

*О. І. Земко,  
студентка IV курсу  
Інституту комп'ютерних наук та інформаційних технологій,  
Національний університет «Львівська політехніка»*

## **PECULIARITIES OF JAPANESE LANGUAGE: DIFFICULTIES IN PROCESS OF TRANSLATING INTO ENGLISH**

It is generally known that Japanese language is one of the most difficult languages in the world. To master the basics of Japanese grammar means to spend a fair amount of time. There is a considerable difference in syntactic structure of Japanese and English languages; phrases and sentences are built differently; particles, prepositions, conjunctions have their peculiarities of usage.

However, despite the complexity of grammar and some features of the language, the correct pronunciation of non-native speaker is not a rare phenomenon. The Japanese is characterized by its melodiousness. But the gender factor plays an crucial role, for example if to take into consideration the rude talk of «samurai» and melodious one of «geisha». Although, the difference between male and female forms of speech is distinguished not only by the manner of speaking. It is unacceptable and impolite for women to use men's rude forms of speech. Naturally, Japanese women do not make such kind of speech errors because of strong sense of etiquette, but foreigners can often make such ones [1].

Grammatical, lexical and graphical features of Japanese language generate many specific difficulties in translating Japanese texts into any European language, including English. One of the main difficulties is translation of grammatical forms, which are absent in English language. Some of them – such as levels of politeness – can be translated only approximately.

In English, we more or less speak the same way to everyone. For example, you would say «Good morning», to your boss, your spouse, your friends, and to a complete stranger. In Japanese, things are quite different. There are polite, formal and informal styles of speech in Japanese. You must speak to different people using different levels of register. If you see your spouse in the morning, you would say «ohayo». When you get to work and see your boss, on the other hand, you would say «ohayo gozaimasu». To most colleagues, you would use the more formal «ohayo gozaimasu», but to the ones you have developed close relationships with, you can drop the formality, saying «ohayo». When speaking to strangers, we should always use the more formal version. Using the correct formality is very important when speaking Japanese, as speaking informally to strangers, superiors, or those older than you are quite rude and you risk to look ignorant in the eyes of the interlocutor [5].

Diminutive forms also take place in Japanese language. Generally they are used while communicating with children and in some other cases. Written and oral speech also has significant differences [2].

There is practically no international lexicon in Japanese, which often helps while translating from one European language into another. Borrowings from European languages (including international) are so exposed to rather strong Japanese phonetic change and become almost unrecognizable for Europeans. Another chal-

lenge is the transferring of Japanese proper names and untranslatable Japanese words.

One more peculiar feature of Japanese language that is rather important in process of translating is the phenomenon of priority / posteriority of action. There is no clear distinction between the Present and Future Tense, so the meaning of utterance is derived from its context. Is action done before the moment of speaking or after it – that is the only important thing, which is taken into consideration. For example, sentence *Daigaku he(university) kite iru (while going), tomodachi wo (friend) aimashita (met)* shows that the speaker met his friend before he came to university, while *Daigaku he (university)kite ita (have come) tomodachi wo (friend) aimashita (met)* emphasizes that speaker came to the university and then met friend.

We also should note the difference in construction between genuine native compounds and those derived from the Chinese, when one member of the compound is a verb governing the other. In genuine Japanese compounds the verb comes last, as in English, thus: *hara-kiri*, lit. «belly-cutting,» the old form of legalized suicide; *kami-hasami*, «hair-cutting.» (hasamu means «to cut with scissors» whereas *kiru* is «to cut» in general). In Chinese compounds, on the contrary, the verb comes first. Take, for instance, the elegant Chinese synonyms for *hara-kiri* and *kami-hasami*, which are preferred by cultured speakers, *sep-puku*, from *setsu* «to cut», and *ffuku* «belly»; *ziin* «to cut' and *hatsu* «hair».

Although each language has a basic word order, they differ in how strictly they adhere to that pattern. English has a relatively fixed word order. Movement from the default position is used in questions and sometimes as means of emphasis, but never in simple declarative sentences. Japanese is much more flexible. Anything to the left of the verb can be rearranged without changing the basic meaning of the sentence, though there is still a preferred order. The object can even be moved in front of the subject without risk of mixing them up.

In English, we order our sentences in the following way: **Subject + Verb + Object**. For example, look at the simple sentence, «I love you.» In this sentence, the verb is «love.» «I» is the one doing the loving, so it is the subject. And, of course, the one being loved is «you,» so it is the object. Therefore, we write the sentence. I (subject) love (verb) you (object). In Japanese things are bit different. In Japanese sentences word order is done like this: **Subject + Object + Verb**. *Watashi wa* (Subject) *anatao* (object) *aishiteru* (Verb) [3].

Japanese is interesting in that basically anything other than the verb can be omitted if understood from context. This is by no means a unique feature among the world's languages, but it can be discomfoting to English speakers, who expect pronouns in such places.

One more specific feature for Japanese is based on describing a person or object. When we characterize someone with the help of one-word attribute, it is placed before the noun. The same is for English. For example: *kireina hana* – beautiful flower, *kowareta jitensha* – broken bicycle. When using compound attribute, in Japanese we still place it before the noun. In English, as a rule, it is followed by noun and corresponds to subordinate clause of sentence. For example: Japanese language word-combination *ashita* (yesterday) *nooto* (copy book) *wo kaita* (bought) *mise* (shop) is translated in English as the copy book, which I bought yesterday.

The most noticeable problem while rendering English is the failure to accurately render the diphthongs. It is impossible to pronounce such words as *caught/coat* or *bought/boat* or the different vowel sound in minimal pairs such as *hat/hut*. Another difficulty occurs when dealing with the (/θ/ /ð/) sounds, such as in the words *month*, *thirteenth* and *clothes*. The /v/ sound is not properly distinguished by those who say *berry* instead of *very* or *ban* instead of *van* [4].

The noun system in Japanese has features that can result in negative into English. Articles do not exist in Japanese. The fact that many Japanese nouns can also function as adjectives or adverbs leads to mistakes in the choice of the correct part of speech in English. Nouns can be pluralized in various ways (depending for example on the degree of respect to be conveyed) or not at all if the context is clear. No distinction is made between countability and uncountability, which are extremely significant for the correct use of the article in English. It is little wonder that this aspect of English continues to cause difficulty to even the most proficient Japanese speakers of English.

There are numerous further small variations between Japanese and English which may interfere with the correct production of English. An example is the pronoun system. Relative pronouns do not exist in Japanese, and personal/possessive pronouns are used differently in the two languages.

Another major difference between English and Japanese are grammatical components called *subject* and *object markers*. Japanese has them, and English does not. The markers, in Romanized form, are *wa* and *wo*. For example: in English we have *I ate Japanese food*, and in Japanese – *I wa Japanese food wo ate* [3].

Particles are sometimes called *postpositions* (parallel to English *prepositions*) because they directly follow the word they are attached to. So while in English we would say «*to Tokyo*», in Japanese you would say «*Toukyou ni*».

Many of the difficulties of translation are not due to problems with the language itself but are more the result of cultural differences. There is a respect for abstraction which is alien to many plain-speaking Westerners.

In any case, the Japanese requires translator's high professionalism and deep knowledge of its features. If tolerable translated from a European language sometimes can be done without even knowing the language perfectly, but having a good grammar and dictionary, is not possible for Japanese [4].

## REFERENCES

1. Алпатов В.М., Крючкова Т.Б., О мужском и женском вариантах японского языка / В.М. Алпатов, Т.Б. Крючкова. – М.: «Наука», 1980. – с.58-68.
2. Федоров А. В. Основы общей теории перевода (лингвистические проблемы): Для институтов и факультетов иностр. языков / А. В. Федоров //Учеб. пособие. – 5-е изд. – СПб.: Филологический факультет СПбГУ; М.: ООО «Издательский Дом «ФИЛОЛОГИЯ ТРИ», 2002. – 416 с.
3. Hudson, Mutsuko Endo. Morton, Jacqueline. English Grammar for Students of Japanese: The Study Guide for Those Learning Japanese (English Grammar Series). Olivia & Hill Press, 1994. -204 p.
4. Shibatani, Masaoshi. The Languages of Japan. (Cambridge language surveys). Cambridge: Cabridge University Press, 1990.
5. Storm, Hiroko. Japanese Ultimate Basic (Living Language Series).USA:Random House Inc.,2001. -528 p.