

TRANSLATING FOR NEW WRITTEN LANGUAGE IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY JAPAN

La traducción como medio para una nueva lengua escrita en el Japón del siglo XIX

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ABSTRACT: In a period called the Meiji era (1868-1912), Japanese translators introduced a large number of various Western works. Near the end of the 19th century, the translators including Morita Shiken (1861-1897) began to attach importance to the Western works' forms. Morita's translation attitude is observable from his published translation text and handwriting manuscript. Morita imported elements from English to Japanese such as putting punctuation marks, distinguishing between singular and plural nouns. Traces of revision in his handwriting manuscript show Morita's translation process in which he adopted the forms of an English source text. Translated works by Morita and others, which were influenced by formal elements of the Western works, showed the Japanese people a new and better way of writing Japanese. Translation played a role in reforming written Japanese language in the era.

Keywords: literary translation; the Meiji era (1868-1912); formal elements; handwriting manuscript; the written Japanese language reforms.

1. THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE IN THE MEIJI ERA (1868-1912)

1.1 *Modernization and creation of a national language*

This article attempts to elucidate an influence of the Western works on the written Japanese language by showing examples from a translated literary work produced in the Meiji era (1868-1912). By analyzing a handwriting manuscript and printed version of *Shōsetsu Rekkoku Henkyōkushi* (*The Historical Novel of Wars Among the Nations of the World*, 1897) translated by Morita Shiken¹, I will exemplify the translator's attitude to introducing foreign aspects into Japanese writing.

The Meiji era started in 1868 and ended in 1912; it was a time for drastic changes as Japan was in the process of modernization then. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Meiji government abolished domains and instead established prefectures for developing Japan into a nation-state. In order to replace traditional feudal system with capitalism, Japanese people actively learned from the Western developed countries, and found out that they needed a national language following those developed countries such as Britain and Germany. In the beginning of the era, Japanese people in the archipelago were using different dialectal variants of Japanese and did not have a common spoken nor written language. To be a modern nation state, a national language was necessary. For instance, the printing media with a national language could share information nationwide and then could contribute to the unification of people as users of the same language. As the Japanese people realized the need for a common language, or a national language, they found the need for the written Japanese language reforms.

¹ In this article names of Japanese people are written with surnames preceding given names.

1.2 *Translation and the national language*

In the Meiji era, Japanese translators introduced a large number of various Western works including books on politics, literature, science, economics, and philosophy. At the beginning of the era, the translators' main purpose of translation was to spread knowledge and techniques of the developed countries including Britain, Germany, and France to Japanese people. Thus, the translators first focused their attention on contents of the source texts, and rarely cared about their formal elements (Yanagida 1961, 13). However, near the end of the 19th century, after acquiring knowledge on the latest techniques to some extent, the translators' attitude changed: they began to attach importance to the Western works' forms. Around the beginning of the third decade of the Meiji period, or around 1898, new words, expressions, and other formal elements began to be introduced to Japanese target texts (Saito 2016, 418-419). Then, those new elements gradually spread among Japanese people, and they were adapted for the written Japanese language. The new Japanese language influenced by Western languages' elements became a national language of Japan.

1.3 *Translation practice: A case of Morita Shiken*

One of the translators who turned attention to formal elements of foreign works then was Morita Shiken (1861-1897). Morita, the translator of the Western literature, produced more than 50 translated works of short stories and published 13 books of translated literature within his short active period before he died at 36. He always translated from English to Japanese. When translating works originally written in other languages such as French works by Victor Hugo, he translated from English translations of those works. Even though his active period was limited, his translated works had established his reputation and people called him "the translation king" (Saito 2012, 1). As mentioned above, he paid much attention to forms of the original works. Morita explains his ideas on the future of the Japanese language in his lecture *Nihon bunshō no shōrai* (*The future of the Japanese writing style*) (Morita 1888/1978). In the lecture, he claims that instead of traditional Japanese writing style much influenced by Chinese, a writing style produced by literal translation from English would be an ideal writing style in Japanese (*ibid.*, 471). He regarded the Western logic, way of thinking, and minute expressions highly, and therefore, he exerted himself to introduce foreign forms of English source texts when translating the Western works. His target texts, which were influenced by forms of the Western works, showed the Japanese people a new way of writing Japanese and a new way of thinking.

1.4 *Introduction Of Foreign Forms To Japanese*

How did Morita Shiken introduce foreign elements to his works through his translation practice? This section shows examples of introduction of foreign forms to Japanese from Morita's handwriting manuscript and its printed version.

1.5 *Morita's handwriting manuscript*

This article analyzes Morita's handwriting manuscript of Chapter 14 of *Shōsetsu Rekkōkoku Henkyōkushi* (*The Historical Novel of Wars Among the Nations of the World*) translated from *The Great War of 189—: A Forecast* (1892) by P. Colomb and others. Kasaoka city library in Okayama prefecture located in Western Japan has this manuscript in trust, and the library allowed me to obtain a copy of the manuscript and study it. I numbered the 12 sheets of the manuscript from No. 1 to No. 12 when citing for this article. The manuscript has no date on it. Its printed version was released in 1897, thus the manuscript seems to be written in the same or a little before the year.

For writing the target text year by hand, Morita used sheets of manuscript paper ruled off into 500 squares (25 x 20), and basically put one letter in each square in black ink. He also used red ink to write punctuation marks, revisions and copy-editing marks.

1.6 Examples

This section will show Morita's way of translating punctuation marks and plural nouns as examples of formal elements imported from English to Japanese. His process of adding punctuation marks and distinguishing plural nouns from singular nouns is observable.

- Example 1: The Use Of Punctuation Marks

The two most basic punctuation marks of today's Japanese are *toten* (、) and *kuten* (。), which roughly correspond to a comma and a full stop of English respectively. Though these punctuation marks are widely used now, they were rarely used in the beginning of the Meiji era. Later in the era, Morita and other translators began to use these marks in their target texts translated from the Western works. They translated commas into *toten*, and full stops into *kuten*. Then the marks spread into works originally written in Japanese such as novels and articles in magazines and newspapers. Morita's manuscript shows us his process of putting the marks. It suggests that deciding where and how often he should put those marks was not easy for him.

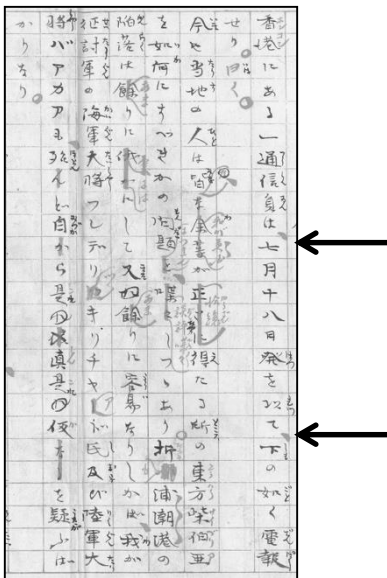


Figure 1: the handwriting manuscript.
(Morita, n.d., No. 3, Kasaoka city library).



Figure 2: The published text.
(Colomb, *et.al.*, 1897, 305).

As mentioned above, we can find letters and marks written in black and red in Morita's manuscript. In Figure 1, though it is shown as a monochrome in this article, a red ink appears in lighter color than a black ink. Because the punctuation marks, added letters, and copy-editing marks such as lines for crossing out some letters are written in red ink, it is possible to assume that Morita first used a black ink

and then he changed colors for making revisions or adding something. The fact that all of the punctuation marks are written in red ink lets us conclude that Morita could not put the marks while writing other letters in the target text. It was not a simple process for him to put the punctuation marks.

If we compare the first two lines of Figure 1, which is the first paragraph of Chapter 41, with the published text (Figure 2), we can find out inconsistency between them. In the manuscript, these two lines have two *toten* (comma) and two *kuten* (full stop), though in the published one, the two *toten* are missing (the spots with an arrow in Figure 2) and only the two *kuten* are observable.

Even though the manuscript had two *toten*, they disappeared in the printed version. The reason why this happened was that the usage of punctuation marks was not settled at that time. Traditionally, the written Japanese language did not require punctuation marks (Kobayashi 1980, 238). After the introduction of Western works in the Meiji era, Japanese punctuation marks spread following those foreign works' examples in using commas and full stops (*ibid.*). Yanabu (2004, 66) also states that, the form of Japanese sentence finishing with *kuten* (full stop) resulted from translations from the Western languages.

If we look at the source text, which corresponds to this part, we can see that it does not have a comma nor a full stop, but it only has a colon and a dash. The first paragraph and its source text:

[ST]

A CORRESPONDENT at Hong-Kong telegraphs under date July 18th as follows: — (Colomb, *et.al.* 1892, 1895, 193, capitalization in the original)

[TT (manuscript)]

香港にある一通信員は、七月十八日を以て、下の如く電報せり。曰く。(Hon-kon ni aru ichi tsūshin-in wa, shichigatsu jūhachinichi wo motte, shimo no gotoku denpō seri. Iwaku.) (Morita, n.d., Hand-writing manuscript No. 3, my emphasis).

A correspondent in Hong Kong, on July 18th, telegraphs as follows. It says. (my back translation)

[TT (published text)]

香港にある一通信員は七月十八日を以て下の如く電報せり。曰く。(Hon-kon ni aru ichi tsūshin-in wa shichigatsu jūhachinichi wo motte shimo no gotoku denpō seri. Iwaku.) (Colomb, *et.al.* 1897, 305).

A correspondent in Hong Kong on July 18th telegraphs as follows. It says. (my back translation)

Even today, for writing Japanese vertically, a colon is usually not used; it is used for writing Japanese horizontally. When translating the phrase with the colon and the dash, “as follows: —,” Morita placed two *kuten* (full stop) and the word, 曰く (*iwaku*), which means “It says.” He put 曰く (*iwaku*) instead of the dash in the original to introduce the correspondent’s message. In this context, it is natural to end the sentence with 電報せり (*denpō seri*), which means “telegraphs.” It seems like Morita had the idea of a sentence ended with *kuten* (full stop), and thus he put *kuten* just after 電報せり (*denpō seri*). Similarly, he put another *kuten* after 曰く (*iwaku*). Morita wrote these sentences finished with the punctuation mark in his target text.

- Example 2: Singular and Plural Nouns

This section shows translation of plural nouns using 諸 (*sho*) as a prefix to mean “several” or “various.” Different from English grammar, Japanese grammar does not require nouns to have different forms according to their singular or plural status. The excerpts below exemplify how plural nouns in

the source text were reproduced as plural nouns in Japanese. In the following example, the two target texts below are identical one another.

[SI]

Most of the boats of the squadron were alongside the transports... (Colomb, *et.al.* 1892, 1895, 196)

[IT (manuscript)]

...諸艦のボオトの多くは諸運送船のほとりに附聚し... (...*shokan no booto no ôku wa shounsôsen no hotori ni fushû shi...*) (Morita, n.d., Handwriting manuscript No. 8, my emphasis).

... many boats of warships were alongside the transports... (my back translation)

[IT (published text)]

...諸艦のボオトの多くは諸運送船のほとりに附聚し... (...*shokan no booto no ôku wa shounsôsen no hotori ni fushû shi...*) (Colomb, *et.al.* 1897, 310-311, my emphasis).

... many boats of warships were alongside the transports... (my back translation).

Though the word “squadron” is a singular noun, it means “a group of warships.” Morita translated the word as 諸艦 (*shokan*), meaning “warships,” that indicates plurality by putting 諸 (*sho*) before 艦 (*kan*), which means “warship.” The other *sho* can be found just before 運送船 (*unsôsen*), meaning “transport,” and its original word is the plural noun, “transports.” When translating this word, the translator first wrote only 運送船 (*unsôsen*), then inserted the letter 諸 (*sho*) in order to show that the number of *unsôsen* was more than two. We can clearly see this process of translating the word “transports” in Morita’s handwriting manuscript, which shows that the prefix 諸 (*sho*) was inserted later with a copy-editing mark for insertion (Figure 3). Then, the inserted letter was printed in the published text as shown in the excerpt above.

For translating the word “boats” in the source text, Morita did not use the prefix. Instead, he translated “the boats” as ボオト (*booto*), which means “boat,” as a result of transliteration in *katakana*, a Japanese system of syllabic writing especially used for foreign words and loanwords. Loanwords usually do not associate with the prefix written in Chinese characters including 諸 (*sho*), and thus he could not use the prefix for this word. However, in this case, the word 多く (*ôku*), which corresponds to “most,” tells that the number of boats is more than one. Thus, Morita might have thought that it was not necessary to reproduce the plural noun. We can see that Morita chose different methods to reproduce the plural nouns depending on words.

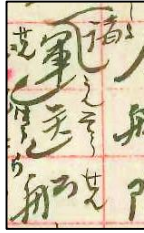


Figure 3: The inserted prefix 諸 (*sho*).
(Morita, n.d., handwriting manuscript No. 8, Kasaoka city library).

2. TRANSLATION AND ITS SURROUNDING CONTEXT

In the Meiji era, the Japanese society experienced a drastic change, as modernization required it to adopt new thoughts and techniques while social and political systems were being changed. In that social context, translation functioned as an agent that introduced the latest information at that time. In addition to that, translation of Western works gave novel elements to the written Japanese language answering the need for a national language used among Japanese nationals living in the modernizing society. That was the context in which the translator Morita Shiken was eager to reproduce the punctuation marks in the source text and tried to distinguish plural nouns and singular nouns based on forms of nouns in the original. By doing so, Morita attempted to show Japanese readers the Western logic and its minute descriptions.

Reproducing the form of the source text was not a simple process. Traces of revision in his handwriting manuscript and differences between the manuscript and the published text show that Morita considered all possibilities to express forms of English source texts. Insertion of the prefix for plural nouns by using the copy-edit mark suggests that he could not write the word with the prefix at once but hesitated before introducing the English way of expressing plural nouns into his Japanese translation texts. Moreover, some of the punctuation marks in his manuscript were not printed in the published text. This means that it was a complicated process, which required effort, for people in the context to write and print the punctuation marks. It is possible to state that Morita and people who worked for publication were inexperienced in writing in the way influenced by the Western works. Even though the introduction of the Western aspects was not a simple and smooth process, translation by Morita played a role in written Japanese language reforms. His faithful attitude to the formal elements of the source text was significant for producing a new system of writing Japanese.

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