

Divided Languages?

Diglossia, Translation and the Rise of Modernity in Japan, China, and the Slavic World

Judit Árokay · Jadranka Gvozdanović
Darja Miyajima *Editors*



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Preface

Standard languages are in most cases based on culturally significant textual traditions. By virtue of representing cultural heritage, standard written languages often differ from contemporary spoken varieties. In cases of a strict functional differentiation between the written and the spoken language, we encounter diglossia in accordance with the definition that was coined in 1959 by Charles Ferguson. In Ferguson's definition "Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation." Although such functional differentiations may persist over centuries, many cases of dissolution of diglossia have been attested over the past centuries. The exact nature of these processes differs widely in different cultures and language societies reflecting the linguistic, cultural, and social changes in the surrounding culture.

The present volume comprises the papers presented at an international conference titled "Linguistic Awareness and Dissolution of Diglossia," which was held in July 2011 at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, as part of the research project "Language and Cultural Translation: Asymmetries in the Emergence of Modern Written Languages" within the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows." The aim of the conference was to reevaluate and compare the processes of dissolution of diglossia in East Asian and in European languages, especially in Japanese, Chinese, and in Slavic languages. To this extent, specialists from China, Japan, Great Britain, Germany, and the United States were invited to report on their research focusing on aspects of the dissolution of diglossic situations.

Initially, in the framework of the project "Language and Cultural Translation: Asymmetries in the Emergence of Modern Written Languages," the center of our interest was the dissolution of the diglossic situation in Japan during the nineteenth

century in comparison with Eastern Europe. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Japanese culture opened up to European influences and literary translations introduced new literary models, which led to a new awareness of the functional possibilities of the spoken language. This formed the background of the *genbun itchi* movement in Japan, a language reform that promoted the spoken language to the status of the literary language. Because similar processes had occurred in Russia one century earlier and because translations from Russian played a crucial role in introducing new literary and linguistic models to Japan at the end of the nineteenth century, we have concentrated on the complicated entanglement between the two languages in their different functional varieties and tried to highlight the parallels and asymmetries of this process. Japan is often referred to as a translating nation, a culture where translation has always played a crucial role in administration and in religious, social, and literary life. For centuries the Chinese had been the major source for information that spanned political ideologies and aesthetic concepts, but by the middle of the nineteenth century translations of Dutch, English, German, French, and Russian texts became prevalent. In the field of literature, hundreds of titles were translated during the first decades of cultural contact, which brought about changes that nobody would have expected or intended. In the process of its evolution, modern Japanese developed its own subsystems; that is, various styles with fixed functional areas came into being. In addition to the socio-political approach that has dominated research in the last decades, a linguistic approach is essential to understand the process of evolution that formed today's uniform written Japanese.

This linguistic and cultural situation found close parallels with the Russian duality between written and spoken language that lasted until the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the nineteenth century (i.e. only a few decades earlier than in Japan) elements of written and spoken language became integrated into a new, differentiated literary language. Before the nineteenth century, the literary language of Russia had been based on the Old Church Slavonic tradition: an archaic language of biblical translations based on texts from the end of the first millennium AD. This language, which has been fundamental to the transmission of cultural knowledge in Slavic religious and in literary traditions, differed from Russian and other Slavic local vernaculars. The spoken and the written language formed two different varieties of Slavic with complementary functions, and it thereby constituted a single diglossic whole. In the eighteenth century, the translation of French literature into Russian created a need for new forms of expression that could not be modeled on the biblical language. This loosened the boundaries of the written norm by blending elements of the spoken into the literary language; the functional differentiation of the diglossic situation became transformed into a thematic and stylistic differentiation between archaic and spoken elements within the new literary style. By the turn of the nineteenth century, elements of written and spoken language became integrated into a new differentiated whole in the artistic writings of Pushkin, the "father of the modern literary language," for his contemporaries, and for the writings of the subsequent generation. Needless to say, the Russian literary language of this time still contained remnants of the old diglossic

situation (in the sense that functionally differentiated varieties were used by the same linguistic community). Translating Russian literary works from that period into Japanese produced a new consciousness in Japan about the possibility of uniting functionally differentiated varieties into a single, stylistically complex whole.

The first group of papers in this volume discusses diglossia as a special type of functional variation. In pre-modern times, literary languages were subject to strict norms of form and function and were representative of cultural heritage, education, and social status. This conditioned relatively closed systems. With the advent of modernity, however, the need to open-up the literary language in order to fulfill additional functions caused the adoption of vernacular elements in what may be called a dissolution of diglossia. All the papers in this group discuss the dissolution of diglossia either as a spontaneous process conditioned by functional needs or as a dismantling process steered by an authority. The distinction between dissolution and dismantling is discussed explicitly for contemporary Czech (cf. Bermel), but similar processes can also be observed in Chinese during the twentieth century (cf. Kaske), leading to a multilevel diglossia of the traditional literary language (such as Mandarin in China), regional languages which contain elements of the literary language and regional dialects (such as Cantonese), and the dialect vernaculars (cf. Su). These new diglossic situations of the ‘standard-with-dialects’ type are characterized by a redistribution of symbolic functions (cf. Li) in which the literary standard language preserves the symbolic function of national unity and cultural heritage but the regional languages carry regional identities. In all the discussed instances, dissolution of diglossia entailed a shift on the level of socio-cultural evaluation and of functional distribution between the literary language and the vernacular (cf. Gvozdanović).

The second group of papers discusses linguistic awareness and the changing perception of varieties. The papers collected in this group discuss the level of socio-cultural evaluation of varieties as expressed by poets, writers, and linguists, and compares these explicit evaluations with the linguistic practices of the same authors. The precondition for the dissolution of diglossia was, generally speaking, the awareness of the historicity of language and the discovery of the vernacular. In pre-modern language societies, historical language variants were traditionally associated with authority and status, while the spoken ones were held to be a degenerative form of language. This may explain why historical languages like Latin in Europe, Church Slavonic in Russia, Classical Chinese in China, Japan, Korea and Indochina, or classical written forms of Japanese and Chinese were used for centuries in written communication. But how did the change come about? In Japan, the perception of language changed radically during the early modern period, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the way was being paved to abandon the rigid bipolar differentiation of language as elegant (i.e. classical written) or vulgar (i.e. spoken) and for recognizing the potentials of the vernacular (cf. Arokay). The process of transition that was prompted and set in motion by the far-reaching Western influence on Japanese society and language at the end of the nineteenth century reveals interesting parallels and similarities with the *Questione*

della lingua in Renaissance Italy, where the introduction of Italian as a literary idiom was at stake (cf. Tomasi). In China, the awareness of the need for a new written language was prompted by a similar situation as in Japan. While a clear-cut functional differentiation of the written and spoken forms of Chinese had persisted for centuries, there was a growing consciousness, especially among Chinese literati familiar with Western culture and languages, of the impediments of a static classical language that was not adaptable to changing social and cultural realities (cf. Miyajima). The modern written idiom proved an important tool in overcoming the rigid social structure of the early modern era. As a vernacular shared by “the people” it helped to develop modes of political and social participation and became the idiom of new public media. However, the entanglement of different styles of written Japanese proved an obstacle to the dissolution of diglossia. While literary texts were mostly written in the new style from the beginning of the twentieth century onward, legal texts proved to be the most tenacious conservers of the classical languages (*kanbun* and literary Japanese), which were in use for several decades after (cf. Lee).

The third group of papers discusses the role of translation in the dissolution of diglossia. Contact with other languages played a crucial role in transforming traditional written languages. The model of European languages like English, German, French, or Russian, where diglossia had vanished by the nineteenth century, was an important impetus for language reform in East Asia. However, it was due to the influence of translation that a new vocabulary and new modes of expression developed, thereby facilitating the adaptation of new cultural techniques. Translation is seen as active language brokering in which the translator not only adjusts to the target culture, but also has an active voice and is able to reshape the receiving culture both linguistically and culturally (cf. Yokoyama). Translation in the early period of Japanese modernization had to grapple not only with cultural difference but also with the highly complex linguistic situation in Japan. In the tradition of translation into Japanese, the approximative retelling was successively replaced by translating with a much closer linguistic and cultural correspondence to the source text (cf. Angles). While the contact with Western languages forced translators to become conscious about language varieties it also prompted language change. In order to achieve the necessary correspondence with the text, the language of the receiving culture had to be adapted. Indeed, predicate structures that are in common usage today can be traced back to linguistic innovations that came into being for the first time as a result of this (cf. Kawato). Although the stylistic richness of the classical idiom could not be abandoned easily, successive translations reveal the increased presence of linguistic innovations in Japanese during the *genbun itchi* period (cf. Hoozawa-Arkenau), testifying to the crucial role of translation in the dissolution of diglossia.

We would like to thank the contributors, first, for accepting the invitation to our conference held in Heidelberg during the summer of 2011 and for the timely delivery of their articles for this volume. A special thanks to Naini Robinson who helped the non-native speakers to correct their English texts, gave valuable advice regarding composition, and also cast an eye over the Japanese and Chinese

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Technical Notes

The Japanese and Chinese names that appear in this volume are in the traditional Japanese and Chinese order, with the surname before the given name. Some of the authors are referred to by their pen names following the same convention. For the transcription of Japanese the modified Hepburn system was used, while Chinese names and terms are transcribed in Pinyin.

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