

Chapter 4

Who Speaks in the Age of Machine Translation? Language, AI, and the Ethics of Knowledge Production

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1. Introduction

Several times a day, in the ordinary course of my work, I now do something that no scholar in history could do with this speed and fluency until the past decade: I hand a passage in one of my three working languages to a machine and receive, in less than a second, a fluent version of it in another. The translation is often good. Sometimes it is better than what I would have produced in an hour. And yet, each time, a small question repeats itself somewhere in my mind, and it has grown louder every year: who is speaking here? Not the author of the passage, who chose none of these words. Not I, who merely pressed a key. Not the machine, in any sense of “speaking” that we understand, for it does not know what it has said. The sentence stands there, confident and ownerless.

In the previous chapter I argued that languages hold some of their meanings at anchor: words moored to fixed texts and long histories, which resist being cut loose and carried across. I wrote there about what happens when human beings attempt the crossing. This chapter asks what happens now that the crossing has been mechanized. The question is not whether machine translation is useful; it is obviously enormously

useful, to me before anyone. The question is what kind of mediation it is, what it does to anchored meanings, and what it changes in the production of knowledge itself: who produces it, in whose words, and under whose responsibility.

These questions sound abstract, and the surest way I know to make them concrete is historical. Before we can say what has changed, we must remember, honestly and in some detail, what translation used to be: how long it took, how many hands it passed through, and how visibly each of those hands signed its work. I will follow two scriptures on their long journeys into Japanese, the Bible and the Qur'ān, because sacred texts are where the stakes of translation are highest, the records longest, and the anchored words most dense. I choose Japanese as the destination not only because I live in Japan, but also because Japan received both these books late, from far away, and through chains of intermediaries that are unusually well documented. What those chains teach us will then let us measure, in the second half of this chapter, exactly what the machine has altered.

2. When Translation Took Centuries: Sacred Texts on the Move

Consider first how slowly, and by how many named hands, the Bible moved westward before it ever turned toward Japan. Jerome's Latin Vulgate, itself a translation and the ancestor of a thousand others, occupied its maker for more than two decades at the turn of the fifth century. Twelve centuries later, when England resolved to make an authoritative version in its own tongue, the work was given to some fifty scholars organized in six companies, who labored seven years, from the commission of 1604 to the printing of 1611. Whatever one thinks of the results, the method is instructive: translation of scripture was understood

to be too consequential for one person, too difficult for one year, and too public for anonymity. Every name was known; every choice could be attacked, and was.

The Bible's arrival in Japan opens with a mistranslation so instructive that I have never found a better teaching example. When Francis Xavier reached Kagoshima in 1549, his Japanese informant and interpreter, Anjirō, rendered the Christian God with the name of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi, and for roughly two years the first Christian mission in Japan preached, in perfectly good faith, the worship of 大日, *Dainichi* (Elison 1973). The Shingon monks welcomed these foreign colleagues warmly. When Xavier at last understood what the word carried, he reversed himself in the streets, instructing his hearers not to worship Dainichi, and adopted instead the transliterated Latin: デウス, *Deusu*. The escape was only partial; local wits soon observed that *Deusu* sounded like 大嘘, *daiuso*, "the great lie." In two years, the mission had run the whole gauntlet that this chapter is about: translate the anchored word, and you import someone else's theology; transliterate it, and you import nothing, not even protection from mockery. I will return to this story, because the choice it dramatizes has never gone away.

The next act is stranger still. After the suppression of Japanese Christianity, the first published portion of the Bible in Japanese was produced in 1837, not in Japan but in Singapore, by a German missionary in Macau, Karl Gützlaff, who knew little Japanese and had never set foot in Japan. His teachers were three shipwrecked sailors, Otokichi, Iwakichi, and Kyūkichi, survivors of a cargo ship that had drifted disabled across the Pacific for fourteen months. With their help he translated the Gospel of John, and his choices show what happens when the chain of mediation is this thin: for God he reached for ゴクラク, *gokuraku*, the Buddhist paradise, and for the Logos of John's opening verse he settled on カシコイモノ, *kashikoi mono*, "the wise one." Three

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centuries after Dainichi, the same trap closed on another hand. I do not cite this to mock Gützlaff, who did what was possible with what he had; I cite it because it shows that before the modern era, the crossing of a sacred text could hang on three sailors blown off course.

The missionary establishment in Japan then did what institutional England had done. The Meiji Version was made by a standing committee of missionaries and Japanese scholars, with James Curtis Hepburn, the physician whose romanization system Japanese still uses, at its center; beginning its joint work in 1874, it completed the New Testament in 1880 and the Old in 1887, thirteen years in all. For the name of God, the committee chose 神, *kami*, a decision I will examine in the next section. What matters here is the regime: a named committee, a public method, and a pace measured in years per testament.

The Qur'ān's westward journey is, if anything, a purer specimen of mediated crossing. Its first full translation into Latin was the version commissioned by Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, and completed by Robert of Ketton in 1143, a paraphrase produced explicitly for refutation, which nevertheless served Europe as its Qur'ān for four centuries (Burman 2007). The first English Qur'ān, published by Alexander Ross in 1649, was not translated from Arabic at all, but from André du Ryer's French: a relay translation at the very origin of the English tradition. Only with George Sale in 1734 did English receive a Qur'ān made directly from the Arabic, followed in the nineteenth century by Rodwell in 1861 and Palmer in 1880.

Japan's reception reproduced this relay structure with remarkable exactness. The first Japanese Qur'ān, Sakamoto Ken'ichi's *Kōran-kyō* of 1920, was translated not from Arabic but from the English of Sale, Rodwell, and Palmer (Ōkawa 2004, 197): the Japanese reader of 1920 was reading Muḥammad's scripture through an intermediate language and a European tradition of translation eight centuries old. The chain

then grew a further link, if a report that circulates in the Japanese literature is to be believed: the first complete Chinese Qur'ān, published in 1927, is said to have been retranslated in its turn from Sakamoto's Japanese, so that a scripture revealed in Arabic would have reached Chinese readers as Arabic filtered through English filtered through Japanese, a triple relay. I repeat the claim as it circulates, not having verified it against the Chinese text. Ōkawa Shūmei's version of 1950 rested chiefly on Rodwell's English, with other European versions at hand (Ōkawa 2004, 207). Only in 1957 and 1958, with the three volumes of Izutsu Toshihiko's *Kōran*, did Japanese receive a complete translation made directly from the Arabic original, prepared with al-Bayḍāwī's classical commentary at the translator's elbow (Ōkawa 2004, 198, 207, 218); and only in 1972 did a Japanese Muslim, Mita Ryōichi of the Japan Muslim Association, produce a complete version made directly from the Arabic from inside the faith itself (Ōkawa 2004, 223). Thirty-seven years separate Japan's first Qur'ān from its first Qur'ān translated out of Arabic. For all that time, Japanese knowledge of Islam's founding text was, in the strict sense, second-hand and third-hand knowledge; and everyone could know it, because every link in the chain had a name, a preface, and a stated method. Izutsu's renderings are debated in Japan to this day, which is exactly the point: there was a person to debate.

Let me draw the baseline, then, in three plain features. Before the machine, the crossing of an anchored text was slow: years for a testament, decades for a tradition, centuries for a civilization. Its mediation was visible: when a version was made from English rather than Arabic, the preface said so, and the next generation could resolve to do better. And its responsibility was personal: Jerome, the six companies, Gützlaff and his sailors, Hepburn's committee, Sakamoto, Ōkawa, Izutsu, Mita, each stood behind a set of choices that could be praised, attacked, and

revised. Slowness, visibility, responsibility: keep these three in view. Everything the machine changes, it changes in one of these three.

3. Three Anchored Words: *Khamr*, *Waqf*, and the Name of God

Histories of whole texts can hide the sharpest difficulties, which live at the level of the single word. I therefore want to slow down and watch three words attempt the crossing: a rule of consumption, an institution of property, and the name of God. All three are anchored in the precise sense of the previous chapter, and all three come from the working vocabulary of my own field, which is what allows me to speak about them with some confidence.

(1) *Khamr*, or the Translator as Silent Jurist

The Qur’ānic verse that seals the prohibition reads: *إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رَجْسٌ مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ*, *innamā al-khamru wa-l-maysiru wa-l-anṣābu wa-l-azlāmu rijsun min ‘amali al-shayṭāni fa-jtanibūhu*, “*Khamr* and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan’s work, so keep away from it” (Q 5:90). The reader will notice that I have left the first word untranslated. This section explains why.

Within the Islamic legal tradition, the extension of the word *khamr* was itself a matter of dispute. The Ḥanafī jurists, in their classical doctrine, tied the term narrowly to the raw juice of the grape once it has fermented and become intoxicating, Abū Ḥanīfa himself requiring further that it cast up its froth (al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, 24:2; al-Kāsānī, *Badā’i‘ al-ṣanā’i‘*, 5:112), treating other intoxicating drinks under separate and partly different rules, and answering the broader reports with the observation that they extend the ruling, not the name (*al-Mabsūṭ*, 24:4); the majority

of jurists read the term broadly, supported by the Prophetic statement *كُلُّ مُسْكِرٍ خَمْرٌ وَكُلُّ خَمْرٍ مُسْكِرٌ حَرَامٌ*, *kullu muskirin khamrun wa-kullu muskirin harāmun*, “every intoxicant is *khamr*, and every intoxicant is forbidden” (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 2003). Whole shelves of jurisprudence hang on that difference, which I have examined elsewhere (Khashan 2022a, 113–114, 128–129). Now watch what happens when the verse goes into English. Sale, Rodwell, and Arberry write “wine”; Yusuf Ali writes “intoxicants”; Pickthall writes “strong drink.” Each of these renderings is defensible, and each quietly enacts a position in a juristic dispute of which the ordinary reader, and possibly the translator, has never heard. “Wine” narrows the verse in the direction of the Ḥanafī definition; “intoxicants” universalizes it in the direction of the majority; “strong drink” hovers between. The translator of *khamr* cannot help issuing a small *fatwā*. There is no neutral word to flee to, because the source word is not neutral: it arrives carrying its whole legal history, and the target language forces a choice among the possibilities that history has carefully kept open.

Japanese adds a further turn. The standard rendering at this verse in the Japanese Qur’ān translations is 酒, *sake*, which serves in Japanese both as the generic word for alcoholic drink and as the name of the national drink itself. The choice is reasonable; no better word exists, and Kosugi, adopting it, says as much in his own note: the original sense of *khamr* is grape wine, and the word came to be read of whatever intoxicates (Kosugi 2009, 232). But consider what rides along with it. 酒 is not a neutral chemical term in Japanese culture; it is the substance of hospitality, of seasonal ritual, and, in the form of 御神酒, *omiki*, of the offering set before the gods in Shinto shrines. The word chosen to carry the Qur’ān’s forbidden substance is the same word used for the drink offered to the *kami*. No error has been committed anywhere, and yet the verse now stands in a semantic terrain its revealer never addressed. This is what I mean when I say that anchored words are not translated so

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much as resettled: they must live, after the crossing, among neighbors they did not choose.

The care that was available here deserves to be stated, because it is precisely what the machine removes. Consider one case, chosen for a reason already given: the version of Izutsu Toshihiko, the philosopher of language and comparative thought whose *Qurʾān*, described above as the first to reach Japanese from the Arabic, is also the one most argued over in Japan, which makes it the natural place to look for a decision rather than a default. He revised the whole work for the Iwanami edition of 1964, and in that edition his handling of *khamr* can be followed occurrence by occurrence. The previous chapter followed the same scholar through another anchored word. He wrote 酒 at Q 5:90 (Izutsu 1964, 1:163), and he did not write it everywhere. Where one of Joseph's fellow prisoners dreams that he is pressing *khamr*, Izutsu writes 葡萄 (*budō*), grapes, and leaves the wine in the future (Izutsu 1964, 2:33); in Joseph's reading of that dream, where the man will pour *khamr* for his master, the word is 酒 again (Izutsu 1964, 2:34). Where the rivers of Paradise run with *khamr* he writes not 酒 but 美酒 (*bishu*), fine wine (Izutsu 1964, 3:126); and where the blessed pass the cup between them, in a verse that does not name *khamr*, he adds a gloss in brackets, (現世の酒飲みとは違って), unlike the drinkers of this world (Izutsu 1964, 3:151). One Arabic word, three renderings and a gloss, each decision taken in view of the verse in front of him. I take this as one instance and not as a survey of Japanese practice; what matters here is not what most translators did, but what a decision looks like when someone makes one. A reader who thinks any of these renderings wrong knows whom to argue with, when the choice was made, and what he said he was doing; and Izutsu said, in his own preface, that the translation of such a book is at bottom an impossible undertaking. That is the whole of the difference this chapter is about, and it survives only as long as there is a preface to read.

(2) Waqf, or Translation with the Force of Law

My second word is an institution. A *waqf* is created when an owner detains an asset from circulation and dedicates its benefit to a stated purpose, in most schools in perpetuity; the word itself comes from the root w-q-f, “to stop, to hold still” (on the institution’s juristic development, see Khashan 2022b). For the English translator, three candidates offer themselves, and each drags a legal ancestry behind it. “Mortmain” imports the medieval European suspicion of the dead hand that holds property beyond the grave. “Charitable trust” imports the whole apparatus of English equity, with its trustees, its beneficiaries, and its doctrine of what counts as charity. “Endowment” is the most neutral and the least informative. In ordinary scholarship the choice among these is a matter of nuance. In British India it became a matter of law, and the episode, which belongs at once to the history of translation and to the imperial and international history of law, deserves to be remembered by students of both.

Colonial courts, obliged to administer Islamic endowments, naturally read them through the nearest categories of English law, which meant the law of trusts and charities. Through that lens, the family *waqf*, in which the founder’s descendants benefit from the endowment before its ultimate charitable purpose matures, looked less like piety than like a device: a perpetual family settlement wearing a thin religious dress. Translation had prepared the doctrinal ground in the narrowest sense of the word: the authority under which the courts struck at family endowments went back to a footnote that Charles Hamilton had attached to his English rendering of the Ḥanafī manual, the *Hidāya*, itself made not from the Arabic but from a Persian version, so that the judges, as Kozłowski puts it, “based their decision on a footnote” (Kozłowski 1985, 142). The line of cases culminated in *Abul Fata Mahomed Ishak v.*

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Russomoy Dhur Chowdhry, decided by the Privy Council in December 1894, which held such endowments invalid. Lord Hobhouse, writing for the Board, declined to enforce what he called “abstract precepts taken from the mouth of the Prophet,” and dismissed the endowment’s provision for the poor as so many “empty words”; the same Hobhouse had earlier published a volume against perpetual trusts under the title *The Dead Hand* (Kozlowski 1985, 147–150). An institution with a millennium of juristic elaboration behind it was, in effect, translated into English legal categories and found ungrammatical. The response is equally instructive: Muslim jurists and publicists in India, Syed Ameer Ali at their head, argued the classical position in books and courtrooms, and in 1913 the legislature intervened, passing the Mussalman Wakf Validating Act to restore what the mistranslation had annulled (Kozlowski 1985, 186–191). It took an Act of the imperial legislature to carry one Arabic word back across the border. I know of no clearer demonstration that translation is not always a literary matter: when the translating language is also the ruling language, a reading error can dispossess families, and the correction of a gloss can require a statute. Japanese scholarship, coming to the same word without judicial power over it, could afford the gentler solution I described in the previous chapter, and simply writes ワクフ (*waqf*).

(3) The Name of God, or Four Centuries of One Choice

My third word is the heaviest a translator can be asked to carry. Japan’s engagement with it, across both scriptures, amounts to a complete experiment: in four and a half centuries, virtually every available strategy has been tried in public.

The first strategy was translation into the local sacred vocabulary: Anjirō’s *Dainichi*. Its failure was total and swift, as we saw, because a

name is the most anchored word of all; it does not describe its bearer, it summons a specific history, and Dainichi summoned the wrong one. The second strategy was transliteration: Xavier's Deusu, which held the theological line at the price of foreignness and mockery, and held it so well that the hidden Christians of the persecution centuries were still murmuring Deusu in their secret prayers two hundred years later. The third strategy was the dignified coinage: the Catholic 天主, *Tenshu*, "Lord of Heaven," a coinage of the China mission, lofty and, in Japanese, unoccupied. The fourth was the Meiji committee's choice, translation into the generic: 神, *kami*, the ordinary Japanese word for the ordinary Japanese gods, of whom tradition speaks in the myriads. The Protestant Bible thereby became readable at the cost of a permanent ambiguity, for every Japanese reader must now learn, against the grain of the word, that the *kami* of Genesis has no colleagues.

When the Qur'ān's turn came, the Japanese translators stood before the same fork, with the added weight that the source word, الله, *Allāh*, is the theological center of the entire text. The Japanese translations settled the question in the direction Xavier had chosen four centuries earlier: transliteration, アッラー, *Arrā* (Ōkawa 2004, 207, 218, 222). The name would remain foreign, visible, unassimilated, exactly as *ribā* and *waqf* remain in the literature of my own field; the katakana script, as I argued in the previous chapter, gives Japanese a dedicated shelf for such guests. What Japanese resolved by script, Arabic resolves by history running the other way: in Arabic there has never been anything to decide, because الله is simply the word for God, used by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians before Islam and in every Arabic Bible since. One language accommodates the name by marking it as a guest; the other by never having treated it as one. And lest anyone think the question antiquarian, it remains live enough that in Malaysia the right of non-Muslims to use the word "Allah" in print has been fought through the courts within living memory.

Three words, then, and three long negotiations: a jurist's word that forces every translator to legislate, an institution that a mistranslation once annulled and a statute restored, and a name for which four centuries explored every strategy from annexation to quarantine. Notice what all three stories have in common. The negotiations were slow, they were conducted in public, and at every step there was someone, Anjirō or Hobhouse or Izutsu, whose choice it was, and who could be answered. Now compress the timescale from centuries to milliseconds and remove the someone. That is the experiment our own era is running, and it is the subject of the rest of this chapter.

4. The Machine Enters: A Short History of the Shift

The machine age of translation has a precise birthday. On January 7, 1954, at IBM's headquarters in New York, a team from Georgetown University and IBM demonstrated the first public machine translation system: an IBM 701 computer that turned more than sixty Russian sentences into English, using a vocabulary of 250 words and six rules of grammar (Hutchins 2004). The keypunch operator who entered the Russian did not know a word of it. Among the sentences the machine produced that day was one that reads, in retrospect, like a prophecy chosen by the event itself: "We transmit thoughts by means of speech" (Hutchins 2004). The press was ecstatic, and the researchers predicted useful machine translation within three to five years. The demonstration had, of course, been carefully staged around sentences the system could handle; but the deeper idea behind it, Warren Weaver's proposal of 1949 that translation might be treated as a kind of code-breaking, had entered the world, and it never left.

The correction came slowly and then officially. Twelve years of rule-based systems produced results so modest that the ALPAC report of

1966, commissioned by the United States funding agencies through the National Academy of Sciences, concluded that machine translation was slower, worse, and more expensive than the human labor it was meant to replace, and funding collapsed in the United States for a generation. It is worth pausing on why the early machines failed, because the reason is the subject of this chapter: their builders had assumed that meaning was in the words, and that words could be exchanged like coins. Everything I described in the previous sections, the anchoring of words in texts and histories, the juristic careers of single terms, the four-century negotiation over one divine name, is precisely what that assumption leaves out.

The field was transformed around 1990 on the strength of a philosophical surrender that deserves more attention than it usually receives. The statistical approach pioneered at IBM (Brown et al. 1990) abandoned the attempt to teach the machine grammar and meaning; instead, the machine would learn correlations from an enormous archive of existing translations made by human beings. For our story, this changes everything, because it means the machine's competence rests on the accumulated labor of past human translators, absorbed anonymously and statistically. Whatever the archive did, the machine does. Google Translate has carried this method to the public, free of charge, since 2006.

Then came the leaps that produced the world we now live in. In late 2016 the major systems switched to neural networks, and fluency improved almost overnight; in 2017 the Transformer architecture appeared (Vaswani et al. 2017), and it became the foundation of everything that followed; and from November 2022 the large language models turned translation into a byproduct of general text generation, conversational, tireless, and free. I want to be honest about the result, because nothing in this chapter depends on denying it: the quality is now extraordinary. Work that occupied Hepburn's committee for

thirteen years can be drafted in an afternoon; the decade Izutsu gave to the Qur'ān can be imitated, superficially but plausibly, in minutes. The first generation of human translators into Japanese, waiting years for a relay text to arrive by ship, could not have imagined such an instrument, and it would be ungrateful and untrue to pretend it is not a wonder.

But now audit the wonder against the baseline of Section 2 above. Slowness is abolished: the negotiation that took four centuries for one divine name is performed, or rather bypassed, in milliseconds. Visibility is inverted: Sakamoto's preface declared that his Qur'ān came through English, and the reader of 1920 could weigh that fact, whereas today's system declares nothing, neither its sources, nor its route, nor its confidence. And responsibility is vacated: the human translator, who, as Venuti taught us, was already being rendered invisible by the conventions of the publishing industry (Venuti 2008), has now been replaced by a mediator that has no self to be visible. The three features of the old regime have not been improved; they have been deleted. What follows from that deletion is the subject of the next section.

5. Who Speaks Now? The Ethics of Mediated Knowledge

The question in my title has a technical answer before it has an ethical one. Who speaks, when the machine translates, is the corpus: the archive of text on which the system was trained. And the corpus is not the world. On the standard count of the content languages of websites, English accounts for roughly half; Arabic, the language of more than four hundred million people and the liturgical language of two billion, for well under one per cent; Japanese, for all the wealth of its documentation, for about five per cent (W3Techs 2026), so that in the machine's world Japan too is a minority. These figures count websites, not the training corpus of any particular system. The machine is fluent

in proportion to what it has read, and it has read the world in wildly unequal shares. Its most confident voice is therefore the voice of the best-documented, which is to say, in practice, a particular register of English. Languages enter the machine unequal and come out sounding equally fluent, which is the most deceptive part: the fluency looks uniform, the understanding is not.

The inequality has a structural consequence that returns us, almost uncannily, to 1920. For language pairs poorly represented in the training data, systems long routed the translation explicitly through a better-resourced language, usually English, as a pivot; the multilingual neural models that replaced this design can translate without an explicit intermediate step (Johnson et al. 2017), but English remains overwhelmingly dominant in their training mixtures, and its categories arguably continue to perform an analogous mediation inside the model (Fan et al. 2021). An Arabic sentence bound for Japanese may thus still travel, openly or invisibly, a version of Sakamoto's route, Arabic into English into Japanese, with one difference that changes the ethics of the situation entirely: Sakamoto's relay was announced in his preface, and the machine's relay is announced nowhere. Recall *khamr*. If the hidden middle language renders it "wine," then the Ḥanafī narrowing I described has been silently enacted inside the pipeline, and the Japanese reader receives ワイン, *wain*, with the juristic debate already settled by an algorithmic accident that no one chose, no one signed, and no one can see. The relay translation, which the twentieth century worked for thirty-seven years to overcome in the name of fidelity, has been resurrected inside the machine with the preface removed.

There is a further mechanism, quieter and larger. The machine learned its renderings from the existing archive of human translations, and the archive has majorities. Whichever rendering of an anchored word was most common in the training data becomes the default of

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every future crossing, in the prison and in Paradise alike; the minority renderings, and the living scholarly debate among them, flatten into a single confident output. This is where the philosophical vocabulary of our time becomes useful. Fricker has taught us to see epistemic injustice, harm done to people specifically as knowers; what is at stake here is the kind she calls hermeneutical injustice, in which a group's own interpretive resources never enter the shared stock, so that its experience is understood in other people's terms (Fricker 2007). Santos warns of epistemicide, the destruction of subordinated knowledges (Santos 2014). What the machine threatens is a soft, unintended version of both: less the killing of a knowledge tradition than its automatic conversion, at every crossing, into the categories of the dominant archive, performed politely, fluently, and at a vast and growing scale (Bender et al. 2021).

Fairness requires the other column of the ledger, and it is substantial. The machine has democratized access to an extent no reform movement ever achieved: a student in Amman or Fukuoka can now read, after a fashion, anything written anywhere. Scholars of small languages can publish through the machine into English and be read, far more readily than before, beyond their borders; and I will not pretend my own work has not accelerated. The cost is not incurred by any individual user; it is structural. To exist globally is increasingly to pass through the machine, and the machine belongs to no speech community, answers to none, and holds nothing at anchor. It is mediation without membership: the first mediator in the history of the crossing that does not live on either shore.

This is why I keep returning, in this chapter as in the last, to the figure of the researcher who works in several languages. In the old regime such a person was a courier, carrying meaning across. In the new regime the couriers are machines, and the multilingual scholar's function changes: he or she becomes an auditor of crossings, one of the few people positioned to catch "wine" standing where the text said *khamr*, to

notice the hidden pivot, to know that a debate has been flattened because they can still hear the debate. The machine has not made such people redundant. It has made them, for the first time, structurally necessary.

6. Conclusion: Toward a Moral Infrastructure

Let me gather the argument. For most of recorded history, the crossing of meaning between languages was slow, its mediation was visible, and its responsibility was personal: Anjirō's error could be found and reversed, Sakamoto's English sources stood in his preface, Izutsu signed his choices and is argued with still. The machine has abolished the slowness, inverted the visibility, and vacated the responsibility, while raising the volume of crossing beyond anything in human experience. The question "who speaks?" has therefore stopped being rhetorical. It has become a question of governance, and I want to end by saying, as concretely as I can, what an answer would require.

It would require, first, that the mediator be named: text that has passed through a machine should say so, and say which machine, exactly as Sakamoto's preface said Sale, Rodwell, and Palmer. Second, that the route be disclosed: where a system has pivoted through a third language, the reader deserves to know it, for the reader of 1920 knew as much, and it would be strange if the twenty-first century offered less honesty than the preface of the Taishō era. Third, that the corpus be treated as a matter of justice: a language's poverty in data must not be allowed to become its sentence in knowledge, and the building of resources for under-documented languages should be understood as knowledge policy, not charity. Fourth, that anchored words be protected: for scriptural, legal, and other anchored vocabulary, the default should be the strategy that Japanese practice has tested longest, from *Deusu* to the katakana shelf, namely transliteration with explanation rather

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than silent replacement, and no machine rendering of such texts should be treated as authoritative without a responsible human reading. Fifth, that multilingualism be treated as an ethical competence rather than a private convenience: the auditors of the crossing must be trained, valued, and placed where the crossings happen. And these standards have addressees: the international organizations now drafting rules for artificial intelligence, the universities and publishers that certify knowledge, and the platform companies through whose systems the crossings actually pass; the governance of translation has become, in the strict sense, a global question.

Taken together, these five standards are not technical adjustments; they are the first elements of what I would call the moral infrastructure of global knowledge: the shared norms that decide whose words are carried, whose meanings survive the crossing, and who answers for what is said in whose name. Roads and cables move goods and signals; this infrastructure would move meaning, and like all infrastructure it will be built either deliberately or badly. A “new era” of knowledge production, to borrow the language of this volume’s title, will be judged less by the fluency of its machines, which is already beyond complaint, than by whether it can keep persons, and the responsibilities of persons, inside the circuit of understanding.

I began this chapter with a small daily scene: a translated sentence standing on my screen, confident and ownerless, and a question repeating itself in my mind. I can now give my answer. The machine will speak more and more of the world’s sentences, and I will go on using it, gratefully, every working day. But between its voice and the reader, in my own work at least, there will always stand a person who has checked the anchored words against their anchors and is prepared to be blamed. The old translators teach us this above all: someone must continue to sign. In my own work, I intend that someone to be me.

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3. Dr. Ammar Khashan



Chapter 3. Beyond the Ocean of Cultural Differences: Arabic, Japanese, and the Mobility of Meaning

Chapter 4. Who Speaks in the Age of Machine Translation? Language, AI, and the Ethics of Knowledge Production

Dr. Ammar Khashan is an Associate Professor at the Ritsumeikan Asia-Japan Research Organization. He graduated from the Faculty of Sharia at Damascus University in 2004 and completed his master's program in Hadith studies there in 2011, with a thesis on the *Musnad* of Abū Ḥanīfa in the recension of al-Ḥārithī. He received his Ph.D. in Area Studies from the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies (ASAFAS), Kyoto University, in 2017.

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