be included in their departmental submission. This determines the department's ranking and research income until the next exercise.

While the positive effects on productivity, in terms of the absolute number of publications, have been clear, the RAE has also introduced great pressures into the academic system. Some academics, while respected in their field, have taken early retirement in the belief that they are not pulling their weight; others have done so because they have been simply unable or unwilling to produce more. During the last few months leading up to each RAE exercise, publishers find themselves under huge pressure to get books and journals out by the deadline. More serious though are questions about what constitutes 'quality'. In the social sciences none of the following are considered high-quality products in RAE terms: textbooks, translations, edited books. Only recently have some RAE panels agreed to look at video, film and musical productions. Quality is assessed essentially on single-authored books or articles. While in theory each of these is assessed in their own right, it is generally thought that a lot of weight is given to where books and articles have been published; the assessor may believe that the review process of the top journals and publishers has allowed only the best work through, and that review processes elsewhere are most likely less selective (despite the specialist nature of many journals and publishers that do not have 'top ranking').

There is no doubt that this assessment process has already had a major effect on collaborative work in the UK and it is hard not to see the same thing happening in Japan. This, I believe, would be a great shame. Strong *kyōdō kenkyū* teams in Japan — truly collaborative efforts where project members divide up the work and meet every few weeks to bring their ideas back to the team, and then present them collectively at conferences — is an extremely efficient (due to peer pressure) and productive (due to peer evaluation) way to do high-quality research. Individuals working in isolation can rarely match this.

Doing Research in the New International Order

Under the new research culture in the UK and Japan, the ability to bring in research funds has become increasingly important for individual careers. Applying for research grants has become a serious business and most campuses not only have a research support team to help put in applications but also to teach 'grantsmanship'

skills to postgraduate students. As Yakai points out in his article, such skills are just starting to be taught in Japan too.⁴⁾ As he also discovered himself, writing is a creative process in itself and not simply the recording of how a project was done and what was discovered.

Equally important have been the scales which have been set up to evaluate research. At the top level, reference is made to research of 'international' standard. This expression of course has its counterpart in the Japanese call for research of a 'global standard'. As Eades points out, though, there is little doubt that these so-called 'universal standards' actually refer to standards set by US-UK hegemonic discourses. There is also little doubt that this new discourse about a 'global standard' is having an effect on Japanese ways of writing up research.

In 1998-9 I spent a year at Minpaku as a visiting professor and attended a number of workshops and seminars. It was the first time that I had spent an extended period of time in a Japanese research institution and I was struck, coming from a western context, how Japan-focussed most of the research papers I heard were. Even in an institute where most of the work was on societies outside Japan, the majority of references were to Japanese authors writing in Japanese, with only a few references to key non-Japanese authors writing on parallel subjects. These foreign authors were largely limited to those who had been translated into Japanese. What struck me most, after attending some of these sessions, was not the usual thought that the Japanese academic workplace is very insular, but how much it actually reflects the style of academic discourse taking place in the UK. In sociology and anthropology, at least, those discourses tend to be very self-referential.

Indeed, given the far smaller population of academics in the UK, the debate there could be characterised as more insular than in Japan. There is no doubt that the Japanese academic community is both big enough and strong enough to be as self-referential as academic communities in the UK and the US; under the banner of 'global standard' though, it is probable that Japanese academia will become much more outward-looking than either the US or UK over the next few years. It is unfortunately less likely — despite brave attempts through the COE and other programmes to get Japanese academics' work more widely disseminated outside Japan - that this interest will be reciprocated.

The role of translators in the New Order is likely to become increasingly important. As Kotani elegantly describes in her paper, there is a definite monoglot hegemony within the 'global standard': English dominates the academic discourse even when one is, like her, a Japanese researcher working on Korean subjects. As she describes it, she feels she is being tested, when she writes up her research, as much for her ability in English as for what she has uncovered. This situation, of course, may not be bad news for translators; one of the interesting things to follow in the academic world over the next decade in Japan will be to see how the status of

translators changes. According to Riggs and Murray, translators enjoyed a brief period of high status immediately following the Second World War during the American occupation, but, as Bradford describes, since then their position has been much more ambiguous. In general, they have been seen as part of a service industry paid to act as intermediaries between two more-important parties; they are not expected to have their own opinions and their skill in acting as cultural, as well as linguistic, facilitators often goes unrecognised.

Riggs and Wilkinson, in their overview of the Society of Writers, Editors and Translators (SWET), give a good indication of the extent to which translators can be unappreciated and the need they have of each other's support. Fluent Japanese speakers of English have sometimes been labelled '*eigoya*' (peddlars of English) as if their ability was simply a skill they could sell and of no other intrinsic value. Real scholars of English in Japan, it has often been pointed out, do not actually speak English but have been specialists in the more arcane aspects of its grammar and literature. This though is changing, largely due to the demands of industry. When Renault took over Nissan in the mid-1990s, English was made the dominant company language and staff were forced to use it. Universities, which are facing a demographic time-bomb and are desperate to attract students, are increasingly providing support for students who want to study English for communicative purposes.

Weisburd's article in this volume is framed around the belief that there should be a 'global standard' in scientific writing, citing the US IMRAD as one basis of this model. In his paper, Weisburd takes an opposing view to that of Eades (who argues that we should make allowances for academic writing being largely socially constructed), presumably because part of his job is to teach the skills needed for writing in this style.

As the 'global standard' discourse becomes more dominant in Japan, and as academics are assessed by *where* they publish as much as *what* they publish, so the role of translators will become more important. Departments will almost certainly begin to establish budgets to help their researchers produce work in English (and other languages) that is acceptable to overseas journals as well as the growing number of Japanese journals that are publishing in English. The *dokuritsu gyōsei hōjinka* process at the national universities and research centers is turning them into semi-autonomous agencies and will allow them to decide much more than hitherto how they spend their departmental budgets. This will presumably encourage academics to request more funding for language services. What will be interesting to see is whether this demand will be met by hiring full-time generalist translators or whether work will be sent out to part-time translators who are specialists in the area of individual papers. There are, of course, pros and cons with both models.

As well as the role of translators, the role of English-language editors is likely

to become much more prominent in the academic world in Japan over the next decade. This is not only because of the need to submit articles in good quality English to get them even read by monoglot editors and reviewers in English-speaking countries, but also because of a decline in investment in editing at all but a few of the top academic US and UK presses. While Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press might still employ in-house a very small number of the 'dream editors' that Riggs and Murray talk about in their paper, most academic publishers use external editors who have to work to very limited budgets and can give manuscripts only the most cursory of readings. Many publishers, indeed, these days do not employ editors at all and will only work with camera-ready copy supplied by the author. This is a real loss to the academic community; having one's work revised by a high-quality in-house editor is one of the greatest pleasures for an academic - as I look forward to seeing when the final version of this paper is published - but is also a more effective process when an editor is intimately familiar with the particular requirements of a given publisher.

Higher Education Reform and the Dissemination of Research

The Japanese university system is going through what is generally described as its 'third great reform', following on from the establishment of the modern system in the Meiji period and its democratization and mass expansion in the period immediately following the Second World War. The current pressure for reform has come from a wide range of directions. For demographic reasons, universities are now competing as never before for students and there is no doubt that many institutions will not be able to survive. Students (and perhaps more importantly, since they pay the fees, their parents) are demanding more from universities in terms of both facilities and the quality of teaching. The government wants universities and research institutions to rely less on governmental funding and to raise more of their own income. Perhaps most important in driving the reform process, though, has been the general view that Japanese universities have not been punching their weight on the global stage in terms of their research output. The higher education sector in Japan is the second largest in the world and yet its research output compares very poorly, not only with its overseas competitors, but also with that of Japan's industrial sector.

The need for higher education reform has been much discussed during the past twenty-five years, but very little has actually happened to date as vested interests have fought to maintain the status quo. The factors outlined above, however, mean that major reforms will definitely be introduced over the next few years. The effects will be far-reaching for large sectors of the population: students, parents, teachers and researchers. In terms of the effects on research, most of the reform focus thus far has been on the production and management of the research itself; there has been

very little discussion, as yet, on issues surrounding research dissemination. This volume, looking at the culture of research writing and the role of editors and translators, has been a first step in that direction. Since research is only as effective as its presentation and dissemination in the outside world, it is important that the role of those involved in these processes continues to be discussed and monitored along with all the other reforms taking place in the higher education system in Japan.

Notes

- 1) Much of the criticism of the so-called academic *Nihonjinron* that was attacked so fiercely in the 1980s by authors like Dale (1986) and Mauer and Sugimoto (1986) was in fact levelled at *keimōsho* versions of otherwise academically respectable books. I am thinking here particularly of the work of people like Nakane Chie, Kumon Shunpei, Doi Takeo, Murakami Yūsuke and others in their circle.
- 2) My own belief is that, in the long run, this may well rebound to the benefit of Japanese scholars, certainly in anthropology, sociology, social policy and educational studies which are the areas in which I work, since as fashionable ideas come and go, empirically-based work will prove much more durable. We will be much more interested in twenty years time to read about what actually happened at a certain period in time in a certain society than what were the reflexive experiences of scholars who went to study what happened.
- 3) For an interesting comparison of Japanese academics views of teaching and research, see Ehara (1998).
- 4) In answer to Yakai's queries about how to do research and how to write it up, the normal advice given is to structure research around one's particular skills rather than around a research area that appears attractive. Funding bodies emphasise that they will most likely support research where there is a clear match between the applicant's skills and the proposal, since they believe that such projects have the greatest chance of success and thereby producing 'value for money' (which has become a key criterion for funding). Put simply, applicants are encouraged to think about what are their particular skills and what research can be done using those skills, and then to formulate a project in terms of a research question which 'urgently' needs to be addressed and for which they are the most qualified person.

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