

Get Your Message Across

The art of effectively “trans-creating” foreign-source communication materials for the Japanese reader



The Importance of Real Localization

We all demand high quality in materials printed in our native language—and we should demand the same in materials localized into Japanese.

The Japanese are voracious, educated, sophisticated readers. The world's biggest newspaper, by far, is the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, with a circulation of more than 14 million. The largest non-Japanese daily, Germany's *Bild*, has a circulation of less than four million; the largest US newspaper, *USA Today*, reaches just 2.3 million. A strong educational system and a stress on reading has created a country with near-universal literacy.

Because the Japanese read a great deal, and have a great choice in publications, they demand quality (as they do, in fact, in everything they buy!). The simple story: much of the material translated from foreign languages for Japan is simply not good enough.

To reach the Japanese market effectively, foreign companies must communicate at the very highest, most natural level.

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Based in Tokyo, Next Inc. provides integrated advertising and communication solutions for business markets.

Translation Is Not Communication

Translation alone does not guarantee that ideas will be effectively communicated. Communication means much more than rendering words from one language into another.

Many people had the experience in the 1970s and 80s of buying a technically-advanced product from one of Japan's leading companies, then finding that the manual was virtually unintelligible. The lesson was learned (but still lingers, of course) that directly translating Japanese into English results in some very awkward, unclear and even unintentionally humorous texts.

Today, as more and more foreign companies are finding a home in the Japanese market, it's critically important that these same mistakes aren't made when localizing foreign-language materials into Japanese. Everything you do says something—good or bad—about your brand. Materials translated into Japanese must favorably reflect on your brand, and communicate your messages effectively and correctly.

With a vastly different structure and traditions, Japanese is completely different from any of the European languages.

The most basic form of translation—providing a Japanese equivalent for every word—simply won't work. Even if the grammar and facts are correct, the way in which concepts are presented in Japanese—the style, the word choice, the nuances, the “flow”—are immensely important in transmitting the core information effectively. That begins by applying the skills of a professional editor to the work of a translator.

On the next page is a good example of this, in a text translated from Japanese to English. The first is the work of a very competent translator; in the second, the text has been “trans-created” by a professional editor. Freed from the restrictions of keeping to the original Japanese structure—but being careful that all the information is still present—the professional editor has brought the text to the “natural” level. It “feels” like text originally written in English—the true goal of localization.

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Your brand name may also need reconsideration.

Photo credit: english.com

Original (Translated from Japanese to English):

“ In Denmark, a major advanced organic country in Europe, there are more strict regulations. Products should be organically grown without the use of fertilizers complying with the regulations established by the government, and they are also examined from a wide range of aspects from environment to animal protection and only the products that pass such an examination are allowed to carry the official certification label of organic food. ”

Edited by Next Inc.:

“ Denmark is a pioneer in organic food in Europe, and has much stricter regulations than Japan. Denmark requires that organic plant and animal products must be grown without the use of fertilizers, in accordance with regulations established by the government. These are also examined in a number of ways, from environmental issues to animal protection, with only those products passing these examinations allowed to be certified as organic food. ”

Although the original translation contains no spelling or grammatical errors, the revised version is clearly much easier to read and more effectively conveys the message.

Materials translated from English (or other languages) into Japanese also must be edited in the same way if they are to retain their full impact, and create the right feeling for a Japanese audience.

At Next, we carefully edit—“trans-create”—translated texts, rather than simply check them for mistakes. In the design process, the editors will often work with the designers in copyfitting; there will almost always be the need to reduce or expand the texts to fit the layout. By omitting the crucial editorial stage, it is likely that the designer would insert texts that miss the mark, or that in fact contain errors.

In the worst case, some companies have been known to use the un-edited output of translation software. The result—confusion.

A professional translator is a must—but translation is just the first step in the professional editorial and design process that ensures that materials localized into Japanese have the same meaning, impact and natural feeling as did the original.



Cutting corners as well as costs? Web-based translation at its worst.

Photo credit: fun.drno.de

Understanding Japanese Typography

To produce quality Japanese language printed materials, it's important to understand the quite different world of creating quality Japanese typography.

The first glance at a written text communicates something to readers, even before they begin to actually read the text. The choice of typeface, the physical structure, the spacing, indents, headline size, subheads, the flow of text around images—all these combine to create a look and feel that can complement or distract from the actual content. Quality typography invites the reader; poor quality discourages further reading.

Today's technology makes it easy to place Japanese text into a layout—anyone with a computer can do it, but it takes a Japanese design professional to not simply insert text into a space, but to create the quality typography Japanese have come to expect.

For example, Japanese characters all run together without spaces. English, of course, has spaces between words (as do most languages outside of East Asia). When moving from an English original to Japanese, for example, the designer often makes the decision to move from the original's single column to two or perhaps even three columns, to ensure easier readability. It takes a trained, experienced, professional Japanese designer to make that the appropriate design decision.

There are also the intangibles of design—the things that “feel right”—that is almost impossible to acquire for someone who does not read the language (or, likely, who is not a native reader). English font sizes are

often much larger than Japanese; the weights of texts and titles may be too strong if directly transferred to a Japanese font.

This is a common problem in Japanese layouts created outside of Japan. A designer who does not read Japanese is simply pasting texts that someone else has translated into a fixed layout—basically, they are designing blind. They may be a good designer, but they have no way of knowing if what they are doing is appropriate, or even correct.

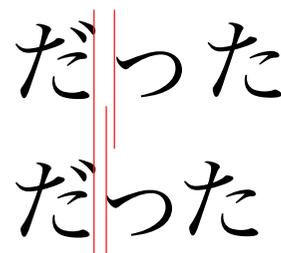
Without the ability to catch the combination of meaning and structure themselves, they cannot communicate the message properly through the design. A well-trained Japanese designer, however, understands the rules, and can re-render an English layout into an effective Japanese one.



Japanese has a range of unique punctuation, particularly quotation marks and brackets, that must be used correctly. This requires a good understanding of both content and common practice.

Comic Sans
DPF 隸書体

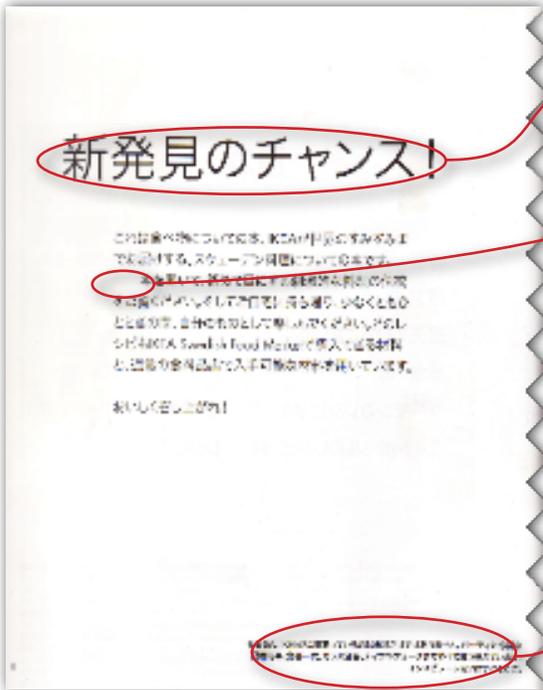
Remember the bad old days of DTP: there are Japanese and English fonts that are overused, outdated or simply inappropriate, and which a non-native designer may inadvertently use.



Modern technology can help with kerning (adjusting the space between characters). Doing it well means being able to read the text.

Real-world Examples

No matter how skilled the designer, they must be able to read the language in which they are working.



Opinions on good design vary across cultures. In Japanese this header is too big, and looks awkward—something that an English speaking designer could never know.

This text was clearly copied and pasted into a format, carelessly. When selecting the text the first indent was taken out, but the second one remained. Regardless of this, indenting in Japanese is usually only one character wide.

Right align is virtually never used in Japanese; this is not a situation where it would be used either. The font is too strong for use with a Japanese language caption.

While it is not necessary to be able to read Japanese to see that this line is too short, it is necessary in order to fix the problem.

Although it can be stylish and trendy to mix vertical and horizontal text in this way, such a result has not been achieved here.

As with English, in Japanese it is customary to have the names of the translator and photographer on a different line and in smaller text. However, this has gone unnoticed.



Tategaki versus Yokogaki

Japanese can be written both horizontally or vertically, depending on the communication goal. Which text direction is appropriate for your message?



Scanorama, SAS's in-flight magazine. The use of vertical **tategaki** is the appropriate choice for communicating to the airline's Japanese customers.

A unique and very important factor in Japanese design is **tategaki** and **yokogaki**—vertical and horizontal text flows.

Tategaki, reading from top to bottom and right to left is the more traditional style, and suggests refinement and seriousness—it is the preferred style for literature. Magazines written in tategaki have the cover reversed from English (for reading from right to left).

Yokogaki, reading from left to right, is less formal, and is common in lifestyle magazines and other publications geared toward a younger audience. The Internet is also entirely in yokogaki.

However, both may well be used in different sections of the same publication, depending on content and creative/editorial intention. The ability to use both allows for great design freedom and creatively, but they must be used wisely.

Foreign brands wanting to show a commitment to Japan are often well advised to err on the conservative side and use tategaki. But this also takes commitment: “trans-creating” a publication from horizontal English into tategaki requires not only that individual page layouts be reconfigured, but that the entire page flow and front and back covers be reversed.

Seeing the Big Picture

A coordinated production process is the key to success in any project, but especially so when working with different languages, and often very different cultures.

Now we're ready to do a really professional localization job. We have a translator to accurately create a Japanese-language version of the original text; a Japanese editor will rework the text to make it read and feel like native Japanese; and an experienced, native Japanese designer to restructure the original and make the design choices needed to give the work a natural look and feel.

These people don't work in a vacuum, however. All members of the team must be able to support each other—and, of course, the ultimate decision maker is the client, who may or may not speak Japanese themselves.

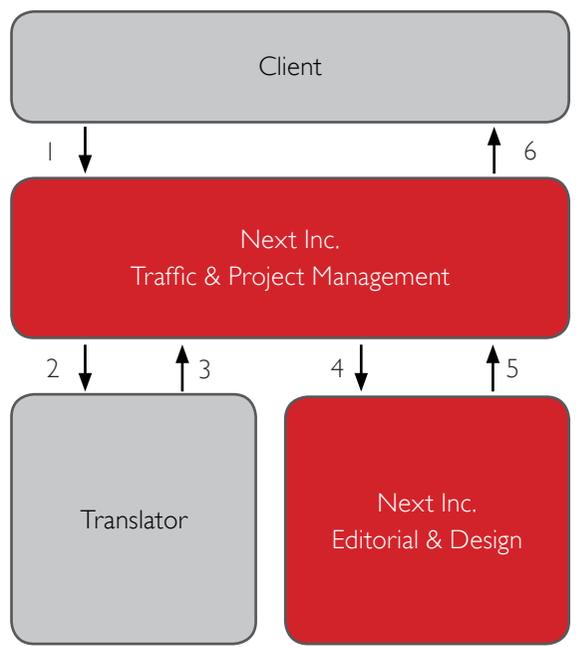
Key to the success of any production project is the account support team. Next's project managers have an overall view of the project—coordinating the production of the localization from reception of the original materials from the client, through translation, editing, design and print or web production supervision.

Equally important, they keep the client involved and informed. This is important in any production project—even in one's native language—but it's especially important when creating Japanese localizations. The client must be involved all the way through, and kept up to date on progress and issues that occur. Working with the creative team, the project managers can explain—in English—why Japanese editorial and design decisions have been

made, and relay client comments and corrections back to editors and designers.

The result is greatly improved communications for everyone involved in the project—and better communications leads to superior Japanese-language materials. Materials that effectively communicate your message to the Japanese market.

Next Inc Project & Communications Flow



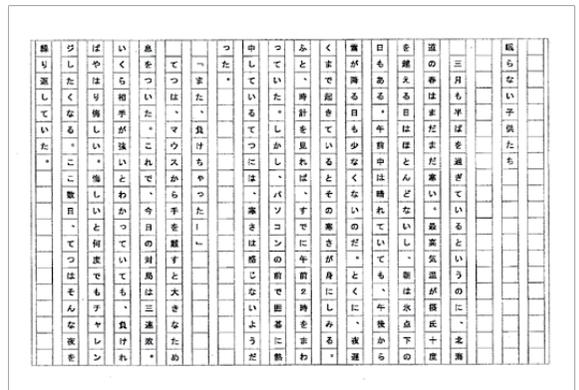
Summing it Up

The ubiquitous *genko-yoshi* and establishing the project costs.

For European languages, translation and editing fees are most often calculated based on the number of source words, in Japan, fees are based on the number of characters rendered in the target language. In order to simplify the process of counting characters, a grid called a *genko-yoshi*, containing up to 400 characters, is used. Even with computers, Japanese translators and editors use *genko-yoshi* to charge for their work.

This can cause confusion, because it is impossible to know before the work is completed how many *genko-yoshi* pages will result from an English text. As a general rule, one *genko-yoshi* is roughly equivalent to 150 English words, but this can change depending on the work. Technical texts may require a specialized

vocabulary with more characters than the vocabulary used in literature, for example.



An example of a *genko-yoshi*.

English to Japanese Translation Fee	Standard	¥30/source word
	Rush Fee* Case-by-case; generally 2 days	+50%
Swedish to Japanese Translation Fee	Standard	¥42/source word
	Rush Fee* Case-by-case; generally 2-3 days	+50%
Editing and copy rewriting		¥7,200/genko-yoshi* One genko-yoshi=400 characters
Design and layout	1-8 pages	¥15,000/page
	10-20 pages	¥12,000/page
	22-32 pages	¥10,000/page
	Over 34 pages	¥8,000/page
	Over 100 pages	20% volume discount
Traffic and project management		15% of Total

About Next Inc.

Based in Tokyo, Next Inc. provides integrated advertising and communication solutions for business markets.

Next Inc. was founded in Tokyo in 1988 by veteran Swedish journalist Kjell Fornander. Today we have grown into many marketing communication fields, but custom publishing remains an important part of our work.

We currently produce around 15 magazines and newsletters, both on and off-line, largely for foreign companies operating in Japan. Some are original work in Japanese; others are complete localizations. Many are a combination: typically 60 to 70 percent localized international material, along with 30 to 40 percent original local material in Japanese.

Our other services include advertising, PR and event marketing, video production, product and brand design.

Next Inc. currently employs 20 staff, including four Japanese writer/editors and one English language writer/editor.



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