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# The Acquisition of Linguistic and Cultural Knowledge through the Translation of Foreign Language Texts and their Dissemination within the Public Sphere

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**Abstract**

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan's only university that specializes in area studies, has developed a new language education program for the purpose of encouraging the understanding of world issues through the study of foreign languages**.** Since 2005, we have been receiving a special funding in order to gather important articles from the Internet to use as teaching materials for the students majoring in Arabic, Turkish and Persian Studies. The students have also been posting Japanese translations of the articles on the University's home page. For students, the responsibility of translating and presenting these articles to the public, as opposed to traditional methods, leads to not only an improvement in their translating skills, but also a bond between Japan and the respective area of study and a clear awareness of Japanese society's culture and its relation to world. This, in turn, contributes to the education of people with a high level of language skills and the ability to cooperate with people from many different cultural backgrounds in order to work towards solutions for world problems. We are attempting to use the translation of authentic cultural texts from other regions to further these objectives, an example being the translation of a Malay comic by advanced students to be incorporated into the Malay Studies curriculum and perhaps published online for public dissemination.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Theoretical premises

A new initiative in language education at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) has been realized with a focus on how to activate students' learning and how to give them a learning incentive, while making use of social and cultural information. We have consulted for our preliminary research some theoretical linguistic issues on speech and discourse with special regard to the importance of the social and cultural context. We agree with M. Silverstein (1976), one of the many linguists involved with the development of our theoretical consideration of language education, who argues that the social and cultural context should be included in the scope of language research and language education. We have also been influenced by the linguistic thoughts of Halliday (1976), who incorporates social and cultural contexts into pragmatic and semantic parameters

of utterance. Our practice in the development of language education methods reflects these premises in the choice of didactic materials as well as in the teaching and learning process.

## 1.2   Teaching methods: Their ideological drift

The incorporation of social and cultural information from the area of study into language education is not a recent innovation. Rather, social and cultural information has traditionally been naturally incorporated into Western language education teaching materials. As an explicit example, the history of French language education illustrates this point. Around half a century ago, the Mauger series of French language textbooks[1], entitled "Cours de langue et de civilization françaises," which incorporated French geography, climate, customs, social structure and cultural background simply but comprehensively, played an important role in the world of French education and French teaching materials aimed at foreigners. In the former French colonies, language education had and has the centrifugal and ideological orientation directed towards France at its centre. Teachers were teaching the language while wearing a coat lined with this hidden directive towards assimilation and cultural hierarchy. The very title of the textbook, including, as it does, *civilisation* (with its French connotation), illustrates the importance of the cultural aspect. It must be noted that this traditional educational method has not been entirely dismissed and there are some researchers who call for its reevaluation[2].

Even when the audio-visual method, which emphasizes students' active participation, became mainstream with the development of educational media in the 1960s, the material chosen and edited still maintained a tendency towards assimilation with the *suzerain* culture. The "Sans Frontieres" series[3] is a typical example; while focusing on functions for interactive communication, it still maintains the traditional emphasis on French civilization in its hegemonic sense. The type of integrative language education incorporating social and cultural information sought after in this research does not have the traditionally vertical and centralized focus as in the typical example above, but rather a horizontal and interactive focus. The information regarding the language and the region studied by students not only encourages the acquisition of new knowledge, but the review of their notions of society and culture. By deciphering real-time information about today's rapidly changing modern society gathered from Internet and magazines, and comparing it with Japan's current situation, students are able to learn about the polyvalent diversity of the world in which we live. This program would be able to bring us closer to our goal of nurturing a talented young generation prepared for the challenges of our globalized world.

This article describes two types of translation projects carried out by advanced students. In Section 2, we presented the details of the project entitled "News from the Middle East" followed by our discussions of the project in Section 3.  In Section 4, in taking a Southeast Asian language as an example, we describe how the translation of a Malay comic has proved to be a valuable tool in expanding cultural knowledge and the understanding of linguistic registers.

## 2   "News from the Middle East" Project

### 2.1   Installation of the project

Twenty-seven major languages and over 30 other languages are taught at TUFS. Students select the major language of their choice before sitting the entrance examination and go on to intensively study this language for 2 years upon entering TUFS. Major languages classes are taught 5 times a week for 90 minutes, but the course also includes area studies as part of the compulsory curriculum. Students in the third year continue their study in one of three disciplinary courses: 1) Language and Information Studies, 2) Culture and Literary Studies, or 3) Area and International Studies. They must submit a thesis based on research in their field of interest in order to receive their degree. There are 3 languages that relate to the Middle Eastern area – namely, Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

The "News from the Middle East" Project, which involves students and teachers in these three language programs, began in 2005 as a part of the "Middle East Islam and Islamic Studies Project," designed and conducted by the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa and funded by the Ministry of Education. After the cessation funding in 2010, the project has been managed by the World Language and Society Education Centre at TUFS.

## 2.2.  *From classroom to Internet*

From 2002, newspaper articles from the Middle East have begun to be published online, providing quicker access to information from newspapers and magazines that would otherwise take 3 weeks to be shipped to Japan. It became possible to download newspaper articles from the Internet, and allowed teachers at that time to place more focus on the background and explanation of current affairs. Teachers and students created a database of the translated articles. After this initial step, the project began to receive special funding from the Ministry of Education and developed into the PRMEIS Project in 2005 with the aim of transmitting translated articles as our teaching results to the society.

## 2.3   *Collaboration of three language departments in one project*

In order to introduce the current situation of the Middle East to the Japanese society in Japanese, students and teachers of the three language departments at TUFS that support the "News from the Middle East" Project – the Arabic (26 students), Persian (25 students) and Turkish (34 students)[4] major departments – choose appropriate articles on the Internet, translate them into Japanese and then publish them online on the university's homepage with permission from 16 newspaper companies overseas (see Table 1). Members of the project include students, teachers and professionals in charge of editing and uploading. The student team consists of both graduate students and undergraduate students from the Arabic, Persian and Turkish major departments, but proofreading is left to graduate students and specialists in current affairs. There are currently over 100 student members. In total, over 350 members have contributed to this project, which is a large number considering the size of the Middle Eastern departments.

**Table 1. Online newspapers serving as source[5]**

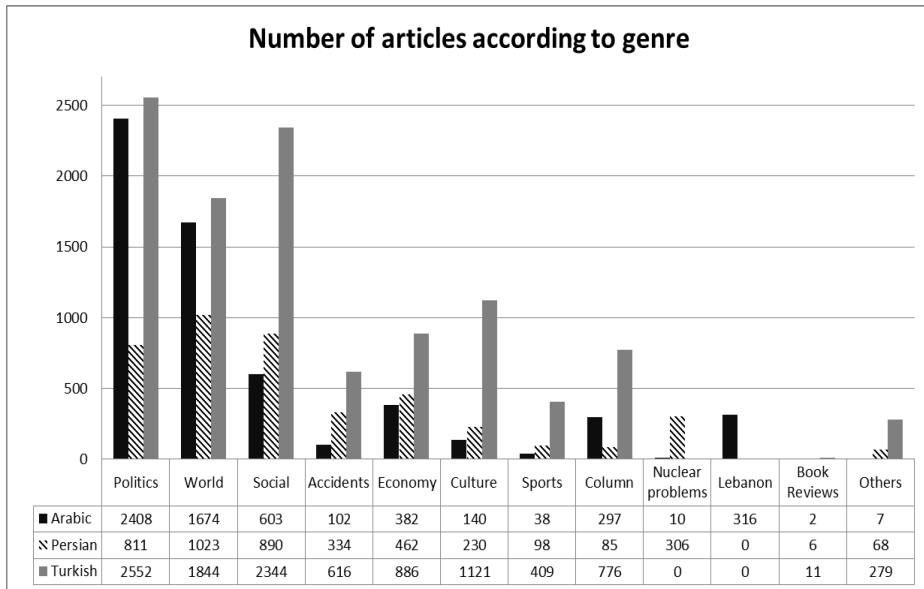| Language | Newspaper | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Arabic | Al-Ahram | A popular newspaper in Egypt, first published in 1876. It covers news from Arab, the Middle Eastern and Africa, based on the official opinion of the Egyptian government. |
| | Al-Nahar | One of the most famous newspapers in Lebanon. Takes a Lebanese nationalist stance. |
| | Al-Quds al-Arabi | An independent newspaper with a base in London. Covers general state of affairs, for example the anti-establishmental movement, in the Middle East from an independent perspective. |
| | Al-Hayat | Pan-Arab newspaper with a base in London. Maintains strong support from intellectuals in Arab. |
| | Al-Sabah al-Jadid | Liberalist independent newspaper established recently in Iraq. Many articles written from Kurdish perspective. |
| Persian | Jam-e Jam | A conservative tabloid published by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) under the direct control of the Supreme Leader of Iran. First published in opposition to the once reformative Hamshahri. |
| | Iran | A political paper published daily by the Iranian Republic News Agency (IRNA). Has large circulation in Iran, second only to the Hamshahri. |
| | Mardomsalari | Bulletin published by the Mardomsalari (Democratic) Party. Currently run by a congress member of a minor party. |
| | Hamshahri | It has the reputation as a newspaper aimed at general public. Popular in Tehran. |
| Turkish | Cumhuriyet | A newspaper with a long history, starting together with the republic. Left-winged paper. Contains many articles aimed towards intellectuals. |
| | Hurriyet | Newspaper with the largest circulation in Turkey. Politically neutral. |
| | Milliyet | Turkish paper. Has a history as being left-winged, but presently it takes a politically neutral stance. |
| | Radikal | Turkish newspaper with comparatively liberal (left-winged) tendencies. Short history but highly renowned for the attractive page layout. |
| | Yeni Safak | A newspaper said to be the bulletin for the current party in power, the Justice and Development Party. Known for it's lenience towards Islam. |
| | Zaman | Conservative newspaper with Islamic influence. |

## 2.4  Present activities of the project

A total of 21,130 articles – 5,979 Arabic, 5,128 Persian and 10,838 Turkish articles – have been translated and published under this project as of October 2012. Table 2 shows the total number of articles, classified according to content. There are relatively more articles on politics in Arabic and more articles on culture in Turkish.

**Table 2. Number of articles according to content**

|  | Arabic | Persian | Turkish | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Politics | 2408 | 811 | 2552 | 5771 |
| World | 1674 | 1023 | 1844 | 4541 |
| Society | 603 | 890 | 2344 | 3837 |
| Accidents | 102 | 334 | 616 | 1052 |
| Business | 382 | 462 | 886 | 1730 |
| Culture | 140 | 230 | 1121 | 1491 |
| Sports | 38 | 98 | 409 | 545 |
| Column | 297 | 85 | 776 | 1158 |
| Nuclear problems | 10 | 306 | 0 | 316 |
| Lebanon | 316 | 0 | 0 | 316 |
| Book Reviews | 2 | 6 | 11 | 19 |
| Others | 7 | 68 | 279 | 354 |
| Total | 5979 | 4313 | 10838 | 21130 |

## 2.5 Classification of articles by genres

Of the articles translated between 2005 and 27th September 2012, there was a higher percentage of articles related to politics, with a smaller percentage of articles related to culture and economics. This tendency could be seen for all languages (see Fig. 1).



**Number of articles according to genre**

|  | Politics | World | Social | Accidents | Economy | Culture | Sports | Column | Nuclear problems | Lebanon | Book Reviews | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arabic | 2408 | 1674 | 603 | 102 | 382 | 140 | 38 | 297 | 10 | 316 | 2 | 7 |
| Persian | 811 | 1023 | 890 | 334 | 462 | 230 | 98 | 85 | 306 | 0 | 6 | 68 |
| Turkish | 2552 | 1844 | 2344 | 616 | 886 | 1121 | 409 | 776 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 279 |

**Fig. 1. Number of articles according to genre**

However, when the results are investigated in detail, the following tendencies become apparent:
1) Arabic: 40% of the articles relate to politics – a large percentage.
2) Persian: Similar ratio of articles related to politics, world and society. Few articles related to culture.

3) Turkish: Similar ratio of articles related to politics, world and society. Larger ratio of articles related to society and culture compared to Arabic or Persian.

From this, it is apparent that there is a difference in opinion towards what kind of articles should be translated in order to maintain a balance between "contributions to society" and "education." This will most likely become an important point to consider when planning the media translation program for other areas of Asia.

## 2.6    Two ways of translating the articles

### 2.6.1    Method 1: Translation in the classroom

One method that involves carefully translating the articles in class, as illustrated in Figure 2:
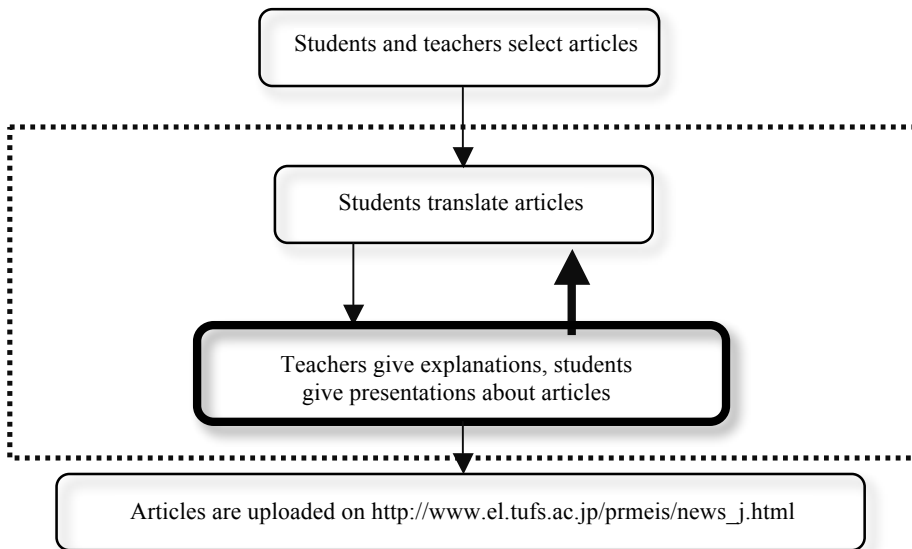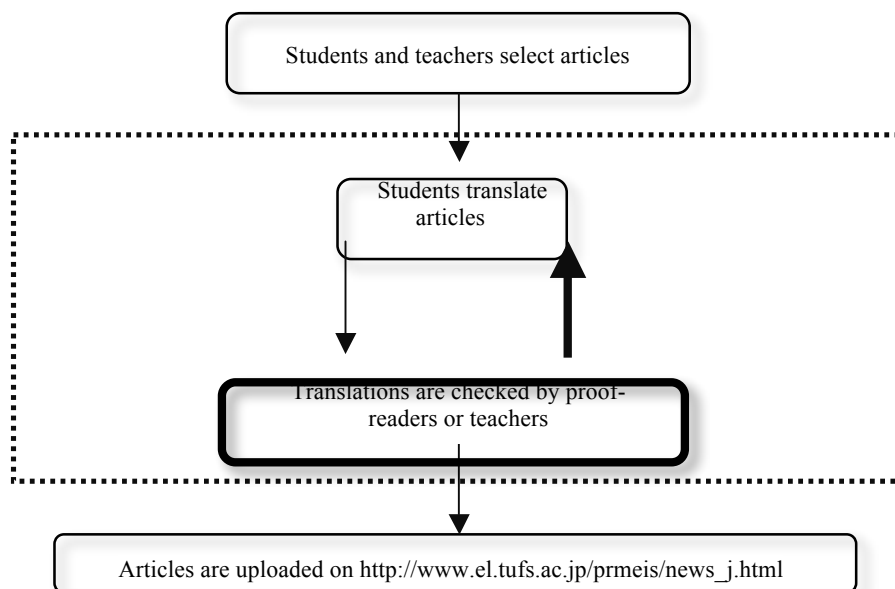


**Fig. 2. Translation in the classroom**

### 2.6.2    Method 2: Translation after class as extracurricular activity

That students voluntarily participate in translation work as extracurricular activities reflects the students' interest. As most correspondence is conducted via e-mail, there is much freedom in terms of the place and time of the translation work. Excel files, which are used to keep track of the process (in addition to *Twitter*), can be accessed by students so that they can manage their own schedule. The work flow of this method is illustrated in Figure 3.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      Students and teachers select articles      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
        ┌─────────────────────┐
        │  Students translate   │
        │       articles        │
        └─────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
    ┌───────────────────────────────────┐
    │ Translations are checked by proof-  │
    │         readers or teachers         │
    └───────────────────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Articles are uploaded on http://www.el.tufs.ac.jp/prmeis/news_j.html │
└───────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

**Fig. 3. Translation work after classroom as an extracurricular activity**

## 3   Results and discussions of the project

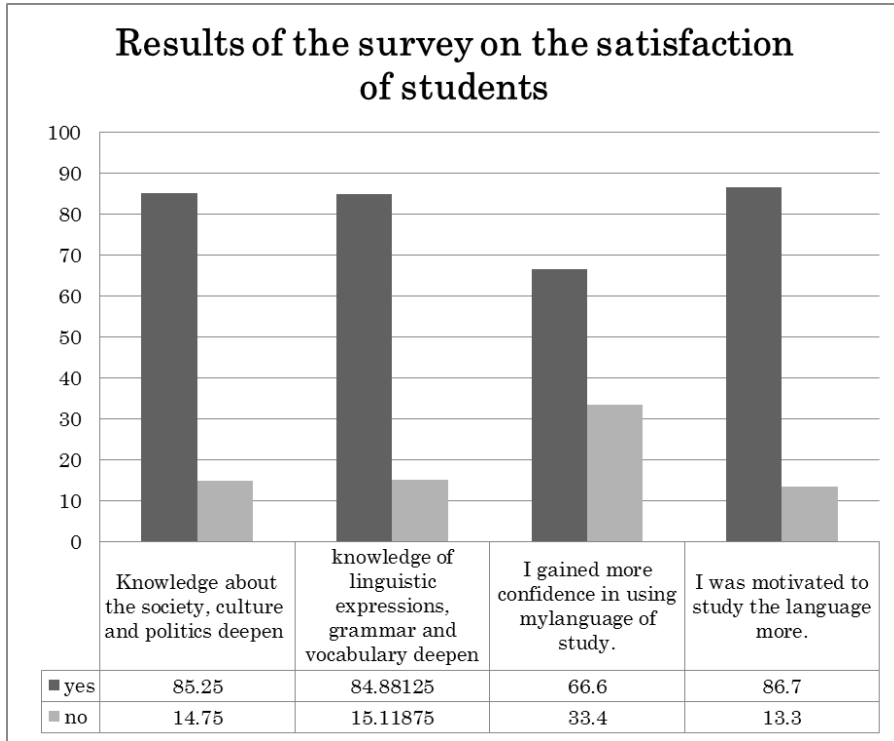### 3.1   *Reaction and awareness of the students involved*

The positive responses from the students hinted at the possibilities of this project. One of the students taking part in the project says as follows:

> I always had trouble thinking of an appropriate word when translating Arabic into Japanese as there isn't always a one-to-one correspondence. I realized that language is arbitrary, and also became able to come up with more flexible translations.

It seems that the project can overcome the problem of word-to-word bilingual dictionaries. Another student reports:

> When I was translating an article about the demonstration against the government in Yemen, there were often no translations of the names in Japanese or English media, so it was very difficult. But I also felt it was a good chance to practice creating names by myself.

It would appear that students can become pioneers and creators in Japanese translation. Figure 4 shows the students' mostly positive perceptions of the benefits from the project in relation to: 1) the knowledge gained in terms of the target language countries' society and culture; 2) the knowledge gained in terms of target languages' grammar and vocabulary; 3) their confidence in using the target languages; and 4) their motivation to study the language.

## Results of the survey on the satisfaction of students

| | Knowledge about the society, culture and politics deepen | knowledge of linguistic expressions, grammar and vocabulary deepen | I gained more confidence in using mylanguage of study. | I was motivated to study the language more. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ yes | 85.25 | 84.88125 | 66.6 | 86.7 |
| ■ no | 14.75 | 15.11875 | 33.4 | 13.3 |

**Fig. 4. Results of the survey on the satisfaction of students**

Students also commented on other benefits and other ways in which the project was effective, as summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3. Comments made by students on the project's benefits**

| I was able to learn more about the current situation in the Middle East |
| --- |
| This site is indispensable to learn about the current situation in the Middle East. It is one of the most important sites for learn about the true situation in Turkey without relying on information from America. |
| This site provided the opportunity to learn about Turkey in real-time. I think it is a valuable gateway, providing up-to-date information to the Japanese community. |
| I think it is a convenient site for those who want to learn more about the situation in the Middle East. You are able to find out exactly what is happening. |
| I think this site is a great resource for students of Turkish. Even beginners can use this site to find out about Turkey and other parts of the Middle East. I hope this site becomes recognized more widely. |
| **I was able to deepen my understanding of the Middle East** |
| Even one article is connected to so many other things (world politics, trade, history etc.) and I feel like I could broaden my knowledge and interest in many other areas. |
| I was able to learn about the current situation of Turkish politics, economy, society, culture and a number of other things I studied in university lectures. |
| I think this site is a wonderful contribution that makes use of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies' good points, leading to a deepening of Japan's understanding towards the Middle East. |
| I thought that perhaps you should create a page that explains more about the history of each newspaper, so that readers can learn more about the features of each newspaper and the general trend in Turkish media to deepen their understanding of current affairs in Turkey. |
| **I was able to improve my translating and language skills** |
| I was able to learn words that relate to current affairs in Turkey by using this site. |
| I came into contact with a lot of new expressions by studying translation through this site. |
| I think I was definitely able to improve my Turkish ability with this site. |
| Students are able to study Turkish through proofreading (or having their translations proofread). |
| It's a great site for learning about Turkish society while studying new expressions and vocabulary. |
| It was good study because I was able to come into contact with lots of new Turkish expression. |
| I felt like I wanted to improve my Turkish ability more after receiving feedback on my translation. |
| **Presenting the information to the public** |
| I often see on people's blogs and things that people use this site to gain information about the Middle East, and so I think that we can continue to expect great things from this project. |
| There are not many other sites that contain such detailed information about the Middle East and Turkey, so I think it's very useful. |

## 3.2   Educational achievements

### 3.2.1   Improvements in translation and Japanese language skills

Proofreading is done by specialists or graduate students with a long history abroad, ensuring the quality and credibility of the uploaded translations. Students are able to experience the responsibility of presenting the translated articles to the public through their involvement in this project, and remarkable improvements are seen in their translation skills. However, there is a need to develop a way of measuring this improvement in order to support these observations.

### 3.2.2 Improvements in the quality of area studies: Understanding the Middle East of today

As professors give detailed explanations of the background knowledge needed for translation activities in class, students are able to develop the ability to think flexibly and a higher level of sensitivity, while maintaining a high level of awareness and a broad outlook towards their major areas.

### 3.2.3 The acquisition and deepening of social and cultural knowledge

Through the News from the Middle East Project, students are able to better understand the cultural situation, which is based on the local people's present values, by translating local newspaper articles into Japanese and pursuing their specialized research. The stronger ability to foster a cultural understanding through language education is a prominent feature and merit of the project.

The following example provides an explanation how students are taught about the traditional culture of the target language, and how this motivates them to consider the connection to Japan.

● **Case 1: "Should Ayran be served with sweets?" (20.08.2012, Zaman)**

This article describes the tradition of serving *Ayran*, a type of yoghurt drink, with sweets, and how the drink is nutritional, stimulates the digestion of carbohydrates and fat, and prevents cavities. It also reveals that this custom is deeply related to the work style of the Anatolian people, while also warning against the dangers of modern food culture, for example, drinks that contain a lot of artificial sweetener.



**Fig. 5. "Should Ayran be served with sweets?" (20.08.2012, Zaman; left panel) and its Japanese translation produced by a student (right panel)**

● **Case 2: "From Turkish 'Food and Daily Life'" (09.02.2012, Hurriyet)**

The article titled "From Turkish 'Food and Daily Life'" published in the Hurriyet on the 9th of February 2012 summarizes the results from the "Survey on Eating and Exercising Habits in Turkey" that was conducted among 1,563 people over the age of 15 across 12 states by the Turkish Society for Obesity, concluding that Turkish eating habits have retained their traditions.

It can be understood from these articles that traditional culture, which was thought to be disappearing, is actually being carried on with a different meaning and form. We can do a comparative cultural study by looking at the connection with the traditional food culture of Japan, and research the differences and similarities between the Middle East and Japan. We are also able to gain different points of view from the perspective of global and local culture. The articles insisting on the importance of the tradition of food culture in Turkey share much in common with proposals in

recent Japanese media, and by acquiring a thorough knowledge of the tradition in other countries, we are able to objectively observe our own traditional cultural beliefs.

### 3.2.4 Learning language and culture in the educational circle

The translation work done by third and fourth year students is given to and read by younger students in the first and second year basic area studies classes. Not only does this provide the students with an opportunity to learn about their area of specialization, it also motivates the students, giving them a clear language learning goal. The first year students read the translations written by their seniors, the second year students read a translation and compare it with the original to study the language, and the third and fourth year students participate in the translation work itself. This process leads to an overall cycle of an integrated curriculum.

These activities attempt to encourage learning based on students' innate, spontaneous motivation. The students select articles themselves based on the advice given by instructors, which fosters interest and often also the will to continue further research. Many students base their reports or theses on the knowledge that they learn in this manner.

### 3.3 Highly positive evaluation by Japanese society

Currently, around 10 articles are translated from one of the three languages into Japanese and published on the Internet every day. The articles boast a large access count, and there are currently 1,720 regular readers (registered to receive the online magazine) and 920 followers on Twitter (as at September 2011). A total of 21,130 articles (as of October 2012) have been published since the project began, and they are accessed by students of TUFS other universities with majors in Middle Eastern Studies, as well as by researchers, the Japanese media, think tanks, government agencies, and also individuals interested in the Middle East.

There are many cases where the information has been used in research papers on areas where it is hard to obtain information in Japanese, and it can be safely said that this is a project that demonstrates TUFS' contribution to society, with education serving as a gateway connecting Japan and the world. Newspaper companies in the Middle East have also shown interest in to these activities performed by students in Japan studying the respective languages, and an article about this project was even published. In addition, our Internet site has also become known amongst Japanese companies, providing an excellent advantage for students who contributed to the project in their search for a job.

### 3.4 The dilemmas and problems of the "News from the Middle East" Project

### 3.4.1 Change in the project's objective

The goal of the project from 2005 to 2009 focused on the university's contribution to society, rather than improving the quality of the education provided to students. The project had aimed at contributing to society by making use of TUFS' broad knowledge of the language and society to translate newspapers and inform the public about the current situation in the Middle East.

Since 2010, the project has been managed by the World Language and Society Education Centre, and greater emphasis has been placed on improving the quality of language education and area studies, which is the main purpose behind the Centre's establishment. Currently, the Centre is trying to strengthen both the project's role as a contribution to society and a means of education..

### 3.4.2 Between social contribution and education

In educational approaches that use textbooks in the classroom, it is difficult to convey real information that is deeply rooted in the local lifestyle and culture. This project acts as a means of

solving this educational dilemma. However, it is not entirely free from the difficulty of balancing the objective informing the public and the educational objectives. Supposing that the project helps to provide information about the Middle East for the Japanese people, the problem of how to fill the gap between the needs of society and article content that is expected to achieve the desired educational outcomes still remains.

There are problems related to issues of the choice of genre, level and trend of article, and to the extent to which students can follow the social, cultural and historical background while battling with the time limits imposed when dealing with the new information. There is also the need to convey the voices of local people in accordance with the needs of society, while at the same time educate professionals with knowledge about the language, culture, history and politics of their area of specialization. The project now has one main goal, namely, to achieve a balance between these two objectives. We have to solve the dilemmas the project faces before these objectives can be achieved.

Although only partially, this project is incorporated into the class framework, but there is a need for the assessment to be something that can be explained concisely. There is a need to develop and establish reference criteria in order to measure students' improvements in reading and translating ability.

## 4   The expansion and development of the Project in Asia Program

Information from Asia rarely reaches Japan. Even when information does reach Japan, the process of selecting information that illustrates its position in the social context and cultural background is difficult with so few specialists on Asia. We rarely hear anything that tells us about the kinds of values that Asian peoples hold and the kinds of lives they lead. The World Language and Society Education Centre intends to introduce an expanded project that will improve the effectiveness of education by presenting Japanese translations of parts of newspaper articles on the Internet, or magazines, newspapers and other media sources that contain information about the societies and cultures of Asia to the general public. A plan has been formulated to apply use the knowhow from the "News from the Middle East" Project to this project.

### 4.1   Extension to Southeast Asia: Translation exercise in a Malay linguistics course

Given the success of the intensive translation-based language and culture learning in the Middle Eastern language programs, we are planning to introduce a similar method in the Southeast Asian language programs in the near future.[6] In this section, we present the translation practice adopted in the Research in Colloquial Malay course taught by one of the authors of this article, as an example of existing courses on Southeast Asian languages that involve translation practice. These courses can be thought of as candidates to be turned into intensive translation-based language courses on par with those already offered in the Middle Eastern language programs.

Research in Colloquial Malay is a linguistics course focusing on Malay and is offered for third and fourth year students. The annual enrolment is about five, which is a reasonable number given that the Malay Language Program has an intake of only ten students per year and that the course is an elective course. The course consists of two main components, namely, reading of a comic novel written in Malay and a small research project. The reading and research components are connected to each other in such a way that the students will source topics for their projects while reading and conduct projects in order to better understand what they are reading. Technically, the course is not a language, but a linguistics course. However, the reading component requiring an intermediate level of proficiency in Malay makes it a semi-language course. We describe the details of the two components below.

## 4.2 Reading

The reading material used in the course is a comic novel (graphic novel), "Aku Budak Minang" ("I'm a Minangkabau Boy"), by Ujang (1988). An excerpt of the book is shown in the upper panel of Figure 6.



**Fig. 6. An excerpt from "Aku Budak Minang" (upper panel) and its Japanese translation produced by a student (lower panel)**

The book was selected both for linguistic and cultural considerations. In terms of language, the book contains a much larger amount of narrative compared to other comic books and, hence, more for the students to learn. The narrative part helps students very much, because it contains many sentences in Formal Malay, in addition to those in Colloquial Malay. This contrasts with the dialogue part, which is mostly in Colloquial Malay. Malay is a language with a considerable gap between the formal and colloquial registers. Nomoto and Shoho (2007) thus characterize the varieties associated with the two registers as the high and low varieties of the classic diglossia (Ferguson, 1959). Malay (and Indonesian) courses in Japan (or perhaps in most countries where the language is taught) normally teach the formal variety first as the primary target of acquisition, with the colloquial variety either neglected or taught secondarily as an additional layer on top of the formal variety. Hence, most students (except those who have studied in Malaysia), despite having intermediate-level proficiency in Formal Malay, will have difficulties understanding Colloquial Malay.

Another linguistic reason for choosing "Aku Budak Minang" is its authentic use of Colloquial Malay, that is, the expressions used reflect how the language is actually used among native speakers in everyday situations. The type of language used in the book differs from that which students often hear from their native speaker teachers in class.[7] The teachers tend to speak a mixture of Formal and Colloquial Malay in class, and their Colloquial Malay speech is in a

teacher-student style and hardly reaches the basilectal end of the lectal continuum. The book thus exposes students to some otherwise untaught/unheard styles present in the language.

The book is rich with cultural elements too, as it is written in an autobiographical form, depicting various incidents that took place in his life, from his birth until he became a popular comic artist. The author was born in a Minangkabau family in a *kampung* or village in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The story begins with a big drawing of a *rumah gadang*, the traditional Minangkabau house famous for its buffalo horn-like roof. As the story progresses, the authors grows, and he moves from *kampung* to town to the capital, Kuala Lumpur. The author's lifestyle also changes accordingly, and so does the style of his language. Students can thus learn different styles of Colloquial Malay associated with different settings. For example, the author uses different first person singular pronouns depending on the addressee and the situation in which he finds himself: *aku* (casual, close), *saya* (formal, distant), *gua* (naughty; borrowed from Hokkien), *I* (metropolitan; borrowed from English).

Out of the fifteen instructional weeks in a semester, six weeks are spent on the reading component. Every week, each student is assigned two (different) rows, which usually contain four panels.  The students have to translate their assigned rows into Japanese before their class, on which they are graded. In class, they present their translations and correct any mistakes pointed out by the lecturer. At the end of the semester, the students revisit all translations that they have created during the semester and edit them to make the Japanese version of the comic. The editing involves correcting remaining mistakes, translational and typographic standardization among the students, trimming words to fit the speech balloons in the original book, and pasting the Japanese translation into the book. An example of the edited comic is given in the lower panel of Figure 6.

The product of the course is distributed to students taking the same course in the following years. This enables the class to work on new pages every year, while at the same time ensuring all students know the story that precedes the pages that they are translating. By accumulating translations every year, the class should eventually be able to translate the whole book into Japanese. The lecturer intends to publish the final product as a joint work by the Malay Program students. Such a plan motivates the students and, if realized, will provide the Japanese society with a new medium through which they can learn more about the Malays and Malaysia as well as their cultures.

### 4.3   Project

In the project component, the students engage in a small research project on Colloquial Malay. The project component was introduced, mainly because the course is offered as a linguistics, rather than a language course. The students come up with topics to investigate while reading the comic in the first six weeks. The research topics chosen by the students in the last two years include:
- the usage of *punya* [a clause-final modal particle; lit. 'possess'];
- the usage of *je* [a discourse particle; lit. 'only'];
- the usage of *sikit* [a predicate modifier similar to *just*; lit. 'a little/few'];
- the usage of *pula* [a discourse particle; lit. 'too, on the other hand'];
- differences between written and spoken language;
- words of English origin.

As seen in this list, many students have an interest in discourse-related lexical items. This is understandable, given that these items not only appear very frequently in the book, but also express discourse-related meanings, which are generally elusive.

The following three research methodologies are introduced to the students: 1) literature survey (studying the existing studies); 2) text analysis (working with the text); and 3) elicitation (interviewing a native speaker). These methodologies are described further below.

1) *Literature survey*. If a student is working on a particular lexical item whose usage is unique to Colloquial Malay, the existing literature often has little to offer.

2) *Text analysis*. When they translate the comic, the students also type the original Malay text (which is by itself a good way of learning vocabulary). The students thus gain access to the

digitized texts of the parts of "Aku Budak Minang" that have already been translated. This enables them to search for certain words and/or their collocations, or even try out corpus linguistics tools. Text analysis is useful for those who wish to collect instances of certain types of words, for example, in the case of the last two topics in the list above. However, it is helpful for those who study the usage of a particular lexical item, only if they happen to find an adequate number of examples of that lexical item, that is, if they are lucky. Non-occurrence in a text does not mean that the item does not exist or that it is unimportant.

3) *Elicitation*. The elicitation method allows students to obtain linguistic and cultural information that is not available in the literature or the text. The course spends a week on an interview with a native speaker of Malay. A Malaysian student studying in a neighbouring university whose first language is Malay is invited to the class as the language consultant. The students prepare a questionnaire in advance. The class discusses whether the question items in their questionnaires are able to elicit the information they intend to obtain and how to improve them. The students learn new ways of asking questions about linguistic forms and meanings. For example, if one wants to know more about the meaning of a word, it is necessary to ask about the situations in which the word can and cannot be used (i.e. the word's truth/felicity conditions) as in "Would you say X if …?". A simple question like "What does X mean?" conversely invites answers by equivalents in the students' own language, Japanese, which do not necessarily express the same range of meanings expressed by the original Malay word. By knowing how to ask, students can learn better through interactions with native speakers.

We believe that a small research project as described above will benefits students' language learning, especially for less commonly taught languages such as Malay. This is because it gives them the experience of independent discovery process. Independent learning, be it conscious or tacit, is a key to success in acquiring Malay. There are not many textbooks of the Malay language available (in Japan) that cater to intermediate and advanced learners. With regard to Colloquial Malay, in particular, as far as we know, "Nyuu Ekusupuresu Mareego" ("New Express Malay") by Faridah Mohamed (Visiting Associate Professor, TUFS) and Yumi Kondo (2010) is the only textbook that really teaches it.[8] Given the small number of learners, it is quite unlikely that many good textbooks of Malay will be published in the future. It is more realistic and important to educate our students so that they can learn independently than to have them wait until someone writes a good textbook. Also, students will graduate sooner or later and have to learn from authentic materials and speakers, usually by themselves and without the guidance of a teacher.

## 5   The significance and prospects of the project

This project has the following merits. The first is that it enables active learning; the second lies in its advantages for research and job hunting; and the third is that it enhances students' understanding of the foreign culture and help them improvement their communication skills.

Articles translated by senior students are used as textbooks in first and second year classes to create a cycle of learning. Students become aware that their articles are of use as learning material to their juniors in area studies. They feel a sense of responsibility and worth. Through this new method of teaching, students are able to gain skills and experiences they were not able to in passive classes of text translation. This project creates an awareness of the responsibility of presenting the translated articles to the public and acts as a means to promote an active way of learning.

Furthermore, translating articles can help students to develop ideas for their research theses. As a result, it motivates them to continue their research in graduate school. Also, the project provides translating experience and creates advantages for students when seeking employment.

This method leads to not only an improvement in their translating skills, but also in their ability to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds. It can be a bond between Japan and the respective area of study, and create a clear awareness of Japanese society and culture and its relation to world.

However, there is a need for improvements in the following areas:

1)  There is a need for evaluation criteria to be clear when translation is taught in class.

2)  There is also a need to develop a way to measure students' improvement and ability

With the World Language and Society Education Centre managing the project, the aim to improve the standards and quality of education plays a major role. Students are responsible for translating and presenting the articles to the public, which leads to an improvement in translation skills and a heightened awareness of the connection between Japan and their area of study within the global community. The project also helps to cultivate in students greater sensitivity and the ability to think flexibly, whilst maintaining a deep understanding of cultural differences.

The fact that students with this experience have a good command of language and are able to cooperate with people of different cultural backgrounds in order to solve global issues is testimony to the effectiveness of our extended project. Considering the fact there is a large audience beyond the university as well, we can also expect TUFS, a gateway between Japan and the world, to continue to promote the project as a contribution to society through educational practice.[9]

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**Notes**

[1] Mauger, G., "Cours de langue et de civilisation françaises" (1953).

[2] See for example http://www.canal-u.tv/video/les_amphis_de_france_5/une_methode_traditionnelle_le_cours_mauger_1.3015

[3] Verdelhan–Bourgade, M., Verdelhan, M., & Dominique, P., "Sans Frontieres 1, Méthode de français" (1982).

[4] The number of students mentioned above applies only to the Faculty of Foreign Studies; it has been modified following the curriculum reform in April 2012.

[5] Table 1 does not include a Syrian newspaper "Watan" written in the Arabic language.

[6] TUFS has eight Southeast Asian language programs: Indonesian, Malay (Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei), Tagalog, Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer and Burmese.

[7] The ratios of the class units (1 unit = 1.5 hours per week) taught by native speaker teachers to those taught by non-native speaker teachers for the Malay language courses at TUFS are as follows: 3:2 (first and second year); 2:1 (third year); 1:0 (fourth year).

[8] There are other textbooks with 'Colloquial Malay' or 'Spoken Malay' in their titles. However, what they actually teach is not Colloquial Malay, but Formal Malay. Academic studies dealing with Colloquial Malay are not in abundance either (e.g. Koh, 1990; Nomoto, 2006; Nomoto & Kartini, 2010; Shoho, 2006).

[9] The authors of this article acknowledges with many thanks that this article was written in collaboration with Ms. Eri Yamashita and Ms. Racheal Andrew of World Language and Society Education Centre, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

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