

If then these so-called aboriginal languages have all the types of words and syntactic structures as any other kind of language, is there anything which we can say about these languages to justify our frequent use of such statements about 'primitive languages'? Yes. We can say that (1) they do not have as extensive vocabularies as Western European languages, (2) they tend to be more concrete and specific in speaking about qualities and processes, and (3) they often lack some of the elaborate rhetorical devices (their esthetic tastes may have developed along lines of dancing and carving rather than speaking or writing). But whatever we say about these languages is fundamentally an observation about the cultures which they reflect. A thorough study of any aboriginal language and culture will convince anyone that humans are all fundamentally alike. It is just that so-called civilized man is primitive in a more complicated and hectic manner.

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## Translation of the Future Tense into Colloquial Japanese

as it is Related to the New Colloquial Translation of the Bible by  
The Japan Bible Society

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In glancing through the published portions of the Japan Bible Society's Colloquial Translation of the Bible, it has been increasingly borne in upon me that a long-standing but mistaken idea about expressions indicating future time in English and Japanese is likely to have very serious effects in the dissemination of Scripture's truth and of Christianity unless the problem is solved by thorough study and decisive action very soon. Briefly, there is a widespread idea that the *dearō*, *deshō*, *mashō*, and other forms of similar signification are equivalent to the simple English future.

For example, in a text used in Japanese schools a few years ago, "Turn the tap and water will flow out", is translated, *Kokku wo hinerinasai, sō sureba mizu ga deru deshō*, also "Open the window and you will see the cherry trees", is *Mado wo akenasai, sō sureba sakura no ki ga mieru deshō*. These translations are idiomatic, but they are not true to the original. In the mind of the English speaker there is no doubt whatsoever that the result named will occur, but the Japanese expresses probability rather than certainty. That is, there is no intention to deny that the result is certain, but certainty is not expressed. Certainty can be expressed in Japanese in these cases simply by using *deru* instead of *deru deshō* and *mieru* instead of *mieru deshō*. But a Japanese sees no need for expressing certainty in these cases. As far as possible he avoids positive statement for which he might be held responsible, and he also tries not to be self-assertive in making statements.

The matters involved in these illustrations are of little consequence, so the translation can well be allowed to pass. But it is not an accurate translation. If the matter involved were of real moment the difference between probability and certainty in the translation might have very serious effects.

I wonder if this special type of mistranslation, which is actually taught in schools, is not due to an attempt made long ago to find in colloquial Japanese a special form that is in itself equivalent to the English future, whereas in fact no such form exists, and so, because there usually is a kind of future connotation in the *arō*, *mashō*, and related forms they are called future and treated as such. But too little effort was made to find out what these forms really signify. Nor was the use of 'present' forms like *aru* and *masu* to express the future sufficiently considered.

It seems to me that the distinction really existing between what are generally considered to be present forms (*iku*, *ikimasu*, *iku no dearu*, etc.) is not between present and future, but between certainty and probability (shading from the probable side of bare possibility to strong probability, according to context, person, tone of voice, emphasis, etc.) but the meaning is never more possibility nor is it ever certainty. *The tense of both of these types of forms depends entirely upon the context (expressed or understood), never upon the form itself.* The following examples show this:

Itō San wa ima ikimasu.	Mr. Ito is going now.
Itō San wa ashita ikimasu.	Mr. Ito is going (will go) tomorrow.
Itō San wa uchi ni orimasu.	Mr. Ito is at home.
Itō San wa ashita uchi ni orimasu.	Mr. Ito will be at home tomorrow.
Itō San wa ima iku deshō.	Mr. Ito is probably going now.
Itō San wa ashita ikimashō.	Mr. Ito is probably going tomorrow.
Itō San wa uchi ni oru deshō.	Mr. Ito is probably at home.
Itō San wa ashita uchi ni oru deshō.	Mr. Ito will probably be at home tomorrow.
Itō San wa kinō kita desho.	Mr. Ito probably came yesterday.

(we need not here go into the use of forms like *ikō*, *ikimashō*, etc., to express intention in the first person singular, or suggestion or exhortation in the first person plural, for these special uses put them outside our present discussion).

In thinking of this whole matter we must try to discover and enter the mental attitude and see the basic concepts behind the English and Japanese usages. In common English speech no account is taken of the uncertainty of the future, as a rule. So one says, 'He will go tomorrow', or, 'He is going tomorrow'. If there is any uncertainty in the mind of the speaker he will indicate it specially by saying, 'He may go tomorrow', 'He will probably go tomorrow', or perhaps by a negative statement like,

'He probably will not go tomorrow', according to the degree of uncertainty. But unless there is some special qualification the speaker is most likely to use the simple future, expressing certainty.

On the other hand, the Japanese speaker is most likely to use a probability form unless he has special reason for stating clearly that he means to express certainty. One reason for this is that there is in Japanese idiom a courteous hesitation about making absolute statement. So he will say, *Itō San wa ashita iku deshō*, instead of *Itō San wa ashita ikimasu*. There is also here a possible avoidance of responsibility for what may happen or *Ito San* may do, but more than that there is a feeling that the future is uncertain and a consciousness that it is uncertain. If, however, the speaker desires to make it clear that Mr. Ito really is sure to go tomorrow he will say, *Itō San wa ashita ikimasu*. To sum it up, by the English-speaking person the future is normally thought of and spoken of as certain whereas to a Japanese the future usually seems a matter of probability and is spoken of as if it were. Naganuma's Grammar, page 88, says, under the head of *Probable Form*, "*Mashō* is generally used in connection with future facts, not because it is the future form, but because future occurrences are usually uncertain". Kakuji Gotō, in his book, *Romaji to Kogobunten no Atarashii Mikata*, page 101, says *Arō, darō, deshō wa shorai yori mo, mushiro genzai to shōrai to no sōzō wo shimesu no desu*.

Sometimes I wonder if educated Japanese, who so often use the probability form to translate the English future indicative, do not read into it a certainty unknown to the Japanese unacquainted with English. On the other hand, is it not possible that a Japanese student of English not so far advanced, who has been taught in the classroom, in books of grammar and dictionaries that *dearō* is the same as the English future, may read into the English future that same lack of certainty that is inherent in the Japanese form?

When it comes to translating the Bible, it seems to me that in addition to the necessity for idiomatic translation, the mental attitude of the original writers must always be borne in mind, as well as the essential concepts of the particular language they used, i.e. Hebrew or Greek.

Taking Hebrew first, we have in it tenses that do not basically express degrees of time sequence, but rather qualities of action. Barring conditional clauses, however, future connotations are definite, expressing certainty—not degrees of certainty. (The Japanese *masu* and *mashō* type forms indicate the distinction between certainty and probability, whereas the Hebrew distinction is between completion and incompleteness, the matter of definiteness being taken for granted unless some special word is introduced to qualify it). In Greek the future is like the English future (both languages being of the same stock, Indo-European), with no degree of uncertainty; so the problem of translation is the same as in translating from English.

But even more important than the essential meaning of expressions for the future in the original languages is the mental attitude and purpose of the original writers and the speakers they quote. In matters of narration they use the frame of Hebrew or Greek, expressing future action or being

without hint of qualification of its certainty. They do not express opinions. Except when quoting the mistaken conjectures or opinions of others, what they say is 'yea, yea and nay, nay'. This essential characteristic, though it is in many cases not in accord with the most common Japanese usage, can be transmitted idiomatically into Japanese by using the *dearu*, *masu*, etc. forms, but the use of *dearō*, *mashō*, etc. fails to convey this all-pervasive sense of certainty and simple truth that underlines the whole of both Old and New Testaments.

And so, although use of the probability forms may be defended on the ground that though not exact equivalents of the original they are more familiar to the reader and so eliminate the sense of strangeness or awkwardness produced by the less usual definite forms, I believe that the reader's being jarred into the mental framework of the writer more than compensates for that disadvantage. Furthermore, must we not look forward to the day, not too far distant we hope, when because of the large proportion of Christians in the population of Japan the thought of the whole people will come to hold Christian presuppositions. Such a situation was brought about in Germany by the translation of the Bible into German, and in Great Britain in like manner. We should not be afraid of using the comparatively unfamiliar (if it is thoroughly understandable) in order to bring to the people the completeness of the "yea and amen in Christ Jesus".

Of even greater importance than the general mental framework of the writers, however, are the passages in which they speak with authority as prophets or apostles of the oracles of God, or quote the words of God as given to His servants in the Old Testament or of our Lord Jesus Christ in the New. Here are not the certainty forms to express the future demanded? Whatever one may think personally of the certainty of the future actions or states indicated in such passages, it cannot be denied that the writer or the speaker quoted had no other idea or intention than to tell the reader about certain future events or states which he believed to be absolutely certain, and to do this in such a way as to make the reader believe them to be certain. I do not see how any translation that does not faithfully show this intention can be justified. It seems to me that this is not one of the cases in which a translation necessarily chooses between two or more possible meanings, but rather of how to communicate faithfully a meaning about which there is no doubt.

To show more clearly what I mean and what gives me concern, as well as what gives me great hope, I will cite a few examples from the new Colloquial Translation.

(1) Genesis 2:17b. *Sore wo totte taberu to, kitto shinu dearō*. Here I have an idea that the Japanese is intended to show certainty (by *kitto*) and at the same time be smooth, though it is hard for me to reconcile *kitto* and *dearō*—it is like saying 'certain death is probable'. It may be that the old use of *dearō*, like that of a feudal lord to his retainers (authoritative certainty in the language form of probability) is intended. But is such language justified in a modern colloquial version? The Hebrew uses the absolute infinitive with the imperfect (future meaning here), the

strongest possible way of emphasizing the idea. Would not simply *shinu* or even *shinu zo* express the awful certainty demanded? The speaker is God Himself, and the issue is the destiny of the human race.

(2) Genesis 3 : 14-19. The translation is inconsistent, using both probability and certainty forms to express the future. The choice between the two seems to be determined by the attempt to present most of the passage as verse. One wonders how much of the certainty in the mind of the original writer is transmitted to the reader who has not previous knowledge of the passage.

(3) Matthew 11 : 28, 29. In verse 28 *ἀναπαύσω* is rendered *yasumasete ageyo*. Here the *yō* form, being in the first person, indicates a promise rather than probability, though even here the form *ageru* might be considered as giving a shade at least more of positiveness. But in verse 29 the translation of *εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν* by *Anatagata no tamashii no yasumi ga ataerareru dearō*, expresses mere probability, a strange way to make a promise which must be *absolutely certain* in order to make it worth while at all. Does the Greek ever give the slightest hint that Christ at any time spoke in terms of probability, or in terms that might even possibly be construed as expressing probability?

(4) Matthew 26 : 64. *ὄψεσθε* becomes *miru dearō*, and this as a part of Jesus' statement under oath. Is it conceivable that He should have voluntarily added to the statement demanded of him a clause giving in detail the future manifestation of His claim to power if he did not believe it to be absolutely certain?

(5) Luke 1 : 31-35, describing the annunciation to Mary, has *deshō* for the many futures in succession. I may be wrong, but I get the feeling from this translation that *deshō* is used in a stereotyped way, so much so as to be unnatural, being used slavishly as an accepted standard translation of the Greek future. I wonder if the simple form of certainty would not produce more natural Japanese, to say nothing of its being a true translation. I would hazard the opinion that a Japanese who has no knowledge of English would think the style very stilted and would get no idea of the solemn sure nature of the annunciation from God through His angel. On the other hand, a Japanese who knows English and has been trained in the tradition that *deshō* translates the English future will probably understand these probability terms in the sense of the English future, remembering that he is reading a translation. But as I understand it, this translation is not intended for such people.

(6) John 21 : 18, 19. Here, after the words *ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι* (verily, verily I say unto thee), *ἐκτενεῖς τὰς χεῖράς σου* is rendered *Jibun no te wo nobasu koto ni narō*, and *οἷσει ὅπου οὐ θέλεις* is *Ikitakunai tokoro ye tsureteiku dearō*. But *τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ δοξάσει τὸν θεόν* is translated, *Kore wa, Petero ga donna shinikata de, Kami no eikō wo arawasu ka wo shimesu tame ni, ohanashi ni natta no dearu*. These words are introduced by our Lord's formula for emphasizing truth and certainty, yet we have again the probability forms in the first two instances. The third instance uses the certainty form *arawasu*, which is inconsistent. I suppose it was used for the sake of euphony. But if simple futures made emphatically certain are translated by *dearō* forms

on principle, then even though it might be cumbersome the translation should have been *arawasu dearō ka*. Is not the real solution to make all of the futures here certain in form? There would then be neither inexactness of translation nor cumbersomeness.

(7) Acts 16 : 31. It seems to me that here the translation is excellent, *Shu Iesu wo shinjinasai. Sōshitara, anata mo anata no kazoku mo sukuwaremasu.*

The exigencies of this have shown clearly that the traditional rule that the simple future of English (and related languages) must be translated by *dearō* type forms simply will not hold. It is evident that the jailer, desperate and ready to committ suicide, must have an answer that is sure, therefore Paul and Silas cannot be made to say *sukuwaremashō* or use any other expression that might not be absolutely definite. Furthermore, the core of the Christian message is at stake here. The truth expressed is universal. The translators have seen the issue and answered it instinctively and rightly.

It is this translation that gives me conviction that the certainty of the Scriptures can be put into colloquial Japanese in all instances, and my prayer is that the translation into colloquial Japanese in process of publication may be put in a form that gives this certainty before it is published as a whole. I have an idea that the success of this translation will in the long run hinge on this matter of the translation of the future. I believe there is a great need for this translation, and I appreciate the tremendous amount of work that has been put on it and its many excellencies. But I think the issue I have raised is crucial. Christians will not be satisfied with anything apparently less certain than what they have had, nor will non-Christians be able to see the certainty of the promises of God through a medium that does not put them in certain form always.

It is very likely that there are flaws in my presentation of this matter, and in my understanding of Japanese, but I think it cannot be denied that the issue I have raised is a real one. Furthermore, I find that Japanese readers of the translation under question are often left with a feeling of uncertainty; so the impression I get is by no means purely subjective. May the Translation Committee be guided so that it will send out a translation that gives the full certainty of the Word of God in the everyday language of the Japanese people.

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## An Old Malay Criticism of an even older Translation of the Bible

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One of the most remarkable works in the older Malay literature is, without doubt, the *Hikajat Abdullah bin Abdulkadir Munsji*, the *Memoirs of Abdullah bin Abdulkadir, the Teacher of Languages*, as we should call this work in an English translation. The writer, born in 1796,