



Panel's title : National Identity Expressed through Katakana and Translation in contemporary Japan

Coordinator (Affiliation, University...) : Naoko Hosokawa (Fondation France-Japon, EHESS)

Language : English

Topics : Linguistics

Panel presentation :

This panel explores various aspects of translation and the use of loanwords in contemporary Japanese society as well as its implication for national identity. The first three papers (Guarné, Hosokawa, and Koyama) focus on the use of angular syllabaries, katakana. Katakana is mainly used for Western loanwords (and some mimetic words), while hiragana (cursive syllabaries) and kanji (Chinese characters) are used for Japanese native words and long-standing highly assimilated Sino-Japanese loans. The use of katakana thus makes a visual differentiation based on the etymological origin of the Japanese vocabulary. However, the use of katakana also represents the perception of objects, concepts, events, and names expressed by the word. There are thus cases in which words in katakana are preferred to the hiragana or kanji equivalents, and vice-versa. There are also cases in which Japanese words or names are intentionally written in katakana for a specific reason. The three papers will analyse how the use of katakana manifests or influences the cultural and linguistic identity of Japan. The final paper (Raju) will then discuss the practice of cultural translation in a more general sense, by examining the case study of Bangali textualisation of Japan. This panel is thus expected to shed light on the inextricable intertwinement between orthography, language, culture, and national identity.

Key words : Japanese; Loanwords; Translation; Katakana; Identity; Media

Participants :

- 1) Name(s) (Affiliation, University...) : Blai Guarné (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona)

Communication's title : The script of difference: distance and estrangement in the Japanese katakana

Language : English

Presentation :

This paper presents the main lines of an ongoing ethnographic research focused on the cultural analysis of the katakana script and the orthographic representation of loanwords, in the framework of a wider investigation on language ideology and the formation of modern Japanese national identity. Katakana is a syllabic script used mainly to transliterate loanwords into Japanese and to express special issues in written communication. Writing a loan in katakana, at the same time that represents its phonetic nativization in the Japanese system, marks its item in a conspicuous script rarely used for Japanese vocabulary. Drawing on historical accounts, the paper argues that the writing of foreign words in katakana acquires its full meaning in the light of the modern definition of the Japanese language as "national language" (kokugo) and the enunciation of the category of loanword (gairaigo), in a linguistic and orthographic correlate of the construction of Japan as a monolingual, monocultural, and monoethnic nation-state. Ultimately, the purpose of the paper is to problematize the writing practice of the katakana script as an important strategy in the modern definition of Japanese linguistic and cultural identity.

Key words : Katakana; Script; Difference; Japan



2) Name(s) (Affiliation, University...) : Naoko Hosokawa (Fondation France-Japon, EHES)

Communication's title : Re-translating Japan: The use of katakana for Japanese words and names

Language : English

Presentation :

This paper examines Japanese words and names written using katakana in the contemporary Japanese media. While katakana is generally used for Western loanwords, certain Japanese words or names are also sometimes written in katakana. Such words include those associated with past tragedies such as Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or Fukushima, as well as those associated with internationally renowned Japanese culture such as Kitano, Murakami, samurai, etc. This paper argues that when the orthography is shifted from hiragana or kanji to katakana, the name or the word is re-translated from a perspective external to Japan. With this observation in mind, the paper will analyse recurrent wordings in the news and social media, such as the co-occurrence of a katakana word and the term sekai (world) or hasshin (transmitting). The objective of this study is to reveal: 1) how those specific Japanese words and names are associated with Japanese national consciousness and 2) the composition of the Japanese identity facing the rest of the world. With the unique examination of primary data extracted from media sources, it aims to contribute to the understanding of contemporary Japanese national identity from the point of view of media discourse analysis.

Key words : Japan; Media; Katakana; Identity; Discourse

3) Name(s) (Affiliation) : Yohei Koyama (SOAS, University of London)

Communication's title : Transliterating Fukushima: the post-nuclear accident representation of the word Fukushima written in katakana

Language : English

Presentation :

The materialistic dimension of Japanese language is characterised by the use of three different scripts— hiragana and katakana, and kanji. Because of this, it distinguishes words by their origins. For example, words of foreign origin are written using katakana. But Hiroshima and Nagasaki have long been transliterated into katakana when associated with the atomic bombs, unconventionally. And similarly, the word Fukushima has been also transliterated into katakana since the nuclear accident in 2011. This study examines the representation of the katakana Fukushima used in the newspaper media. Interestingly, when written by using katakana, Fukushima seems to only represent the nuclear accident, radiation, contamination and the like. It no longer represents the geographical and cultural features of the place. Following Jacques Lacan's interest in the system of Japanese letters, a Japanese literary critic Kōjin Karatani argues that when kanji and katakana are read by using the Japanese native sounds, their foreign origin is reserved and cohabits with the Japanese nativeness. Therefore, those transliterated letters are never essentially internalised in one's identity. Seen in this light, does the katakana Fukushima represent a kind of self-alienation? It will be worth examining what this psychoanalytical approach can tell us about the transliteration of Fukushima.

Key words : Katakana; Fukushima (nuclear disaster); Psychoanalysis; Subjectivity



4) Name(s) (Affiliation) : Zakir Hossain Raju (Independent University, Bangladesh)

Communication's title : Bengali Textualization of Japan: 'Japanization' or Cultural Migration?

Language : English

Presentation :

This paper looks at the textual negotiation of Bengali visitors and migrants with/in Japan during last century to interrogate the cultural migration of Bengalis in/to Japan. It investigates the ways and means of cultural translation in between Bengal/Bangladesh and Japan through textualization of/by such 'cultural' migrants. Bengalis have textualized Japan for more than a century. Reputed Bengalis like Rabindranath Tagore, Rashbehari Bose, and Horiprobha Basu Mallick, traveled to Japan in early twentieth century and wrote narratives on Japanese society. Contemporary authors and filmmakers have also composed texts linking Japan with Bangladesh (e.g. A Ahmed, 2015; Z Hossain, 1995; T Mokammel, 2012). Through analysing the literary and film texts as well as the 'subjects' of these films and books, the paper explores the Bengalis' way of cultural translation which are connected to the process of cultural migration. I ask how such processes interact in a site like Japan throughout the twentieth century and beyond. I apply 'Trans-Asia' as method of understanding —a method that has been instrumental in Asian cultural studies during last decade or so. I thus investigate how the individual memory of such migrants contributes to the social memory of the two national/regional communities of Asia during last century.

Key words : Cultural Migration; Bengali; Trans-Asia; Documentary film; Inter-cultural marriage