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Using Dictionaries in
Japanese>English Translation
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CONTENTS:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Types of Dictionaries
- 3 Tips & Troubleshooting
- 4 Examples
- 5 Final Note

✓ **STUDY TIPS** and ✎ **EXERCISES** are indicated thus.

1 INTRODUCTION

When you are faced with unknown vocabulary or phrases, or you want to check the meaning of a term, you need to refer to dictionaries, but using Japanese dictionaries is not quite as straightforward as finding, say, a French or German term. You may need to use both a *kanji* dictionary and a phonetic dictionary, and this may be in *kana* order or in Roman alphabetical order. This aspect of dictionary use is perhaps unique to Japanese. Also, as there are no gaps between words, it may not always be clear where one word ends and another begins.

Translators also need to use various reference materials in addition to their *kanji*- and Japanese>English dictionaries. These include Japanese monolingual dictionaries and encyclopaedia, English monolingual dictionaries, mono- and bilingual dictionaries for specialist subjects (for example medical terms or architecture), a dictionary of classical language (古語辞典 *kogo jiten*) and, of course, internet resources.

So the first hurdle is finding the term you require in the correct dictionary: that is, knowing where and how to find it.

Next you will need to select the correct English equivalent, where one is listed, and adapt it to the context of your translation text. Very often the English equivalents given are not appropriate, so the dictionary is only a guide to meaning and not a 'translator's bible'. On other occasions the term you want does not appear in the dictionary at all, and you need some coping strategies!

This article aims to look at these problems more closely and provide some useful hints for student translators.

2 TYPES OF DICTIONARIES & when to use them

***Kanji* dictionaries**

These are necessary when you need to look up *kanji* (Chinese characters) that you do not know how to pronounce. The *kanji* dictionary usually gives the various pronunciations of a character, its basic meaning(s), and a number of compounds beginning with this character. If you already know how to pronounce the *kanji*, go straight to a phonetic dictionary, which will list many more meanings and idioms. See **phonetic dictionaries**.

(Note that you do not need to know the pronunciation of *kanji* to translate – it is enough to know the meaning.)

There are a number of Japanese-English *kanji* dictionaries on the market with various look-up systems, which I will not describe in detail here. The *Nelson Dictionary*, Spahn and Hadamitzky's *Kanji Dictionary* and Halpern's dictionary (1990) are amongst the best known. Whichever you choose, you will need to read the introduction carefully and get used to the system of ordering *kanji*. I suggest that beginners, having chosen a *kanji* dictionary, stick to it for some time and do not switch between dictionaries as each has a different look-up system and you are likely to waste a lot of time and get confused. Most people find that once they have got to know a *kanji* dictionary quite well they are able to look up characters relatively quickly, but be prepared to persevere at first!

(Note that *kanji* dictionaries do not go out of date in the same way as phonetic ones. A few new *kanji* compounds may appear, but in general new vocabulary will be found in phonetic and other specialised sources. The forms of the *kanji* themselves, and their basic readings and meanings, have remained relatively unchanged since revisions after WW2.)

One of the best-known *kanji* dictionaries is the *Japanese-English Character Dictionary* by Andrew Nelson, published by Tuttle. This has been republished numerous times, with a 'new expanded version' and a compact edition is also available. The *Nelson Dictionary* uses the traditional Chinese/Japanese system of 'radicals' to order *kanji*. This may take some time to master, but I would recommend it to students as this is a useful skill in its own right. *Nelson* also has a very large number of *kanji* compounds, so I feel that the time invested in learning to use the look-up system is rewarded. It gives you an insight into the derivation of the *kanji*, and as it is the system the Japanese themselves use, it also enables you to refer to monolingual *kanji* dictionaries (漢和辞典 *kanwa jiten*) in the future.

Finally, there are now ways of finding *kanji* electronically. Although many electronic

dictionaries use the traditional system of radicals (and give meanings and readings in Japanese only), some now allow you to write the shape of the character onto the screen with an electronic pen – a hugely helpful innovation! The same system is available in Microsoft Word. When you have opened a Word Document and set up the ‘Japanese Language Input’, click on the IME pad, and then click on ‘Hand Writing’. Draw the shape of the character you are looking for into the box – it does not need to be perfect – and the computer suggests characters you may be searching for. These technologies are a great help, but bear in mind that they only give you the pronunciation or meaning in Japanese. I do not know of any such hand-written system adapted for English speakers.

[If any readers can recommend new dictionaries or look-up software that they have found useful do let me know: contact via SOAS Language Centre.]

Phonetic dictionaries

These list vocabulary according to its pronunciation. Most are in *kana* order (あ、い、う、え、お、、、) but sometimes Roman alphabetical order is used, for example in the Kenkyusha’s large *New Japanese-English Dictionary* (see below). Phonetic dictionaries are the translator’s main resource; they contain a wide range of vocabulary items, phrases and idioms. You will find items listed here regardless of whether they appear in your original text in *hiragana*, *katakana* or *kanji*. This is extremely useful, as Japanese allows an author to use whichever script they choose when writing. For example, an author may write 後, あと or even アト, to mean ‘afterwards’.

[But beware to pick the correct headword if the author has used *kana*. Each of the following might also be read あと: 跡、痕、址! Only context and experience will help you here but do remember that several words may be pronounced the same way – do not immediately go for the first alternative in the dictionary. See **TROUBLESHOOTING II**]

Of course you cannot look up terms in the phonetic dictionary if they are written in *kanji* which you cannot pronounce. In this case, you need to use a *kanji* dictionary (see **kanji dictionaries**). If the *kanji* dictionary gives you an adequate English equivalent, you need go no further. However, the *kanji* dictionary is often very brief and does not give the range of meanings or phrases you need. You then have to go back to the phonetic dictionary and look up the term there.

I recommend you compare meanings in more than one dictionary and read the examples provided to get a good feeling for the meaning of a word. Unlike *kanji* dictionaries (best stick to one of those), I do not think you can have too many phonetic dictionaries – each will give you a different range of examples, phrase or

idioms. (See **looking up idioms**).

Monolingual Japanese reference books

Japanese-Japanese dictionaries are difficult for beginners to use, but once intermediate and advanced learners have taken the plunge they will find them very useful. When you start reading authentic materials, they are essential. What we mean here are not really ‘dictionaries’ but very wide ranging reference books, rather like encyclopaedias. 広辞苑 (*Kōjien*) and 大辞林 (*Daijirin*) are amongst the best known. They are helpful because they include proper names, *katakana* terms and so on, not only *bona fide* dictionary vocabulary, and they are not restricted to Japan. You might find, for example, the Romanised name of a Chinese Province, a German author, or a historic Japanese personality, all in *Kōjien*. Of course the difficulty, if you are dealing with *kanji*, is reading the term in the first place! (see **kanji dictionaries, dictionaries of proper names**). Another specialist area is Classical Japanese; you will usually need to work with a monolingual classical dictionary (古語辞典 *kogo jiten*) before translating into English.

Dictionaries of proper names.

As we all know, proper names are a real problem for foreigners tackling Japanese, and some names can prove challenging even for native speakers. Professional translators usually try to resolve name readings on line, but there is a handy and useful dictionary of Japanese personal and place-names, P.G. O’Neill’s *Japanese Names*, which learners should familiarise themselves with. It is organised in a similar way to traditional *kanji* dictionaries like *Nelson*, with a phonetic index at the back and ‘radical’ order throughout the book.

Much more comprehensive, and perhaps a little harder to use, are monolingual names dictionaries. Bookshops in Japan will stock many of these, for example Sanseidō’s 日本地名事典 (*Nihon chimei jiten*). There are also books like the 朝日人物事典 (*Asahi jimbutsu jiten*) which are not so much dictionaries for finding name readings but sources of information, in this case on important personalities in Japan.

Specialist dictionaries.

Once a translator begins work in a specialised area s/he will need to use dictionaries relating to that field, as many terms will not appear in a general dictionary. If Japanese>English dictionaries exist in your field (for example medicine or law) these are invaluable, even in the internet age. If not, translators will need to look at Japanese>Japanese sources, as well as books in English, and work from these. This is largely the case in areas like the arts or ceramics, for example. For those interested in

Japanese fine and applied arts, <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/> is an interesting resource.

English>English dictionaries.

In translation examinations, some students concentrate on the Japanese text at the expense of their English, but of course translation involves producing high-quality English. English monolingual dictionaries are relevant for checking your English; use them to look up spellings, language usage, and meanings of unfamiliar words.

All-English books will also be needed in specialist areas (see **specialist dictionaries**.) English-language books about Japan can also prove useful. It is often necessary to find out more about the subject you are translating: never translate anything without fully understanding it! Kodansha's *Encyclopaedia of Japan*, or even a small book like Papinot's *Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan* (Tuttle Books) often come in handy. Looking up references like the name of a battle, the life of a ruler, the history of a temple or town, the origins of a festival etc will often pay dividends, as the information you discover frequently comes in very useful in the rest of your translation.

English>Japanese dictionaries

These are occasionally useful to check back the English equivalent you have selected. This is vital for students whose native language is not English, particularly Japanese native speakers translating into English. When you use an English term or expression you are not entirely sure of, or taken from a Japanese>English dictionary, double check to see whether the examples and Japanese definition really fits the context you want, and whether the term is of the correct register.

Electronic dictionaries

These are small, hand-held word-tanks containing perhaps half a dozen reference books, typically a Japanese>English, English>Japanese, a Japanese reference book such as *Kōjien*, a *kanji* dictionary, and Thesaurus. Often there is a memory which automatically saves words you have looked up recently. This can provide a good study tool, as you can learn the words you did not know without having to copy them into a separate glossary. Electronic dictionaries are designed for Japanese users so the menus and instructions will be in Japanese, but once you have got used to them they are very handy. They contain the same material as the paper dictionaries described above so there is no difference in principle, but they are very practical, particularly for interpreters, because they are small and portable. Also, although a good electronic dictionary may be fairly expensive, it is still economic when compared to the price of

buying each volume separately, and you can even purchase Japanese electronic dictionaries in the UK. Note that *kanji* dictionaries in electronic format use the radical principle although some new ones also allow you to write the shape of a *kanji* on screen and identify it (similar to the MsWord facility described above: see ***kanji dictionaries***).

Electronic dictionaries are extremely popular with today's students but please bear in mind that there are still some professional translation exams, like that run by the Institute of Linguists, which only allow paper dictionaries into the exam room and forbid the use of electronic devices. I think it is still worth familiarising yourself with the wide range of paper dictionaries available, and not relying entirely on an electronic one.

Facilities within computer systems

Many computer packages now incorporate dictionaries; English monolingual, Japanese>English and others. I am not aware of *kanji* dictionaries incorporated into computer software, but Microsoft Word does have two interesting features which can be helpful. One is the ルビ function – that is, adding *furigana* to a text. You might want to have a look at this in order to see how *kanji* might be pronounced. Highlight the relevant *kanji* or compound, select 'Format', then 'Asian layout', and then click on 'Phonetic Guide'. But be careful – the suggested readings may be wrong!!! Never rely on them for name readings. Secondly, and perhaps much more useful, is the facility for hand-drawing a character (see ***kanji dictionaries***).

Grammar dictionaries

Grammar reference books are useful to check unfamiliar grammatical constructions, especially uses of particles which can be difficult to find in regular Japanese>English dictionaries. Books like Yōko McClain's *Handbook of Modern Japanese Grammar* (Hokuseidō Press) give examples and brief explanations in English of verb-forms, auxiliary verbs, adjectives and so on. I have found the section on 'Verb-Following Expressions' particularly useful, as well as the alphabetical list of particles and their functions. Separate grammar books exist for Classical Japanese, although an older book like Henderson's *Handbook of Japanese Grammar* (1945) covers a lot of old (文語) usage, and is clearly and easily arranged in alphabetical order.

Can you recommend a grammar reference book? Do let me know if there is a book you've found useful: Contact via SOAS Language Centre.

Internet resources

This is a huge and ever growing area. There are translation sites, translators' mailing lists and archives of previous questions, online glossaries, bilingual sources, and much else. If you take translation to a professional level, you will find these resources indispensable. However, I do not think that students should become dependent on the internet too early: if you start by mastering standard dictionaries, you will then have a solid grounding with which to exploit and appraise online material. A beginner is tempted to take anything on screen at face value, and may be confused and overwhelmed by it.

One of the first occasions I encourage students to use the internet is to find the official English translations for names of institutions, book titles, and the like. Remember that many Japanese institutions, from government ministries and universities to newspapers or symphony orchestras, will have an English title on their website, even where the website itself is Japanese only. In that case you should always use the English title given. Also where a Japanese book or play has already been published in English, you should refer to it by the title used in the published translation. Finally perhaps the most obvious situation: where your Japanese text discusses foreign personalities, places, publications or institutions, particularly where these are originally in English, you must find the correct English original! An internet search is almost always the most efficient way to do this.

3 TIPS & TROUBLESHOOTING

You don't know the meaning of something in your text so you look it up in the dictionary. This might sound obvious, but life is not always that simple. What can go wrong?

Common problems include:

- i. Not finding what you are looking for in the dictionary.
- ii. Picking the wrong meaning when a term has alternative meanings (or not realising that it has several meanings).
- iii. Picking an English word/phrase of the wrong register or tone.
- iv. Not recognising that you are dealing with an idiom.

There is no quick fix for these problems – practice is the key. Nevertheless, knowing about the pitfalls is half the battle won.


i. What do you do when you cannot find what you are looking for in a Japanese>English dictionary? I suggest you ask yourself the following questions:

- Could the mystery item be a proper name?

If so, you will need to look in a names dictionary (see **dictionaries of proper names**).

Very often a personal name is followed by a suffix, denoting the status of the person.

Look out for this type of clue: さん *san*、ちゃん *chan*、くん *kun*、様 *sama*、氏 *shi*、先生 *sensei*、教授 *kyōju*、総理 *sōri*、選手 *senshu*、課長 *kachō*、部長 *buchō*、代表 *daihyō*、家 *ke*、被告 *hikoku*、容疑者 *yōgisha*.


 **EXERCISE:** How many of these do you know? Look up and fill in the meanings of any you don't, and add to the list when you see other suffixes to names.

Place names, on the other hand, do not usually come with any clues, nor do names of shops or companies. Always consider the possibility that an unknown term may be a proper name – see whether the context would fit.

- Does the mystery item consist of several *kanji*?

If so, check whether the first of these is a prefix, or the last a suffix. For example 歴史学 *rekishigaku* might not be in your dictionary, but 歴史 *rekishi* 'history' and 学 *gaku*

‘study’ will be, so 歴史学 means ‘the study of history’. Likewise 生出演 *namashutsuen* may not appear in a dictionary but 生 *nama* is used as a prefix to convey the idea of ‘raw’, or ‘live’ and 出演 *shutsuen* means ‘performance’ so 生出演 is ‘a live performance’.

 **EXERCISE:** Use your dictionary to look up any of the following suffixes that you do not know, and list examples of these when you see them in texts.

- 案
- 化
- 学
- 感
- 期
- 者
- 中
- 上
- 数
- 性
- 高
- 的
- 法
- 率
- 力
- 用
- 以前
- 以後
- 以降
- 直後
- 以外
- 氣味

Notice that suffixes may be combined: 動物 animal/s

動物学 the study of animals, so ‘zoology’

動物学者 someone involved in zoology, so ‘a zoologist’

●Or do you have a four-*kanji* compound?

This will often consist of two pairs of terms to be looked up separately. 地方 *chihō* meaning region combines with 教育 *kyōiku* meaning education to give 地方教育, regional education. 財政 *zaisei* ‘finance’ combines with 制度 *seido* ‘system’ to make 財政制度 ‘financial

system”. This can be extended further, for example if we add 中央 ‘central’ we get 中央財政制度 ‘central financial system’.

●Could your set of *kanji* be an abbreviation?

Often the Japanese take the first and third of a group of four, e.g. 東大 (Tōdai) is an abbreviation for 東京大学 (Tōkyōdaigaku), and 日銀 (Nichigin) of 日本銀行 (Nippon ginkō). Much longer *kanji* strings are often abbreviated, for example 国連安全保障理事, *kokuren ampo rijikai*, (The United Nations Security Council) is abbreviated to 国連安保理 *kokuren ampori*.

If you have ruled out the possibilities mentioned above and a compound does not appear in your *kanji* dictionary, you may need to look up the readings of each character first, and then look them up in a phonetic dictionary, or a Japanese>Japanese dictionary. Most frequently a *kanji* compound will combine two *on-yomi* (所見、しょけん) or two *kun-yomi* (見所、みどころ) . It is rare to find a mixture of *on* and *kun* in a single compound.

●Are you perhaps trying to look up an inflected term?

Verbs, for example, are listed in the plain form in the dictionary. So you will not find のんだ (飲んだ) – you will have to look up のむ (飲む) . Beware of *keigo* (polite inflections) and complex grammar which does not appear in the dictionary. E.g. 連絡させていただきます。’ 連絡 *renraku*’ will appear in the dictionary, but the rest of this phrase will probably not – you need to look at your grammar books to resolve it.

Sometimes verbs are combined: a second verb is added to the ます stem of the first verb, for example たべる (eat) and あきる (get tired of) are combined to make たべあきる (get tired of eating; have enough of). Very common verbal pairs will appear as single entries in dictionaries, but others you may have to look up separately and combine the meanings. Some verbs are commonly latched onto others, for example: - つくす (to do completely), - はじまる (to begin doing), - なおす (to redo).

✓**STUDY TIPS:** Make a list of these auxiliary verbs, along with examples of their use.

Note that particles like は or も may also be ‘inserted into verbs’ for emphasis, for example: 食べもしない 飲みもしないで 起きてしまった。The particle/s are added to the ます stem of the verb and followed by inflexions of する。

●Could the mystery phrase be a term the author has coined him/herself?

If so, you will usually find out when you read the whole text. This is one reason I recommend

that you always read through a whole text before starting to translate. Note that the title phrase is normally explained in the text; do not start by searching for that in dictionaries.

● Are you dealing with a specialised term?

If so, an encyclopaedia or specialist dictionary may be needed (see **specialist dictionaries**).

If all of that has failed, then the un-findable term might just be a misprint!! But I would certainly search for it on line, perhaps in Japanese google (google.co.jp) before coming to that conclusion. If you get any hits, then it is likely to be a legitimate term!

ii. Picking out the correct meaning.

The term you are looking up will very often have more than one meaning. Firstly, you need to decide which dictionary entry or 'headword' you need. In Japanese, several words may be pronounced the same way, so it is important to select the correct entry. Here are a few examples:

Let's say we want to look up あと. *Kenkyūsha* gives two main headings:

あと 後

and

あと 跡

So you need to decide which of these entries applies. The first, あと 後, lists many meanings related to time: after, later etc.. The second, あと 跡, is a noun with various meanings including 'mark', 'track', 'site', 'remains'. You need to firstly decide which of these meanings, or range of meanings, is the one you need. Only then can you read through the entry in detail and work out how to translate the term.

If the term you are searching for is written in *kanji* this problem does not arise so funnily enough, *kana* items are the most confusing in this respect.

Let's list a few more examples:

じょうだん 冗談 a joke

じょうだん 上段 an upper bunk, upper step

 **EXERCISE:** Try looking these up for yourself:

しる (知る)

しる (汁)

ばん (晩)

ばん (盤)

ばん (番)

ばん (版)

ひとで (人手)

ひとで (人出)

ひとで (海星)

きかん (期間)

きかん (機関)

きかん (帰還)

きかん (器官)

ちゅうおう (中央)

ちゅうおう (中欧)

きかい (機会)

きかい (機械)

きかい (棋界)

How many distinct meanings can you find for 「かける」、「なる」、「きく」?

Only when you have got the correct headword can you look through and select the best meaning. Let's go back to our first example, あと, and let's assume that you have decided on the first headword あと 後. *Kenkyūsha* then gives various numbered meanings. [1, the back (seat), the rear (part),..., 2. later, subsequently, future,..., 3. the next, the following, ..., 4. the rest, the others, the remainder,..., 5. a successor, descendent, ..., 6.]

You must at least glance through all of the meanings before selecting the one you need. Look at the example sentences in each section and see which sense of the word best matches the context of your text. Do not assume that you can just take the first meaning and use it in your English. **This is probably the most common mistake students make when using dictionaries to translate!**

It is also worth looking at the key to your dictionary to understand the Japanese abbreviations printed alongside the definitions. These provide categories of meaning, for example 医 medicine, 化 chemistry, 建 architecture, 哲 philosophy, 数 mathematics, 商 business, and so on. So if you are translating a business text for example, when you look up a term you will look at the translation equivalent marked 商, which tells you how this term is used in a business context.

A GENERAL RULE

Use the dictionary to work out what the text means, and then use your imagination and knowledge of English to express it in the best possible way. Do not rely on the dictionary to provide your translation immediately.

iii. English tone and register.

Producing a good translation is not only about meaning, but also about making your English match the register and tone of the text you are translating. A scientific report, a lyrical piece of literature, or an advertising slogan, must all sound authentic – they must be written in the appropriate style of English. This is part of the translator’s challenge – the dictionary will not do it or you! However, there are some helpful hints in dictionaries. Example sentences often give you an idea of the situations and context in which a particular term is used, and suggest the tone of that term. For example, the word 出頭 *shuttō*, according to the dictionary means ‘attendance’ or ‘presence’, and 出頭する ‘to attend’. Kenkyūsha’s dictionary (*New College Japanese>English Dictionary, 4th edition*) gives various examples of the usage of this phrase, many of which are marked 《fml》, meaning ‘formal’. The examples include 出頭しないとき ‘in default of attendance’ ; 法廷に出頭を命じられる ‘be subpoenaed, be ordered to appear in court’ ; ‘出頭命令 a summons, subpoena’. This should be sufficient to show you that this is a formal term, often used in a legal context, and so a translation like ‘come along’ or ‘show up’ would be inappropriate although it has the same meaning. Some dictionaries will also mark terms with style indicators like 敬語 respectful; 俗(語) slang; 卑(語) vulgar/rude, 文 literary; 方言 dialect; 口語 colloquial/informal; 戯言 humorous; 児童言 children’s language; but please remember that these are added for the benefit of Japanese dictionary users as a guide to the English translations, and are not intended for us.

If any readers do come across Japanese>English dictionaries with helpful style and usage guides, please let me know.

iv. Idioms.

An idiom is a phrase which you cannot easily derive from the meanings of the individual words. Idioms are usually listed at the end of each headword entry, often in bold type. Some dictionaries will refer the reader to a separate entry for a common idiom.


Idioms come in many forms, but a very common pattern in Japanese is ‘Noun followed by Particle and Verb’, for example: 気をつける. Start by looking for the headword 気.

You will find that 気 has various meanings, each with their own chunk of information, separated by numbers. So, for example, your dictionary may show:

- 気 1. mind, heart.....;
- 気 2. nature, disposition;
- 気 3. (、、する) intend, mean
- 気 4. worry, be careful

Idioms are usually listed at the end of each of these numbered sections, very often in bold print. [the more common the word, the more information you will have to look through, and the more idioms you will find!] It is very helpful to note that ‘Noun + Particle’ idioms are grouped using the *kana* order of the particle. So, for example, you might find that various idioms beginning 気が are followed by 気に, 気の, 気は, and eventually 気を. Finally, in the list of 気を phrases: 気を利く、気を配る etc., you should come to 気をつける.

Note that in this case we were able to find the idiom we wanted under the headword 気. But sometimes this may not be the case: if you cannot find an idiom under the first word, you will need to look under the next key word. So just supposing that 気をつける was not listed in the 気 section, you would have to look for it under the headword つける [付ける].

 **EXERCISE:** See whether you can use your dictionary to find the following idioms:

- 後の祭り
- あとを引く
- 後にも先にも
- 後から後から
- 心がける
- 頭にくる
- 首になる

✓**STUDY TIPS:**

- a. Note down idioms as you come across them and make your own glossary.
- b. Make a list of idioms beginning with: 気、心、首、手、間、日

NOTE We (non Japanese natives) are at a disadvantage because most of the published dictionaries are intended for the use of native Japanese speakers, and so are not geared towards our needs. *Nelson* is a notable exception, as well as learners' dictionaries such as *Cambridge Learners Dictionary of Japanese*, *Oxford Beginner's Japanese Dictionary*, or the *Oxford Basic Japanese-English Dictionary*. However, I do not know of any comprehensive Japanese-English dictionaries (suitable for translation of authentic materials) written from the 'English language perspective'.

Do let me know if you discover any!

4 EXAMPLES

羽田空港に着陸した。

Clues: If you look up the verb first 着陸した, it gives you a clue that the first term may be a proper name. Split the first term into two parts, 羽田 and 空港.

An American location: ポトマック川

Clue: this is a good candidate for *Kōjien* or similar Japanese source.

What about a Japanese historical figure? 豊臣秀吉

You will need more than one type of dictionary for: ハンガリーの数学者ボーヤイ

Here are a couple of noun phrases taken from the press :

★ オリンピック以後最大な国家的行事

You have to chop this phrase up and look up various bits separately. Look up any of the following words that you do not know:

オリンピック

+ the suffix 以後

最大な

国家 + 的

行事

You then translate from the back to get:

“the greatest national event since the Olympics”

★ 研究論文をめぐるねつ造問題

This time, chop the phrase up yourself: a set of *kanji* compounds, particle を、verb, and then another compound. This trick is to realise that the author has chosen to use *kana* for ねつ, but the underlined section is one piece of vocabulary、捏造。

Could you work out the answer?

A: “the problem of falsification of research papers”

Now a few sentences, taken from a short story by Hoshi Shin’ichi, (現代の人生)

★ [cut タバコの味はうまくなかった。彼は灰皿でもみ消し、深いため息をついた。

Concentrate on the underlined sections. You could be thrown here if you do not notice that もみ消し is one phrase written as a mixture of *kana* and *kanji* (plain form 揉み消す). At first it is easy to read this as two particles 灰皿でも isn’t it?

The noun ため息 again, is written in a mixture of *kana* and *kanji* (溜息). Again one could easily confuse this for the particle ため !

TRANSLATION TIP The lesson here? When your translation does not make sense always look back and consider the possibility that you have misread the text – might you have ‘chopped it up’ wrongly?

★ 光はベッドの友彦のすがたをもとらえた。

Of course it is harder to translate these sentences out of context, but 友彦 can only be a proper name. Notice that the author has used two particles together ‘をも’. The verb もとる does in fact exist in Japanese, but it does not fit here, either in terms of meaning or grammar. So the verb to look up is とらえる。

★ 「cut おまえの愚痴を聞きに来たのではない。それにしても、聞いても歯がゆくなるな。」

The underlined phrase is an idiom. If you don’t know it, practice looking it up. See **looking up idioms**.

Where do you need to look to fill in the gaps in the following translation?

アメリカの作家ロバート・フルガムは「人間に必要な知恵はすべて幼稚園の砂場で学んだ」という本を書いた。

The American author [] wrote a book called [].

I would suggest that the internet, for example Amazon, might be a good place to find the author and the book title.

Here is a similar example:

イギリスの有名な動物学者デズモンド・モリスの「人間動物園」

And what about 谷崎潤一郎の「細雪」

Or a recent animated film, 「千と千尋の神隠し」

Were you surprised by the difference between the original titles and the English translations?

Look online for the English equivalents for the following:

東京都交響楽団 (also abbreviated to 都響！)

国立能楽堂

5 FINAL NOTE

Various attempts have been made to simplify Japanese>English look-up and make finding written Japanese terms as easy as finding an Italian or French word in a dictionary. A whole variety of systems have been devised for *kanji* retrieval alone. I don't believe that any of these have really succeeded: for a Western reader, written Japanese remains a fascinating and complex challenge – like unravelling a puzzle. The most successful students and translators are those who accept and relish this challenge. Good luck!

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