Manyōgana

Sphinx-characters or pure sounds?

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The *Manyôsû* contains among thousands of characters, about 600 *manyô-gana* (m. g.), i. e. Chinese characters used to represent japanese sounds.

For each sound several characters were used, chosen at random by a poet, who wanted to jot down an *uta*. The 4516 *uta's* of the M. are a selection out of thousands of poems written by emperors, priests, soldiers, scholars, fishermen and girls, peasants, etc. A poet writes an *uta* on the spur of the moment, impressed by the landscape or some strong emotion, or on command of an Emperor or Empress, when snow has fallen in the courtyard, or when one had to leave for a long journey as government-official or as guardsman. He hardly chooses his words or phrases, and helped by the many *makura-kotoba* and *zôsi*, the *uta* is produced at a moment's notice. He will take the *manyô-gana* r e a d y a t h a n d, the e a s i e s t to write in the case of a soldier or fisherman and perhaps a more elaborate one in the case of an emperor or scholar. Sometimes an incorrect character was used instead of another (e. g. [1] for [2], [3] for [4], [5] for [6]) because of their resemblance or else a new character was (unconsciously) coined like [7] for [8] or [9] for [10] or [11], characters which one cannot find in any dictionary like the former or with a totally different meaning as in the latter case.

I do not think one poet will have rejected a *manyôgana* marked (1) because a *manyôgana* marked (2) would suit his purpose better 'taking into consideration the finals of the chinese prototypes'. HASIMOTO, who introduced this distinction, is of course aware of the fact, that it is of a c a d e m i c v a l u e for the linguist, and at best, may form an additional proof for some grammatical problem. (See Appendix to Book—IV of my *Manyôsû*, where his lists are reproduced together with possible applications for grammatical categories. The lists are arranged in the same way as my lists of *manyôgana* in Book—I, pp. 27/72.)

Some phoneticians want to introduce s e m a n t i c e l e m e n t s in the *manyô-gana* and do not realize how impossible such a thing is. A well-known dutch phonologue even said that "a phoneme is at any rate a speech-sound with a significant function". Of course no morpheme or phoneme can ever have a semantic or significant function, as they are building-units and nothing more.

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[1] 續	[5] 菟	[9] 獷
[2] 績	[6] 兎	[10] 狩
[3] 冢	[7] 謄	[11] 猟
[4] 冢	[8] 躁	

No stone has an architectonical function, nor a sound a musical function. They are buildings-units for houses and walls and melodies, not a part of them.

Leonard BLOOMFIELD, discussing DE SAUSSURE's *Cours de Linguistic Générale* said: "Psychology and Phonetics do not matter at all and are, in principle, irrelevant to the study of language[1]."

A study of sounds may be interesting and even exciting but it remains a study of building-units, outside the language. Phoneticians and phonologues do not want to admit this hard fact and keep filling 'language periodicals' with their clever articles, that however do not belong there.

Ordinary writers and poets choose their words, wordcombinations and phrases, but they do not choose sounds. This simple truth is so obvious that sound-specialists don't seem to hear it! The minute differentiation of sounds in groups (1) and (2) or even more, may be of great interest for the study of the behaviour of these sounds in different surroundings; they may even incidentally help solving some grammatical problem, but they can never have any influence on the choice of words.

In the thousands of cases of *mana* ([12] for *omovu*, [13] for *yuki*, [14] for *unavara*, [15] for *Avumi no umi*); *atezi* ([16] radiant model for *sugata*, form; [17] considering oneself as not-joyful for *sabusi.mi*, being lonely; [18] the 3rd hour after 8 p.m. = 11 for *yonaka*, the middle of the night; [19] sea-man for *ama*); *kambun* ([20] for *miyu*, [21] for *sirayezu*, [22] for *misureba*); *guzi* ([23] for *ivavi-be*, sacrificial jars, [24] *umasi*, sweet or: *avare*, alas! [25] for *ovovosiku*, in so sorrowful a way, read *ibusesi*, gloomy, sad); or the so-called humorous writings ([26] 3 times 5 = 15th day's moon, read: *moti-duki*; [27] 2 times 2 = 4 read *si*, or the reverse; [28] = 81, read *kuku* because 81 = 9 times 9; [29] i.e. [30] and once more that [30] on top of it = [31] *ide.ba!*) ——— in all these cases to which one can add the hundreds of japanese *kana*, there is *naturally* no question of a possible selection between (1) or (2) or some other phonetic refinement, but simply the choice of an appropriate word, regardless of the writing.

When a poet could not think of an appropriate character for *madovu*, I do not think that he will have pricked up his ears and started carefully selecting a *ma* (1), a *do* (2) with a *vu* (1). Such a course of things is unnatural, improbable

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[1] *Modern Language Journal* 8, 1929, p. 317/19.

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[12]	思	[19]	海人	[26]	三五月
[13]	雪	[20]	所見	[27]	二二
[14]	海原	[21]	不所知	[28]	八一
[15]	海淡乃海	[22]	令見者	[29]	山上復有山者
[16]	光儀	[23]	齋忌戸	[30]	山
[17]	不怜弥	[24]	阿怜	[31]	出者
[18]	三更	[25]	欝悒		

if not impossible. The use of differentiated *manyôgana* was incidental, not intentional or premeditated. Maybe at certain times there was the tendency or mode to use a particular m. g. for the *(-ru)* ending or the *(-te)* forms, but to say these were intentionally selected is a dangerous kind of 'Hineininter-pretieren' which I for one, cannot accept, n'en déplaise all phoneticians on their hind-legs!

For the linguist the only phonetical rule of importance is that final (gene-rally) falls away before initial (e. g. *waga + imo = wagimo, miru + aku = miraku, toko + iva = tokiva, koto + itaki = kotitaki,* etc.) and that final *(i)* may form an *(e)* with a following *(a),* as in the formation of the perfective. The *nigori*-formations are familiar to any beginner, and we know that not one genuine japanese word begins with a voiced sound and that the Japanese abhors an hiatus (e. g. *varusame* for *varu ame* and perhaps also the above quoted cases like *wagimo* for *waga imo* etc.)

Historical Japanese was a language of open syllables originally written with chinese characters whose sound resembled (à peu près) the japanese sounds. In choosing these characters *(manyôgana),* the chinese finals were ignored, without one exception. They may have had some influence on the preceding sound, but this does not interest us. When these finals were never-theless taken into consideration, they coined two open syllables, as *ra + mu* out of *lan; sa + ku* out of *tsak; na + mu* out of *nan,* but ˙*ran,* ˙*sak,* ˙*nan* were out of the question[2].

From certain *manyôgana* the shorthand form *(hiragana)* or an abbreviation *(katakana)* was used (± 900) to represent the japanese vowels and open syllables, up to this day; they are the so-called syllabaries of 47 syllables. This provided us with the japanese value of the *manyôgana.* As a rare coïncidence, KARLGREN reconstructed the pronunciation of ancient Chinese of the 6th, beginning of th 7th century, in his *Analytic dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese,* 1923. This gave me the idea of comparing the *manyô-gana*-lists (7th century) with the chinese pronunciation of Karlgren under A (Ancient Chinese), and I asked him what he found of it. In his letter dated 23/II/27; he writes: "I think your plan, as far as I can judge from your brief description, is perfectly sound, and the only possible one for reliable results."

The result of this comparison, in continual contact with K. was published in the T.A.S.J. sec. series Vol. VI, Dec. 1929 and reproduced as Introduction to my translation of Book-I of the *Manyôsû,* pp. 27—72, also in 1929.

As Karlgren's reconstruction of ancient Chinese is universally accepted as correct, my reconstruction of ancient Japanese, with a first rough outline of Japanese Phonetics of the Nara-period, could be taken as base for all further investigations in this field. At any rate the transcription could be adapted as the only possible scientific and historical one for the Nara-period.

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[2] See my article on: Was Japanese a language of open syllables in the seventh century? "Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan", sec. series Vol. XI, 1934

K.'s only objection was the *(v)* as initial, but for the sake of uniformness, he could accept it, just as Florenz later on. The ideal voiceless (φ) initial and the voiced *(F)* as 'Inlaut' were reluctantly rejected. The *(h)* did not yet exist in the Nara-time and the *(p)* as pre-historic possibility, was already aspirated.

The so-called *Hepburn-system*, followed in modern transcription, is of course, out of the question, because of its mixing up of the *ha*[32]-*gyô* and *wa*[33]-*gyô* and the *ta*[34]- and *sa*[35]-*gyô*, the latter only in the nigoried forms. It therefore is inadequate for any scientific study. Still some colleagues write their works in this Hepburn spelling, well aware of the fact that it is an impossible one for etymological or phonetic studies. From time to time they add the kana-transcription between brackets, e.g. *tamau (tama-fu)*, *tamawayu (tama-fa-yu)*, with which they condemn their own spelling. Their only argument in favour of Hepburn is that it is used in most dictionaries and in *'Romaji'-text*. Others use many diacritical signs above and beneath the letters, in the hope that readers will understand their meaning.

Not one of these transcriptions is scientifically founded on historical facts and therefore I should like to propose my reconstruction of the Nara-language as base. After that basic transcription one could put an individual transcription of the period in study, finally followed by the Hepburn spelling. (e. g. *mawosu/mausu/môsu; samoravu/saburau, samurau/sôrô*). In this three-fold way, we could coordinate all the different spellings with the basic and the Hepburn spellings as fixed transcr., and the changeable spelling between these two. This would have the advantage of roughly showing the sound-development in a glance, and we need not look up the *kana*-spelling in Brinkley or Takenobu to be able to find a word in a native dictionary. It would be the end of the Spelling-war, for between the basic and Hepburn spellings, each scholar could maintain his own (much cherished) transcription.

In 1934, five years after the publication of my first attempt at reconstruction of ancient Japanese with a first outline of japanese phonetics of those days, a certain YOSHITAKE of the London Language School, with whom I corresponded all that time (1929—1934) on this matter and other *manyô*-problems, published a booklet on Japanese Phonetics with my method, my material and my result, but he forgot to mention my name! A case of the purest plagiatry. Mirabile dictu this Yoshitake is quoted by certain modern japanologues, but my pioneer-study is ignored. Acknowledgement of priority is perhaps a kind of vanity, but even scholars are human beings in their free time, and thieves of another man's thoughts ought to be condemned by all decent men.

Like all imitators Yoshitake made in thinking-error when he started to think all by himself, mixing up *manyôgana* and the *ON*-readings, but this was of no consequence on the results.

The above stated comparison is t h e o n l y u s e the *manyôgana* can have for the linguist.

Perhaps the sub-title should be: 'The gentle art of making enemies' (Whistler).

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[32] ハ 　　　[33] ワ 　　　[34] タ 　　　[35] サ