Interpreting in Japan: History, Profession, Current Trends and Developments

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Abstract

The present research project aims to investigate the profession of conference interpreting in Japan. The first section furnishes a summary of the Japanese language and also studies how the geography of Japan reshapes Japan’s monolingual and monocultural landscape. The research project also reveals the history of interpreting, educational institutions related to conference interpreter training, and current trends in the interpreting profession, along with associations and organizations of conference interpreters in Japan. Moreover, the research conducted for this project unveils the current situation of interpreting in Japan and reviews whether it is a fully established profession as it is in the European Union—whose institutions have one of the most comprehensive interpreting services in the world (Introduction to Interpretation 2019). Ultimately, the research project examines universities, prevailing trends, and advancements associated with conference interpreting and both their positive and negative impacts on the profession itself.

Methodology

The general research strategy exposes Japan as a country. Firstly, the present research investigates and examines the Japanese language and culture in an attempt to understand
whether geographical and cultural aspects reshape the profession of conference interpreting in Japan. As well as looking at the existing literature on interpreting in Japan—for this study—several Japanese-English interpreters, AIIC interpreters, and AIIC-approved consultants working in Japan were interviewed to obtain data regarding the situation of conference interpreting in Japan. The results of this research show that in Japan—a monolingual and monocultural nation—there is still a colossal necessity toward advancement concerning conference interpreting. For instance, there is room to establish more exceeding institutions associated with conference interpreting. Furthermore, the Japanese government can increase the number of schools providing interpreter training, which would enable the mastery of global language(s) to become more widespread throughout Japan. The results, on the other hand, also show that Japan has grown to be a more globalized country throughout the centuries—which, in turn, has accelerated the growth and popularity of the profession of conference interpreting in Japan. Finally, the present research concludes the current empirical and theoretical examination of conference interpreting in Japan. The conclusion unveils that Japan—as a country—has converted into an interpreter-friendly state. Nevertheless, compared to the countries of the European Union, it is plausible to see that there is still an insufficiency concerning conference interpreting, which necessitates the enhancement of the field in Japan.

**Keywords:** Japan, interpreting, language differences, interpreter training, associations
3 Introduction

This research project unveils the current situation of interpreting in Japan. It also investigates whether it is a fully established profession. For instance, there are a plethora of associations, organizations, and institutions throughout Europe (Language Interpretation 2019). Moreover, interpreting is a particularly widespread profession; there are numerous of AIIC member interpreters—working as a freelance or staff interpreters throughout Europe. The latest data derived from AICC’s official website exhibits the number of actively working interpreters in continental Europe as follows:

- Europe, Central: 432 interpreters
- Europe, Eastern: 51 interpreters
- Europe, Northern: 80 interpreters
- Europe, South-Eastern: 91 interpreters
- Europe, Southern: 409 interpreters
- Europe, Western: 1564 interpreters (AIIC 2019).

The central research question is to unveil the connections between Japan’s monolingual character, and its impact on the interpreting profession in Japan. This research fills a gap in the field of interpreting studies related to Japan. The present study also discusses relevant literature in each respective section by citing, comparing, and contrasting, and critiquing various arguments related to the research question.

3.1 Background and Significance

The European Union and its institutions have one of the most extensive interpreting services in the world—interpreters play a critical role in ensuring effective communication in these institutions, which operate every day in 24 languages (Introduction to Interpretation
Unlike in the countries of the European Union, in Japan—a monolingual and monocultural nation—there exist several impediments regarding foreign language acquisition and practice. Those impediments make Japan a challenging country concerning conference interpreting, given that mastery of foreign language(s) is a necessity in the field of conference interpreting. The present study, therefore, also analyzes how Japan’s monolingualism has fashioned the interpreting field in the country.

3.2 Problem Statement

Interpreting studies have enjoyed tremendous international growth over recent decades in tandem with the expansion in both the practice of interpreting globally and in related programs (Hubscher-Davidson ve Borodo 2012). Japan’s transforming into a ‘modernized’ country starting after the 1868 Meiji Restoration (Tipton 2002), created an understanding of the concept of interpreting. This paper analyses the current situation and development of the interpreting profession in the Japanese context.

3.3 Research Questions

As mentioned above, the first section introduces the main aspects of the Japanese language. This paper takes into account the interpretation between Japanese and English. Therefore, the language section will include a number of comparisons between the two languages, including phonological, grammatical, structural, syntactical and expressional differences between the English and the Japanese languages. The second section presents the monolingual and monocultural features of Japan. The introduction provides the reader with geographical data, revealing whereby, Japan’s geography has altered its social structure, and language. Being an archipelago and having almost no contact with other countries for centuries has made Japan a culturally unique nation. Contrary to European countries, there is
inconsiderable interaction with other countries and cultures in Japan due to its geographical insularity. Therefore, Japan is a monolingual and monocultural realm due to little contact with other nations, communities, and languages. The third part describes a concise history of Japan and the history of interpreting in Japan to lay the groundwork for current advancements correlated to the profession in the Japanese setting. The history section, moreover, introduces former associations and organizations and the attempts to promote interpreting and multilingualism in Japan. Besides, the section also includes a list of organizations that did not manage to persevere due to inadequate management, low demand, and interest. Following this overview of the historical perspective of conference interpreting, the fourth section discusses formal institutions, certificate programs, educational aspects, training facilities, and opportunities to work as competitive conference interpreters in Japan. Moreover, the section examines associations, organizations, and agencies in Japan related to interpreting, along with their contribution to the field. As a final remark, the section also gives place to the comparison of associations and organizations—shut down, continuing to operate, or enabling the most notable promotion of conference interpreting across the country by advancing the field. The conclusion offers proposals as to how to render conference interpreting a more prominent and well-established profession in Japan—signifying that there are enough institutions, associations, organizations, interpreter training schools/universities, and professional interpreters.

3.4 Keywords

Japan, interpreting, language differences, interpreter training, associations
4 Background Information: Language, Geography & History

4.1 Language

4.1.1 The Japanese Language: The Language Profile

Currently, 126.8 million people speak the Japanese language according to 2017 data, making it the ninth most spoken language (Börner, 2012). However, this does not mean that Japanese is a universal language, given that the majority of Japanese-speaking people are native speakers. Furthermore, the center of the Japanese language is Japan; there are not several countries where the Japanese language is the official language or widely spoken. Geographically, the Japanese language is the official language on the four main islands of Japan—namely Hokkaido, Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū. Japanese is also a minority language in the formerly colonized parts of the world by the Japanese Empire, such as in Korea, Taiwan, Sakhalin, in some parts of China, in Hawaii and even Brazil (Shimabukuro 2007). The Japanese language consists of the hiragana and katakana syllabary and the Chinese characters, known as kanji. Although kanji makes up a significant part of the Japanese scripture, the two languages—Japanese and Chinese—have distinct lexis and grammar. Japan adopted the Chinese characters in the year 300 A.D. and developed the classical Chinese characters to fit their language system and kana syllabary. There are controversies as to whether the Japanese language is an Altaic or a Malay-Austronesian language. Linguists are unable to discover a particular genealogical relationship between Japanese and other languages. Therefore, scholars consider the Japanese language as a sub-branch of the Japonic language family. However, debates still surround as to which family the Japanese language belongs to (Börner 2012). The Japonic language family encompasses the endangered Ryukyuan languages of Okinawa and the Amami Islands. However, the early Japanese records and their relationship to other languages remain considerably complicated.
On the one hand, there are theories stating the Japanese and Korean languages share a common ancestor. Egami Namio—for instance—puts forward a language thesis, which states that the Japanese articulated a language that was akin to Korean (Brown 1993, 108). Namio also claims that Japanese is part of a more comprehensive Altaic group of languages. This relation signifies that Japanese is related to Korean, Mongolian, and the Turkic languages of Asia. As mentioned, other scholars also claim that Japanese and Korean are part of a wider language family—called the Altaic language family—which also includes the Turkic languages, Mongolian, and Tungusic languages. However, the Altaic language family and the connection between Japanese and Korean are only theoretical (Cartwright 2017). This theory, therefore, is among the currently debated theories and has not yet been generally accepted. “The general consensus, accepted by most linguists, is that Korean and Japanese are not part of the same family. Even the once-accepted idea that Korean and Japanese belong to the Altaic family of languages has now been rejected by most modern linguistic scholars,” (Whitman 2012). The fact that Japanese and English do not belong to the same language family supports the idea that two languages have profound structural differences. “There are very significant differences between Japanese and English, particularly in sentence structure, which make it hard for most Japanese ESL students to acquire English at the same rate as, for example, their German or Swedish peers,” (Frankfurt International School n.d.). Therefore, the Japanese and English languages have different backgrounds and histories. In this view, it is incontrovertible that interpreting between Japanese and English has its unique challenges in addition to the demanding nature of the profession of conference interpreting.

4.1.2 A Comparison of Two Languages: Japanese and English

When it comes to interpreting, Japanese-English interpretation is renowned for its complexity. The most prominent explanation for the predicaments at the sentential level is the
distinction between Japanese—a subject-object-verb (SOV) language—and English—a subject-verb-object (SVO) language. The difference in word order means a delay in the ear-voice span. The following passage elucidates the ear-voice span (EVS) as follows

The EVS, or lag time between the moment an incoming message is perceived by a conference interpreter and the moment the interpreter produces his translation of the segment, is one of the few observable variables in SI study. The importance of this variable is that it can be easily quantified for research on SI processing. Thus, EVS has been one of the most outstanding variables for corpus analysis and time management of SI. During this short EVS, interpreters carry out numerous concurrent information processing, including comprehension of incoming source language (SL), converting, planning TL and uttering TL. Even while uttering the TL, interpreters are believed to monitor their own rendition. (Lee 2002)

The following analysis will explain why the difference in word order means difficulty in Japanese-English interpretation. “The delay is heavily affected by the source and target languages. Because Japanese and English have quite a different word order, it is considered that Japanese-to-English (J-E) and English-to-Japanese (E-J) interpretations are difficult,” (Ono, Tohyama ve Matsubara 2008). The same study also reveals why the difference in the word order means a delay in EVS

Word-level delay was calculated for 3,722 pairs and 4,932 pairs of words for J-E and E-J interpretations, respectively. The analyses revealed that J-E interpretation has much larger delay than E-J interpretation and that the difference of word order between Japanese and English affect the degree of delay […]

J-E interpretation has larger delay than E-J interpretation.

In J-E interpretation nouns have larger delay than verbs while verbs’ delay is larger than nouns’ one in E-J interpretation.

In J-E interpretation subjects have smaller delay than objects. No significant difference was found in E-J interpretation. (Ono, Tohyama ve Matsubara 2008)

Therefore, it is inferable that Japanese-English interpretation has its unprecedented challenges considering the delay in EVS. Another aspect concerning the complexity of interpreting between Japanese and English is subordinate clauses. It is a well-known fact that Japanese into English subordinate clauses are one of the most problematic areas for
simultaneous interpretation, as pointed out by Crystal (The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language: Translating and Interpreting 1987, 349). Tominaga also reveals the differences in the syntactical structures of the two languages in the following statement. Tominaga states that “In simultaneous interpretation between English and Japanese, interpreters employ certain techniques to cope with the time constraint and the significant difference in syntax between the two languages,” (Tominaga 1991, 32; researcher’s translation). The language structure, however, is not the only difference between the two languages. First of all, the Japanese language has no definite or indefinite articles. Secondly, the Japanese language also does not consist of plurals—which means that the way of counting numbers in both written and spoken Japanese could change in every case based on the thing—or living being—calculated. A different obstacle to surmount stems from the fact that much of the meaning in Japanese—particularly when it comes to verb addition—originates from structural particles. Structural particles are essential to incorporate nuance into Japanese sentences. Accordingly, such a hurdle to overcome includes that a lot of the meaning in Japanese—particularly when it comes to adding to a verb—originates from structural particles, which have no equivalent in English but of tremendous significance to add nuance to sentences in Japanese. Henceforth, they have to be retained in some way by the interpreter (Language Connect 2017). In his study on the problems inherent in simultaneous language processing during simultaneous interpretation from Japanese into English, Luli Ishikawa points out two issues related to tense

Another problem at the structural level is that of tense/aspect. Two main reasons come to mind:

- Japanese verbs appear at the very end of long sentence with lengthy insertions. Thus, in English interpretation, the interpreter has to predict what time reference the speaker is going to use.
- Japanese time reference is more aspectual -i.e. perfective and imperfective- than English. In other words, the concept of ‘time’ is not identical. (Ishikawa 1995, 47)
Another article, published by a Japanese-English translation and localization company Ulatus, reveals the difficulty of Japanese language learning for foreigners by giving some examples regarding Japanese and its grammar.

Japanese is one of the most difficult languages for westerners to learn, particularly English speakers. The reverse is also true because the grammatical structure of both languages is so different. [...] Some of the basic reasons why the Japanese language is so difficult for English speakers are no definite or indefinite articles, no plural nouns, plus the way of counting changes all the time, even with adjectives and pronouns, verbs come at the end of sentences, structural particles, which have no meaning in English, but give nuance, which is so important in Japanese, take the place of prepositions and contribute to the meaning of verbs, sentences do not always need a subject, no future tense, honorific, known as Keigo, is difficult to understand and many words and phrases cannot be translated literally, making translation of abstract concepts extremely difficult. (Ulatus 2016)

4.1.3 An Interview with Yoko Owatari Kudo

Yoko Owatari Kudo—who currently works as a conference interpreter for the Japanese Ministry of Defense—was one of the interviewees for this study. Below, she talks about her education to become a Japanese-English interpreter. Kudo completed her master’s in Conference Interpretation at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. She clarified her position: “I am the staff of International Policy Division Bureau of Defense Policy at the Ministry of Defense of Japan.”

4.1.3.1 The Interview

How would you describe the curriculum at the Monterey Institute?

When I first joined the Institute, I was astonished to meet with my classmates about whom what I have heard was they did not have any interpretation skill at the beginning and after the year they came to the level where they can perform simultaneous interpretation. But a few days later I found out why. The classes are well-organized, and students asked to draft -well they are not asked- their voluntary practice at least five or six hours a day and of course, most of the students practice more than that. Moreover, they are exposed to English-speaking environment. They think hear and speak in English. I think that is the reason why they improve faster than the students working and studying at Japanese interpretation and translation and professionals.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing a professional degree abroad?
There are pros and cons over doing degrees overseas, and as for translation and interpreting specifically, if you are already confident in your English proficiency and if you want to work only in Japan, it might be faster to work or get a study at a professional training school. But if you are interested in working overseas and if you want to improve your English more, I strongly recommend studying overseas, especially at MIIS (Monterey Institute of International Studies).

Given the background information and Yoko Owatari Kudo’s responses, it is clear that as a language-related profession, interpreting—or more specifically conference interpreting—is not well-established in Japan, given that in Japan, the Japanese language is the only language spoken. Therefore, since Japan is a ‘monolingual’ country, the Japanese cannot become exposed to a multilingual environment.

Interpreters enable the cross-cultural communication necessary in today’s society by converting one language to another. However, these specialists do more than solely manipulating words; they relay concepts and ideas between languages. Henceforth, It is of surpassing significance that interpreters comprehend the subject matter—or context—thoroughly while working to decode information from one language into another. Furthermore, interpreters must be sensitive to diverse cultures associated with the languages in which they work. They also have to acquaint themselves with a wide range of communities. In this view, conference interpreters, working between Japanese and English, have a particularly challenging task stemming from the profound linguistic and cultural differences between the Japanese and English languages (Udagawa 2009). The linguistic differences between the Japanese and English languages enable to state that the distinctions are clear between Japanese and English. Given the contrast between Japanese and English, it is evident that foreign language acquisition plays an extraordinarily instrumental role in Japan to become a qualified and competitive conference interpreter. Japan lacks a multilingual environment, and a future interpreter must spend some years in an English-speaking country instead of immediately jumping into the career path of interpreting.
4.2 Geography

4.2.1 Composition, Position, and Relative Size

Japan is an island country—which means that Japan’s geography has influenced its communal structure throughout history. Islands dictate an insular community. People living on islands feel relatively safe, secure, and isolated from the outside world. They also feel more protected and less threatened. That the community life takes place on islands also influence social, economic, and technological developments. Japan is an archipelago, and its islands are close to the Korean Peninsula and mainland China (People’s Republic of China). Nevertheless, the Japanese islands—located as a spot in the Pacific Ocean—have made it unmanageable to cross the channel. Furthermore, Northern Seas have faced the danger of hurricanes named typhoon. Therefore, it is remarkably laborious to cross the strait. It is noteworthy that throughout history, whenever the Japanese tried to sail to mainland China, they were aware that they would not be able to reach there. Henceforth, it is explicit that Japan has sustained a limited communication and connection and harbored an insular nature. Such characteristic has also had its manifestations on Japan’s monocultural society. Japan’s both old and contemporary social structures signify that it is a closed country, with considerably less integration and interaction with other countries, contrary to the nations of the European Union. Throughout history, Japan has been renowned for its geographical challenges. It is a mountainous, volcanic archipelago located in the western Pacific Ocean. The Japanese islands range from Russia in the north towards the Korean Peninsula in the south. Japan has four main islands—namely, Hokkaidō, Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū. Japan also has thousands of minor islands that extend through the Ryukyu island chain framing the East China Sea. The main island, the center is called Honshū, and that is where the human activity took place for most of the time. This island forms the central stage of Japanese history; it is where people and human activities started and have taken place for most of the
time throughout history. Then, there are also tiny little two islands towards the Pacific Ocean. Shikoku and Kyūshū are two of the most well-known Japanese islands. Kyūshū is of elevated significance in terms of Japanese history given that it was the locality for the arrivals from the south; cultural interaction of the prehistoric times mostly took place between Southern Korea and Northern Kyūshū of Japan. Accordingly, Kyūshū was a geographical region that allowed close intercommunication with Korea and China. Every time the Japanese traveled to China and Korea, they always reached their destination through the southern island, Kyūshū, and every time they left Korea and China to proceed to Japan, the Japanese perpetually arrived from the south.

What is ‘distinct’ in terms of Japanese history is that the Paleolithic period continued longer than in other nations. When it came to roughly around 2000 B.C., there existed ancient Egyptian civilization; there were the pyramids, the hieroglyphs. Moreover, the great Sinise of the Sumerian rulers of the Sumerian Kingdom invented the cuneiform. There also existed Mesopotamia with the rise of the Assyrian Empire, Hammurabi’s laws, the Hittite Empire, the Ancient Persian Akkadian Empire. Therefore, it is clear that in other parts of the world, there were inventions and developments in many fields such as law, literature, and architecture—which, in turn, contributed to cultural enrichment and prevented these geographies from becoming monocultural societies. However, in Japan, there were hunters and gatherers. Nothing much changed under the Rising Sun, and there were scarcely cultural advancements; human beings still hunted and gathered, and they were bustling trying to meet their primary needs. Consequently, that should—first of all—be a critical starting point to start pondering about the effect of geography on human factors for development. The geography of Japan resulted in the monocultural character of Japan since the lack of interaction and integration with other countries resulted in the latency of cultural development and enrichment throughout Japan.
4.2.2 Climate

Japan consists of isolated islands off the shore of North Asia. The islands are challenging to access—amidst remarkably ferocious oceanic storms today known as the typhoon, striking the islands and making navigation difficult. Even today, approximately thirty typhoons form over the Northwest Pacific Ocean every year, of which an average of nearly seven or eight passes over the Okinawa Prefecture, and roughly three hit the Japanese main islands, particularly Kyūshū and Shikoku. However, typhoons can visit any region of Japan, including Tokyo, Osaka, and Hokkaido (Japan Meteorological Agency 2018). Today is the age of sophisticated technology. However, it is not laborious to imagine that—historically speaking—it was not easy for the Japanese living on the Japanese islands to leave their islands. It was not easy for outsiders to arrive in Japan, either. A notable peculiarity of Japan’s geography is that the Japanese archipelago lies far away from the Asian mainland. The country, however, has a different disadvantage—making it less accessible—due to its geography and climate (Strafor Worldview 2009). Outstanding detail is that in approximately 300 B.C., foreigners arrived (Hoare and Pares 2005). The arrival of foreigners marked one of the most significant turning points in terms of Japanese history. The arrival of foreigners marked one of the various significant turning points in terms of Japanese history. Significantly outstanding, foreign visits have always been critical for the Japanese because of the lack of access to the Japanese islands. In this sense, whenever people and goods reached the Japanese islands, it marked a crucial period in history. Visitors—and arrivals—were dramatic events considering access to the Japanese islands had always been difficult. Considering living in a continental area with access to different regions through the highways or the Silk Road, King’s Road, shipping in the Mediterranean, it is clear that remembering the arrival date is not the most meaningful item on the agenda since arrivals are events that occur
all the time. However, the Japanese always remember visitors and approaches, for it is of tremendous influence in the Japanese historical sub-conscious.

### 4.2.3 Topography

Japan’s geography has its manifestations on the social and cultural lifestyle of the Japanese. Japanese national development also possesses influences from geography, as mentioned above. The insular lifestyle stemming from the geographical features of Japan has led the country to grow monocultural and monolingual, which creates a drawback for the promotion of conference interpreting. Brief information on the geography of Japan and how it shaped the society is as follows

Japan’s rugged terrain and lack of interregional connecting rivers isolated its population into separate, densely populated coastal plains. The Yamato plain dominates the “Inland Sea,” the birthplace of Japanese civilization. The Inland Sea saw the rise of early Japanese maritime culture and facilitated communication and political control. As Japanese culture expanded over the island chain, the seat of power moved to the more productive and strategically located Kanto plain, Japan’s core region and home to Tokyo, the world’s largest metropolitan area. (Stratfor Worldview 2013)

The article also reveals the impacts of geography of Japan on its social structure. It states

[… ] geography has prompted the country to alternate between periods of isolationism and expansion. […] A country’s geography influences the development of its society and culture in many ways. Its location in relation to other nations has an effect on intercultural influences; its size affects demography, the development of social structures, and its position in the international community. Its topography dictates to a large extent where and how its people earn their livings, and its climate influences its agriculture and styles of living. (Stratfor Worldview 2013)

Therefore, it is apparent that Japan’s geography has revised the country and led Japan to implement a separate policy. In this view, the profession of conference interpreting has been affected by the geographical regime of Japan. As stated, “Distance from the continent has historically allowed Japan to maintain cultural, political, social separateness and
independence from other countries and mainly from China, which has, in turn, allowed the evolution of a distinctive and highly uniform culture,” (Strafor Worldview 2009). Contrary to the countries of the European Union, this uniform culture resulted in a not so developed profession of conference interpreting. Had the case in Japan been different throughout history, conference interpreting could have been a much more widespread profession today as it is in the countries of the European Union.

4.3 History

4.3.1 A Brief History of Japan

The island geography of Japan has also affected Japanese history. The geography of Japan preserved the nation’s insular nature until the opening process to the Western world. Japan commenced integrating with other countries, and the country shifted more open to change. Japan started to influence other countries and cultures and became inspired by them. Social scientists conceptualized the modernization of Japan as a social, economic, and structural transformation in the 19th century. Therefore, authorities regard the change Japan experienced during the 19th century also as a history of globalization. Analyzing Japanese history, during the Yayoi Age, the Roman Empire ruled. In that period, Japan was an accurately isolated country, or more specifically, a clan society. Until the acceptance of Buddhism and the opening up of diplomatic relations with Tang China, Japan remained a marginal, isolated, old-fashioned clan society. However, this transformation would bring about an experience of integration and interaction with other civilizations, which would also create a tendency towards westernization in Japanese history. Since then, opening up to the outside world has meant modernization and interaction with other nations. Beginning in 1868, Japan would open up to the outside world—allowing the country to transform itself radically. The opening of Japan starts in 1853, and this process results in a new era—the beginning of
modern Japan. The following sections shall discuss how important the legacy of Dutch studies and Tokugawa Japan of samurai act as official interpreters and translators during the annual Dutch visits.

4.3.2 How Translation and Interpreting Emerged in Japan

Meeting with the Shōgun on the throne, translating their reports, and all kinds of activities gave birth to a small community of specialists and experts. Elite intellectuals in the late Tokugawa Japan were of great importance, and they made sure people learned Dutch.

During the ‘sakoku-jidai’, the so-called seclusion period, Holland and China were the only countries permitted to trade and have limited contacts with Japan. It was a status which actually lasted over two centuries, from 1641 to 1853, and as the only western country with such privileges, Holland held a very special position. It was the door through which knowledge on science and medicine, and products and armaments from the Netherlands and Europe were imported into Japan through the Dutch settlement on Deshima, the man-made fan-shaped island in the Bay of Nagasaki. Simultaneously the Dutch generated great wealth exporting Japanese products and knowledge to the west. For both sides, Deshima was more than just a window on a new world. (Kingdom of the Netherlands tarih yok)

Considering the relations between the Japanese and the Dutch, Dutch language expertise would help immensely in developing the late Tokugawa intellectual debate. With rangaku (Dutch Studies), translation and interpreting emerged in Japan. In the 18th and 19th centuries, whenever there arose a need to translate a European language into Japanese, the Japanese invented words for new terms. Terms that someone may consider as ‘ordinary’ had to be in Japanese because there was not an appropriate counterpart. Books on geography, science, and technology became popular during this period, and the Shōgunate was very tolerant of this. The Shōgunate, however, did not allow any religious books. The progressive Togukawa Yoshimune—the eighth Shōgun of the Tokugawa Shōgunate of Japan—attempted to solve such matters. Furthermore, he promulgated edicts, founded a Bakufu office, and a bureau of scholarly samurai. The Bansho Shirabesho (Japanese: 藩書調所)—or Institute for the Study of Barbarian Books—was the Japanese establishment commissioned for the
translation and study of international books including various other publications in the late Edo Period (Perkins 1997). The word nanban means ‘southern barbarians,’ which stood for what the Japanese of that period used to refer to the Europeans and other newcomers. According to the Japanese, all nations other than the Japanese were barbarians (Haino, The Story of "Southern-Barbarian Lacquerware" tarih yok). The name of the translation bureau, accordingly, was named after foreigners, or so-called ‘barbarians.’ The Dutch worked there as translators and interpreters because they knew the language. Therefore, they were able to translate between Japanese and Dutch.

Around 1720, under Shōgun Yoshimune (1716-1745) the introduction of Dutch books on medicine, botany and astronomy was officially permitted (4). Moreover, various books were expected to be offered to the authorities as gifts, such as Dodoens’ Cruydtboek, Heisters Chirurgie (5) or even dictionaries, which were of great importance for the translators, mostly interpreters at Deshima.” (Luyendijk-Elshout 1989, 121)

Earlier Japanese history reveals that the Japanese had nativist studies—kokugaku (the study of the country). The 18th century was a period of particularly striking advancements in Japan. It denoted the period of enlightenment; the aftermath of the monarchy became the model for the enlightened monarch. There was also vibrant intellectual activity in Edo—the capital of the Empire of Japan. Kokugaku scholars became samurai and were responsible for the ‘barbarian’ books. Dutch language experts were medical doctors. Medicine in Japan was a hereditary profession; the families transferred medical practices, techniques, and know-how from generation to generation. Therefore, there was a small group of samurai—who, for generations, had been trained by physicians of Chinese medicine. However, some members of the group learned Dutch and translated Chinese and Japanese books. Looking at the anecdotal notes of the 18th century, the Japanese commenced experimenting whether Chinese medicine or Western medicine was the right one. Henceforth, they decided to perform a secret autopsy,
which resulted in the further development of translation and interpreting studies in Japan (Mestler 1954).

With great respect we remember the Japanese doctors who mastered the Dutch language and became experts in the Dutch Learning, the *rangakusha*. We also admire the exchange of learning between Japanese interpreters and von Siebold, the outstanding natural scientist. (Luyendijk-Elshout 1989, 128)

Before starting the autopsy, they examined a Western anatomy book, the *Ontleedkundige Tafelen* by Johann Adam Kulmus

Ryotaku opened the book and explained according to what he had learned in Nagasaki the various organs such as the lung called “long” in Dutch, the heart called “hart,” the stomach called “maag” and the spleen called “milt.” They looked so different from the pictures in the Chinese anatomical books that many of us felt rather dubious of their truths before we should actually observe the real organs. […] Comparing the things we saw with the pictures in the Dutch book Ryotaku and I had with us, we were amazed at their perfect agreement. There were no such divisions either as the six lobes and two auricles of the lungs or the three left lobes and two right lobes of the liver mentioned in old medical books. Also, the positions and the forms of the intestines and the stomach were very different from the traditional descriptions. [Even the bones] were nothing like those described in the old books but were exactly as represented in the Dutch book. We were completely amazed. (1771: Green Tea Hag, the beginning of Dutch Learning)

Genpaku spent the following three years translating the Dutch textbook. He had to carry out the task without any knowledge of the language, nor dictionaries available for consultation, employing constant interpretations, deductions, and discussions with other doctors who had been in contact with the Europeans in Nagasaki. Genpaku’s colossal effort, similar to actual decryption, was eventually published in 1774 (Cenzi 2016).
4.3.3 History of Conference Interpreting in Japan

This section shall elucidate how interpreting emerged in Japan and evolved to become recognized as a profession. As discussed in the previous section, Rangaku (Dutch Studies) played a prominent role in the flourishing of the field. The following summary reveals how the history of interpreters started.

The history of interpreters in Japan started with Chinese interpreters (Toh-tsūji), whose main work was to help with interpreting and translation that was needed for trade with China. The major port for foreign trade in the 17th and 18th centuries was Nagasaki in Kyushū, in southern Japan. The central Tokugawa government in Edo placed it under their direct control, and along with this, in 1604 the government officially acknowledged the existence of interpreters, institutionalizing them into the bureaucratic system. (Torikai 2009, 28)

As mentioned in the previous section on ‘history,’ and understood from the statement above, Meiji Period brought about international trade to Japan, granting the country...
intercultural communication with other countries. The following elucidates these developments.

The period after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 had again been characterized by continuous efforts on the part of Japan to introduce culture and technology from Europe and the United States, although they were seriously disrupted in the period just before and during World War II. (Someya 2016)

Japan’s opening up to the rest of the world and the process of integration with other countries enabled interpreting to evolve into a field. Communication and bilateral dialogues with other parties brought about a need for interpreters—thus, for the profession of interpreting in Japan. The statement below summarized the first instant when the Japanese government started regarding interpreting as a field. The statement below summarizes the first occasion when interpreting started to be regarded as a profession.

The first occasion where the role of interpreters attracted attention after the war was the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, which was convened in Tokyo from May 1946 to April 1948. Thirty Japanese-English interpreters were engaged, but interpreting during this tribunal, unlike in Nuremberg Trials, was basically consecutive except occasional simultaneous reading of pre-translated documents such as the final verdict. (Someya 2016)

Lisa K. Honda (2016) suggests that there are not ample sources regarding interpreting in Japan, given that the profession, itself, has a verbal nature. Moreover, as is apparent in the statement above, the Japanese government commenced acknowledging interpreting as a profession in Japan only in the 1940s—which proves parallelism with the European case. The European nations began establishing the profession of conference interpreting in the aftermath of World War II—more specifically during the Nuremberg Trials.

Although there are limited records on interpreting history in Japan due to the oral nature of interpreting as opposed to translation which leaves written records, there are some records of the work of interpreters who helped conduct trade between Japan and Asia such as the Chinese interpreters and Dutch interpreters as mentioned above. (Honda 2016)

The tasks and duties of these interpreters are explained in detail below.
The features of Nagasaki interpreters, or Oranda tsūji (Dutch language officers) as they came to be known, were threefold. Their work entailed not only interpreting and translating but also administrative work in connection with diplomacy, trade, or anything to do with foreign relations. Secondly, they were not freelancers as are most modern interpreters. They were local officials employed by the central government, and as such, their loyalty was unquestionably to the government of Japan, demonstrating that the notion of neutrality is not a traditional one but rather a modernistic concept. The final feature was the fact that Oranda tsūji was hereditary and about twenty families from the educated official’s class held the position throughout the Edo era. A male offspring of a tsūji family was destined to succeed the tsūji father, and when they were not blessed with a male child, they adopted a boy from some other family to inherit the position, as was commonly observed in the feudal Japanese society. (Torikai 2009, 28, 29)

It is evident from the passages that the profession of conference interpreting emerged out of the need to communicate with foreigners—especially with the Dutch. Moreover, it is clear that these interpreters did not have an official title as interpreters but interpreted as a part of the feudal tradition. The family lineage and hereditary character of the profession also signify that working as an interpreter back then in Japan was not subject to individuals’ choice, but it was an expectation from the Bakufu government. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that the history of interpreting had its drawbacks during the period.

5 Training, Interpreters, Institutions & Organizations

5.1 Interpreter Training In Japan

5.1.1 Why Interpreter Training is Important?

As mentioned before, Japanese-English interpreters have a particularly challenging task stemming from the profound linguistic differences between Japanese and English—explained in the ‘Language’ section. Therefore, interpreters—especially conference interpreters—must be capable of accounting for these differences almost intuitively and expressing the sense of what the speaker says without relying on a literal translation of a string of words. In this respect, interpreters need much more than conversational fluency in a
second language to meet the requirements and overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. Interpreters working in a professional network must undergo progressive levels of intense professional training. They must also have the guidance of a code of ethics—which includes confidentiality, a non-judgmental attitude, accuracy and completeness in interpreting, and client self-determination. In an opposite scenario, inexperienced interpreters pose danger by omitting or adding dialogue, changing the intended message, deleting relevant cultural information, giving a personal opinion, or engaging in extraneous discussions that exclude either the client or the provider. Therefore, a bachelor’s or master’s degree for future Japanese-English interpreters is a must in that such a background prevents the mentioned scenario from taking place. Training students to use the Japanese-English language combination for all types of communication enable the enhancement of the profession in Japan.

5.1.2 Japan’s Case

Although the interpreting profession and industry in Japan is fragmented, with a plethora of associations, many funded by tests marketed as ‘qualifications,’ there are not as many official interpreting schools and programs as there are in, for instance, the countries of the European Union. All the Japanese universities that currently offer an interpreting program and grant their students with an official diploma in interpreting are listed below (American Translators Association):

- Bunka University, Tokyo
- Inter School Tokyo
- International Christian University, Tokyo
- Kyoto Tachibana Women’s University, Kyoto
- NHK (Nihon Hoso Kyokai, a public broadcasting station) Joho Network, International Training Project, Tokyo
- Osaka University of Foreign Studies, Osaka
- Toyo Eiwa Women’s University, Yokohama

As can be seen above, there are currently seven universities in Japan, providing their students with an interpreting program—a rather low number compared to Europe (American Translators Association n.d.). Yudai Sato—a Japanese interpreter and London Met Interpreting graduate—speaks about life after university. Sato also describes training methods, as well as comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the universities in Japan to London Met

There are private educational institutions for interpreters in Japan. They are language specific and teach with a ‘this should be translated as that’ kind of approach. In contrast, London Met teaches you the process of interpreting. How should you cope when the speaker speaks at the speed of a machine gun? How can you cultivate your memory? How can you liberate yourself from words that are coming at you and render ideas or meanings as opposed to words? These are strategies you can universally employ for any kind of assignments.

Another precious experience I had at London Met is in what we call ‘relay.’ In Japan, Japanese interpreters are expected to interpret from Japanese into English. English is a foreign language for many of us and I am no exception. At London Met, I often interpreted from Japanese into English and all of my international colleagues would interpret my English into their mother tongues. They were such demanding listeners as they themselves had to interpret what I was saying. It was tough and I felt a great deal of pressure but thanks to that my English interpreting has been honed. Believe me, compared with my international colleagues, my clients are much less demanding! (London Metropolitan University 2017)

Taking into account the comparison of Sato’s experience at London Met to private educational institutions in Japan, it is clear that receiving interpreter training in another country is a must if one wants to work as a conference interpreter in Japan. The limited number of universities—along with the monolingual character of Japan—makes it quite clear that future conference interpreters must invest in themselves and get themselves exposed to both another language and culture. The situation also stems from
the fact that Japan will not provide such future interpreters a much-needed multilingual and multicultural atmosphere. Another interview reveals the same idea; Tatsuya Komatsu—a graduate of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and renowned as one of the pioneers of simultaneous interpreting in Japan—has for more than 40 years been summoned to serve at international gatherings all over the world, including at G-8 Summits. When posed the question, “Could this be the end for interpreters,” Komatsu resolutely stated, “No. Japan is a monolingual society, and it is very difficult to improve your English skills,” (Ito 2004). In conclusion—regarding conference interpreting in Japan—it is unmistakable that the monolingual character of Japan brings about specific obstructions as to language learning, interpreter training, and conference interpreting. Therefore, the Japanese state must implement particular policies both in educational and professional aspects of conference interpreting in Japan to promote the profession in the country.

5.2 Interpreters In Japan

Interpreting is one of the most stressful tasks on earth, and Japanese interpretation to or from other languages is one of the most difficult of all interpreting jobs. According to Stephen Bentley—who has been working as a creative director, senior copywriter, and freelance interpreter in Japan since 1997—professional simultaneous interpreters in Japan work for about 15–20 minutes at a time before handing off to another interpreter. Japanese-English interpreters claim that their brains cannot handle more extended periods than that without making more and more mistakes. If they rise to the top, a Japanese interpreter can command at least USD 1,000 per day, and they will be fully booked six months in advance. Professionals get work through agencies that test their applicants. Interpreters in Japan also
reveal that they usually do not want to get hired to be an interpreter at one company—thinking that such situations may endanger their physical and mental health (Bentley 2018).

There are currently only twelve AIIC-accredited interpreters in Japan. According to the geographical distribution, Japan is home to twelve interpreters—Tokyo is home to ten interpreters with one interpreter located Nagoya and one in Yokohama.

![Figure 2: The geographical distribution of the AIIC-accredited interpreters in Japan.](image)

Moreover, when we consider language combinations, we can say that according to AIIC figures, there are twenty-two interpreters in eleven cities and nine countries working from Japanese into English. There are eight interpreters in two cities and two countries working from Japanese into French, and five interpreters in four cities and three countries working from Japanese into German. There is one interpreter in one city and one country working from Dutch into Japanese. There are twenty-eight interpreters in twelve cities and nine countries working from English into Japanese, nine interpreters in three cities and three countries working from French into Japanese and finally five interpreters in four cities and three countries working from German into Japanese. As mentioned in the first section of the paper, there are far more interpreters working across the countries of the European Union. Interpreting is a widespread profession, and there is an ample number of AIIC-accredited
interpreters working as a freelance or staff interpreter throughout Europe. The figures reveal that there are four hundred thirty-two interpreters in Central Europe, fifty-one interpreters in Eastern Europe, eighty interpreters in Northern Europe, ninety-one interpreters in South-Eastern Europe, four hundred nine interpreters in Southern Europe, and finally one thousand five hundred sixty-four interpreters in Western Europe (AIIC 2019).

Figure 3: The geographical distribution of the AICC-accredited interpreters in Central Europe.
Figure 4: The geographical distribution of the AICC-accredited interpreters in Northern Europe.

Figure 5: The geographical distribution of the AICC-accredited interpreters in Eastern Europe.

Figure 6: The geographical distribution of the AICC-accredited interpreters in Southern Europe.
Therefore, it is indisputable that the cultural and linguistic nature of Japan makes conference interpreters less widespread and prevalent in the Japanese context—especially when compared to the multicultural and multilingual setting of Europe. Even though Japan has experienced regular progress in conference interpreting, there remains plenty of room to promote the profession in Japan.

5.3 Associations And Organizations

One of the signs showing that a profession is well-respected, prevalent, and well-established in a country is associations and organizations related to that profession. For instance, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) is an international non-profit organization representing professional conference interpreters worldwide (AIIC n.d.). In Japan, one of the problematic characters as to conference interpreting is that there are not many associations regarding conference interpreting. Although the quality is over quantity, it is clear that the demand and interest towards such associations are low, given that conference interpreting is not very well-established in Japan. Below, there is a list of older and current associations and organizations related to conference interpreting in Japan (Wikipedia).

5.3.1 Primarily Interpreting

- Medical Interpreters & Translators Association (MITA): Organized at Tokyo Medical University by J.P. Barron and Raoul Breugelmans, 1993-2012. It was an offshoot from JAT, focused on helping Japanese doctors communicating in English, with links throughout the world and some government funding. It created training resources such as actual video interviews with patients in Leicestershire (having various accents), and a 3-way glossary (Japanese, doctors’ English, patients’ English).
- International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA): Has a Japan Chapter and West Japan Chapter, founded in 2008. The parent body was founded in 1986 in Massachusetts and went ‘international’ in 2007; it has around 2000 members in total and incorporates the (American) National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters.
- Japan Association of Medical Interpreters (JAMI): Founded in 2011.
- International Medical Interpreters and Translators Association (IMEDIATA): Founded in 2011; around 30 members.

Although the list may seem extensive and full of associations, it is a well-known fact that many associations and organizations in Japan were subject to be shut down due to either bad management or low interest and demand. For instance, as one of the most influential interpreting associations in Japan, the Japan Interpretation Association was shut down due to bad management. The explanation they made for the deactivation of the association is as follows
Due to the poor management of the Japan Interpretation Association, we were forced to close all operations and offices as of the end of December. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience caused and ask for your cooperation after inferring the current situation. (日本通訳協会 (Japan Interpretation Association), 2008; researcher’s translation)

Therefore, it is unmistakable that the condition of interpreting associations and organizations in Japan could have a more immeasurable impact on the profession if they operated more effectively and actively in holding conferences, organizing events, and promoting the field throughout the country.

6 Conclusion

The present research analyzes the current situation of conference interpreting in Japan. As to the analyzed data, and comparison of it to the other geographies of the world—where conference interpreting has an older history—it is clear that Japan is relatively new when it comes to conference interpreting. There are only a few AIIC-accredited interpreters, there is only one association holding events regularly—which is Japan Association of Conference Interpreters—and there are not enough universities and institutions providing interpreter training in Japan. In conclusion, the profession of conference interpreting in Japan has been relatively newly expanding. Moreover, the monolingual and monocultural structure of Japan reshape conference interpreting and bring about certain obstacles as to the promotion of the profession in Japan. Hence, such gaps can be filled via new research in the field, establishing interpreter training universities enabling Japan to become more multicultural and multilingual.
7 Bibliography


