

Etymological Coincidence Between English and Japanese

(An Extract from *Logic in Language*)

R. Ishiguro

§ 1. "Etymology may be understood to denote that branch of science which traces the history of the meanings and forms of words—*i.e.* which treats of word-derivations in the widest sense. It traces the origin and development of the pronunciation, spelling and signification of individual words." Whether or not this explanation given in *Nelson's Encyclopaedia* be precisely a definition of the science, we may well be content with it so far as a practical purpose is concerned. And from this we may deduce that etymology gives us concerning a word

- i. the history of its phonetic change ;
- ii. the history of its sematic change ;
- iii. history of its syntactic change ;
- iv. its structure ;
- v. the source and route ;
- vi. its original sense or relation to other words ; and
- vii. the conjectured state of the society when it was used in the sense in question or underwent its recorded change.

It is thus a historical study of culture as well as of language. "But it is always a matter of reflection, of learned curiosity." Yet it is quite natural that one should "in varying degree, according to his turn of mind, his general culture, and his particular education, turn his attention to etymological inquiries, and please himself with tracing out why the words which he had

learned or learns were elected to the office in which they serve him.⁽¹⁾” And a student of literature as well as language could not neglect its merit.⁽²⁾

§ 2. Languages are divergent, as each language takes up a word—*i.e.* a sound or sound-group with a sense or senses associated to it—in her own way. But the principles by which languages drift are found convergent to a great extent: human natures run in a groove. This may be seen in all the departments of the science of language. I find for myself to my surprise many an instance of etymological coincidence between English and Japanese. If systematically investigated, all the phases of etymology will prove parallel and similar between the two languages or further among all the languages. For the present, however, I can give only a limited list in a limited scope. The examples are no more than those which I have met with by chance while reading ordinary books with anything but linguistic object in view.

I have had no time to classify or arrange them more scientifically. The chief object I have in mind in enumerating my scanty collection here is this, that I should like to prove the existence of etymological coincidence between or among languages, and further to enrich my collection of the data for the fact by my own continued labour and by the kind help of those who may take interest in this kind of study.

§ 3. The science of etymology being still in its infancy in Japan, the etymology of the Japanese words compared with the English ones may be open to dispute. Though I consulted, in the matter,

(1) W. D. Whitney: *Language and the Study of Language*, 1910 (7th ed), p. 128.

(2) For this, please see my article “Some Notes on English Etymology” (*The Study of English Literature*, XII, 2.)

F. Otsuki: *Dai Genkai*, Vol. I (A—KI), 1932,

S. Matsuoka: *Nihon Kogo Daijiten*, 1929,

yet what they give me have all been put into my own melting pot.

The authorities on English etymology are abundant, but I here, for the sake of convenience, use only the concise etymological dictionaries by Late Rev. Dr. Walter Skeat and Prof. Ernest Weekley. For some words, as I marked out last year⁽¹⁾, the two scholars differ in opinion. But it is not the case very fortunately with the here quoted words.

§ 4. Now let me make some lists of etymological coincidence between English and Japanese.

A. COINCIDENCE IN THE WAY OF GIVING THE FIRST SENSE OR OF DERIVING IT FROM OTHER WORDS.

(1) **ago** < OE *agone*, p.p. of *agan* to go or pass (of time).

J *inishie* of old < *inishi* went + *he* direction.

(2) **battle** < F *bataille* < VL *battualia*, neutral plural of *battualis* < L *battuere* to beat.

J *tatakai* battle or fight < *tataki ai* to strike one another.

(3) **ceiling** < L *caelum* sky.

J *tenjo* ceiling < Ch *ten* heaven + *jo*.

(4) **door** < ME *dore* < OE *dura* gate. cogn. with Skt *dvara* or *dvar*.

J *to* door, (formerly) gate. cogn. with Ch *to* earth.

(5) **envy** < F *envie* < L *invidia* < *invidere* to look upon.

J *netamu* to envy. cogn. with *niramu* to look at manacingly.

(6) **face** < F < VL *facia* for *facies* to make or form.

J *kao* face, (originally) appearance. cogn. with *kawa* skin or cover.

(1) "Some Notes on English Stymology" by R. Ishiguro, above mentioned.

(7) **finger** < common Teutonic root. cogn. with G *fangen* to grasp.

J *yubi* finger. cogn. with *yuu* (< *yup*) to bind (?).

(8) **flag banner** < Scand < base of Icel *flöggra* to flutter.

J *hata* flag < *hata-hata* (< *pata-pata*) noise of fluttering.

(9) **front** < F < L *frons*, *front-* forehead.

J *mae* < *mayu* eyebrow + *he* near-about.

(10) **hawk** a bird < OE *hafoc*. ultim. cogn. with *have* have to grasp or seize.

J *taka* hawk. cogn. with *tsuka* hilt < *tsukamu* to grip.

(11) **mouse** < ME *mous* < OE *mus*. Literal. a stealing animal.

J *nezumi* mouse or rat < *ne* (for *ana*) hole + *sumi* dwelling. (another theory) < *in* sleeping + *nusumi* stealing.

(12) **open** < OE *open* literal. that which is lifted up < *up*.

J *aku* open. cogn. with *agu* to lift (?).

(13) **pecuniary** < F *pecuniaire* < L *pecuniaris* < *pecunia* money < *pecu* cattle.

J *bai-bai* selling and buying < Ch *bai* shells.

(14) **ponder** to weigh in the mind < L *ponderare* to weigh.

J *omou* to think. cogn. with *omoi* heavy (?).

(15) **section** < L *secare* to cut.

J *kiri* section < *kiru* to cut.

(16) **sheaf** < OE *soeaf* pile of corn shoved together < *scufan* to shove.

J *tsuka* (in *inazuka*) sheaf. cogn. with *tsuku* to poke (?).

(17) **straw** < OE *strews* literal. what is scattered (strewn).

J *wara* straw or stem < *bara-bara* asunder (?).

(18) **wall** < L *vallus* stake or palisade, literal. protection. cogn. with Skt *vri* to cover or surround.

J *kabe* wall. cogn. with *kawa* cover.

(19) **window** <Scand, literal. wind-eye, replacing AS *eagduru* eye-door.

J *mado* window <*ma* eye + *to* door.

B. COINCIDENCE IN SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT.

(1) **kite** a bird <a toy, through the resemblance in shape.

J *tako* a toy <*taka* hawk (?).

(2) **knight** <OE *cniht* cogn. with G *Knecht* lad or servant, (especially) one who serves.> man-at-arms.

J *samurai* man-at-arms <*samurau* to wait on.

(3) **to-morrow** <OE *to morgene* for the morrow <*morgene* (>*morn* or *morning*) dawn.

J *ashita* dawn or morning > to-morrow.

(4) **owe** to possess <to be in debt or obliged. cf. *ought* <OE *agan* to owe.

J *ou* to bear on back > be in debt.

C. COINCIDENCE IN COMPOSITION.

(1) **blizzard** blinding storm-wind <*blow*, *blast*, *blind*, blended together. First common in U. S. newspapers in severe winter 1880-1. (Fowler.) a portmanteau word.

J *fubuki* blizzard <*fuki* blowing + *furi* coming down + *yuki* snow.

(2) **wayfarer** traveller <*way* + *fare* to go + *er*.

J archaic *michiyukibito* (= *tabibito*) traveller <*michi* way + *yuki* going + *hito* person.

(3) **surpass** to exceed <F *sur* <L *super* over + *pass*.

J colloquial *uekosu* surpass <*ue* over + *kosu* pass.

§ 5. Short and slender as the lists are, they are sure to suggest some Sprachgefühl, which may lead to all the fields of linguistic study.

ADDENDA TO A.

(10.1) **monarch** king < GK *mōnas* alone + *archein* to rule.

J *kami-go-ichinin* emperor (archaic), literal. "supreme honoured one person."

(15.1) **G** **sehr** very. cogn. with E *sore* or *sorrow*, orig. "to harm."

J *itaku* very (archaic) < *itai* ailing, painful.
