

Translation as Method in Collaborative Humanities Research: Reflections on a Project Conducted Using Japanese and English

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方法としての翻訳
——日本語と英語を使用した共同研究企画に関する考察

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Abstract

Between 2017 and 2019, a series of workshops were held at a Japanese university which used both English and Japanese languages in varying degrees. These workshops culminated in the publication of a collection of papers with an experimental bilingual format. Translation played a significant role in all stages of the project. This paper is a study that draws from feedback received from project participants to consider the potential of actively incorporating multiple language use and translation into collaborative research, particularly in the humanities. After considering the specific context of this project, I will discuss the benefits and challenges of multiple language use, or “bilingual study”, in collaborative research.

Introduction

In recent years, it has become fairly commonplace for scholars working in the humanities to share and publish their research in multiple languages. In part, this reflects the establishment of English as the preferred, or dominant, language of international dialogue, and the value ascribed to research output published in English. However, as this development includes scholars for whom English is a “first” or “main” language, it also reflects a changing linguistic environment in which not only

English but also other languages, such as Japanese, are increasingly used as mediums for cross-cultural and/or international interaction between researchers. This development is apparent, for example, in the case of Japanese literary studies, where non-Japanese scholars tend to have expert knowledge and fluency in the Japanese language and culture that is the subject of their research, but until recently, would not usually publish their research in Japanese themselves. Likewise, Japanese scholars of Japanese literature are also increasingly inclined to publish research in both Japanese and English, whereas previously they would almost exclusively publish in a single language, usually their “own”, or “first” language. In this context, the question of how an individual uses, or should use language(s) is gaining a new prominence, particularly amid ongoing debates about the hegemony of the English language.

This paper aims to present some of the potential benefits and difficulties of “bilingual study”, that is, research activities conducted in more than one language, which involve an element of translation. The discussion is based on a research project conducted by the author while a graduate student at Kobe University, Japan, in collaboration with fellow students and teaching staff in addition to overseas-based scholars. A series of workshops were held between 2017 and 2019, in which a varying mixture of English and Japanese were used.

The project resulted in the publication of a volume of research articles presented in an experimental bilingual format, titled *Adaptation, Mediation and Communication of Otherness in a Globalizing World: Perspectives from Japan* (『他者をめぐる人文学 グローバル世界における翻訳・媒介・伝達』) (Kobe University Press, 2021). While this volume already begins with an extensive introductory chapter, which explains in detail the context of these workshops and the reasons for the bilingual format, the issue of translation is only touched upon briefly. This paper will elaborate on this issue, drawing from a survey conducted with participants of the project.

The relatively closed nature of the project and small scale means that the findings of this research cannot be made completely anonymous. However, use of identifiable proper nouns in the following discussion will be kept to a minimum. This is done to maximize the potential of the research findings to be adapted to a more general context.

Context 1: Conceptualizing “Bilingual Study”

The term “bilingual study”, used throughout this paper, is borrowed from Haruo Shirane, whose edited volume, *New Horizons in Japanese Literary Studies: Canon Formation, Gender, and Media* (『越境する日本文学研究 カノン形成・ジェンダー・メディア』) (Bensey Publishing Inc., 2009),

was a major point of reference throughout the project.

This book, a collection of short articles authored by mainly Japan and U.S. based specialists in Japanese Studies, is based on an international symposium held in 2007 at Meiji Gakuin University, Japan, and is notable for its almost perfect bilingual format. The book can be read from left to right in English, or from right to left in Japanese. The contents are numbered twice: the book is numbered from both directions, meeting on the “執筆者一覧／Contributors” page (numbered 142-3 right to left). Only the afterword is printed only in Japanese.

The term “bilingual study” appears in the “Prologue”, authored by Shirane, as shown in the following quotation:

By making this issue bilingual, we hope to reach out to both Japanese readers and to North American, European, and Asian audiences and to set a precedent for future collaborative, global research. Translation involves explaining the assumptions behind the methods and approaches of the authors in an effort to reach out to another cultural-linguistic community that does not share the same assumptions. It is this trans-cultural process, which is both the responsibility of the author and the translator, that makes bilingual study important and that can be of great stimulus in the future. (Shirane, 2009, 4, underline added for emphasis)

In the above quotation, “bilingual study” is presented as a collaborative process, dependent on two individuals: “the author and the translator.” While approximately half of the book’s content fits this description, for the other half, it appears that in fact the original authors are translating, or perhaps rewriting themselves in either English or Japanese.

Of the 28 individual papers or chapters included (including the “Prologue” and the introductions to each of the three sections), seemingly five were translated from Japanese to English and nine (five excluding the “Prologue” and section introductions) were translated from English to Japanese by somebody other than the original author. However, the remaining 14 were presumably both written and translated by the same original author, as they do not include translation credits.

Returning to the concept of “bilingual study”, in the Japanese translation, the term is rendered as “二言語併用での研究”, which can be translated literally as “research that uses two languages together/simultaneously”, and this would presumably accurately describe the process for those contributors who wrote both versions of their papers. However, this does not fit with the explanation offered in the quotation above, in which two individuals, who each belong to a separate “cultural-linguistic community”, are involved. As a result, although “bilingual study” is presented as something

of great value, the question of how we should conceptualize this activity remains somewhat vague.

This paper is not intended to present a methodology that is superior to that presented by Shirane's example. The context, circumstances, and requirements of the respective projects differ too greatly for a direct comparison. The "precedent" set by Shirane is and has been a valuable point of reference. But rather than providing a model (which was not necessarily his aim), it raises questions which then influenced our own methodology. In short, how can we, or how should we conceptualize "bilingual study"? Furthermore, what role can, or should, translation play in such a process?

Context 2: The Circumstances of the Project

Between 2017 and 2019, a series of workshops were held in the university building using both English and Japanese languages in varying degrees. Each workshop consisted of graduate students' research presentations and discussion, followed by a keynote lecture. Although support and encouragement were provided by senior faculty staff, the project was directed by a group of graduate students which gathered monthly under the name: "Others in the Humanities Research Group."

As discussed in the introductory chapter of the book which resulted from these workshops, the first workshop was held mostly in Japanese, whereas in subsequent workshops, from 2018 onwards, English shifted to being the main language of use. However, Japanese remained the primary medium, or operative language, in monthly study meetings with the graduate students involved in the project, and a conscious effort was made to not simply do everything in English, but rather try to maintain an element of "bilingual study", or multiple language use. For example, at each workshop, I, a native speaker of English, wrote the overall abstract in Japanese, and asked a regular participant with experience writing papers in English to help me translate it into English. I could have translated it into English myself. However, I felt like that would reduce the value of having first written it in Japanese. This stance was carried through to the publication project. Additionally, at each workshop, abstracts in both English and Japanese were prepared and provided to participants.

It should be noted that the makeup of this student group had an impact on the way the project turned out and is what enabled a more experimental approach to translation to be taken, as will be elaborated upon in the following section. My own research concerns so-called "border-crossing writers", or transnational writing in the context of contemporary Japan and the Japanese language, and this was a primary motivation in the continued use of Japanese as a shared medium. Two members of the group specialize in British and American literature respectively and therefore have exceptional English proficiency. All members had experienced varying degrees of study/research overseas and/or

had strong writing proficiency in English or another language other than Japanese.

The series of workshops culminated in a 230 page-length book consisting of two parts. “Part 1: Globalization, Interdisciplinary Research in the Humanities and the Mediation of Otherness” (グローバル世界の人文科学研究における学際的研究と他者性の媒介) consists of five chapters by five contributors, concerning various aspects of globalization, which is presented in a bilingual format, with the Japanese original and English translation printed on opposite-facing pages. “Part 2: Perspectives on the Adaptation, Mediation and Communication of Otherness” consists of eight individual academic papers, all written in English. At the back of the book, “Abstracts” and an “About the Authors” section are presented in English and Japanese. Finally, there is an “Afterword” in Japanese.

There are some similarities between the book edited by Shirane, described above, and the result of this project, such as the “Afterword” only being printed in Japanese, which reflects the fact that both were published in Japan and share a concern with reception by a Japanese (domestic) audience. However, the placing of original text and translation on adjacent pages, and decision to only make a part of the book completely bilingual, are significant differences.

The reason for this asymmetry in the book’s design relates to the different purposes of each section. The first section consists of overviews of fundamental concepts concerning globalization such as “glocalization” and “world literature”, and placing the Japanese and English versions of the text on adjacent pages was done partly to allow readers to consider these concepts across the two languages,



Image 1: An example of one of the two-page spreads from the bilingual section of the book.

and partly to make the process of translation more visible. On the other hand, the decision to include a section consisting only of papers written in English, without an accompanying translation, was made as a conscious attempt to recognize the special role played by English as a “global medium”, and to represent, or simulate, the mostly monolingual format in which English is actually used as a *lingua franca*.

The Translation Methodology of the Project

The idea of turning the workshops into a publication came about in 2018. Initially, I proposed making a collection of papers written in English, but also allowing original drafts to be submitted in Japanese, to then be translated into English. However, the eventual format, as mentioned above, consisted of a two-part structure with differing uses of language. The second section follows the convention of a standard collection of papers authored in a single shared language. The first section is not only printed in a bilingual format but was also created through a collaborative translation process.

First, the original manuscript was written in Japanese, following presentations given in our monthly meetings. Then, a several-step translation process was carried out as illustrated in the diagram below:

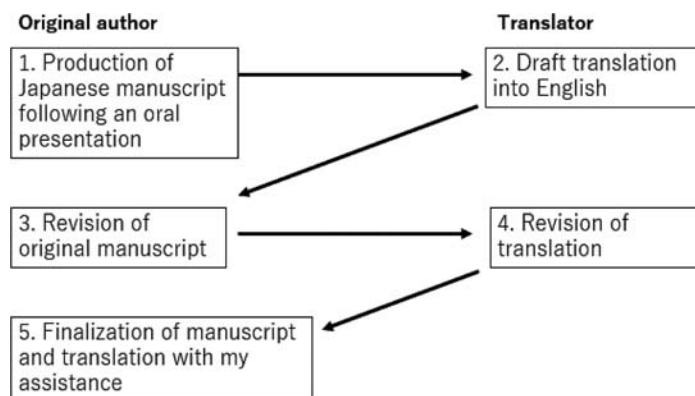


Image 2: The writing/translation process for the bilingual section of the book.

While this image represents a generalization of the process, in fact, with the exception of the “Introduction”, authored by myself in Japanese and translated into English by two participants with expertise in English language academic writing, the role of “Translator” in all other cases was filled by myself, the author of this paper. Hence, every English translation ends with the note, “(Translated by Thomas Brook and XYZ)” or “(Translated by XYZ and Thomas Brook)”. To a greater or lesser degree, for the chapters authored by participants other than myself, the process finished at step 3.

This might be attributed to the weight carried by my being a native speaker of English with some professional experience of translating Japanese into English.

Nevertheless, the process was designed to encourage all participants to recognize and think about the relative autonomy and interdependence of both the original Japanese text and its translation into English, and this was confirmed in a survey carried out after the book's publication, which is the topic of the next section.

This translation methodology was mainly motivated by a desire to make the translation process visible, and conscious in the minds of participants, in contrast to the vague description of “bilingual study” referred to above. This was in part a response to Minae Mizumura's argument about the asymmetry between English (as a “universal” medium) and other languages. However, this acknowledgement was modified by attention towards Japanese as a language of cross-cultural communication (i.e. also possessing a potentially “universal” aspect).

The work of Naoki Sakai, both his criticism of symmetrical thinking via his concept of “the schema of configuration” and the collaborative method of translation described in his own academic work, was also a source of inspiration. Finally, postcolonial studies on “the Other” that assert the value of knowledge production in non-English languages were also a motivating factor for the decision to produce the first part of the book with a distinct “original” text in Japanese presented alongside its translation into English.

Survey and Results

In this section, I will introduce the findings from a survey I asked participants to fill in based on their involvement in the project in order to better understand the challenges and potential benefits of consciously integrating “translation proper” (i.e., translation between two languages, involving a distinct original author and translator) into collaborative research. The survey consisted of 16 questions in total; 10 of which were multiple choice, the remaining six of which required a written response to gather qualitative data. It was conducted online with Google Forms. The survey was conducted in Japanese, as this was the primary method of communication in the study group. In the following discussion, some of the written responses will be quoted alongside a translation, by the author, into English.

The survey consisted of two parts. The first part concerned the first, bilingual section of the book, while the second part concerned the second section of the book and the book contents and process as a whole. Information was gathered from four participants, not including the author, who were all

domestic Japanese students associated with Kobe University, whose other relevant background (at the time of the project) is summarized in the following table.

A	Graduate student specializing in British/American literature. Assisted with translation of the “Introduction” into Japanese and contributed to both parts of the book.
B	Graduate student specializing in British/American literature. Assisted with translation of the “Introduction” into Japanese and contributed to both parts of the book.
C	Graduate student specializing in Aesthetics. Only contributed to the first, bilingual part of the book.
D	Post-doc researcher specializing in Philosophy. Only contributed to the second part of the book with a paper written in English.

Due to their varying levels of involvement in producing the book’s contents, the first part of the survey was only given to the first three participants (A to C), whereas the second part, concerning the project as a whole, was answered by all four participants. However, it should also be noted that all were regular attendees in the monthly study group and had given a presentation in English in at least one of the workshops, and therefore had experienced various forms of “bilingual study” firsthand.

Perception of agency/involvement

Towards the end of the “Introduction”, I wrote : “ここに収まっている両言語の文章は双方とも原著者に帰されるものとして理解される”(translated as “Therefore, both the texts in Japanese and English collected in this part should be understood as being attributable to the original authors”). However, when asked how much this description fits with participants’ own impressions, of the three respondents concerned, one replied “agree very much”, another “somewhat agree”, and the third “not sure”.

Similarly, when asked if they felt to have contributed to the “mirror image” layout of the first section and overall format, a question relevant to all four respondents, three replied “somewhat agree” and only one replied “agree very much”. The answers to these two questions reflect my role as the chief decision maker in the planning process.

Perception of translation and/or use of two languages

Another interesting finding was that opinions relating to the first part of the book seemed to be influenced by participants’ prior experience and expertise. A and B, with specialized knowledge of English both “strongly felt” the asymmetry between the English and Japanese texts. They also, when asked about how they perceived the relationship between the two versions of the text, agreed with the option: “The hierarchical relationship between the (primary) Japanese original and (subordinate)

English translation was clear” (“日本語原文（主）と英語訳文（従）の主従関係がはっきりしている”）。That is not to say that they considered the translation inferior; to the contrary, they both specifically referred to the relative independence of the translated text in their written responses. A remarked that being able to confirm their interpretation of the text with the original author meant that they “did not feel the need to produce a strictly word-for-word translation” (“字義通りの翻訳には強くこだわる必要がないと感じた”), while B commented that the overall experience was an interesting opportunity to “appreciate the asymmetry between the two languages” (“異なる2言語の非対称性が垣間見える面白い体験として捉えている”).

In contrast, C, who specializes in Aesthetics, and has less expertise in writing in English, only felt the asymmetry between the two texts to a limited extent. C also couldn't say which of the texts, the Japanese original or English translation, was of primary importance. C explained in the subsequent free input box that because translating directly from Japanese to English was beyond their individual ability, the process involved checking my translation against the original text and revising the original text accordingly. While in this sense, the original Japanese text was indeed “primary”, the distinction between the two was not so clear. Rather than seeing the translated text as subordinate to the Japanese original, C perceived the entire process as an attempt to communicate in a “global language”, commenting: “Even in this form [whereby I could only participate in the English translation to a limited degree], I was without a doubt challenging myself to [write in] a global language.” (“このような形でも、私自身にとってはグローバル言語への挑戦だったことは間違いない”).

The value of publishing in a bilingual format and of bilingual study in general

In the second part of the survey, I asked some more general questions about participants' overall experience and how they interpreted the value of the book and the collaborative research as a whole. Two respondents believed strongly that the book has the potential to be used in a classroom environment, while two were less sure. In terms of the value of the bilingual format of the book, responses were quite diverse.

All four respondents felt that a major value of the format was the way it facilitates recognition of differences between English and Japanese concepts.

Three respondents agreed that the format meant the book could be useful in the context of studying English and/or Japanese (which resonates with one of the merits Shirane gives for “bilingual study”), and also saw value in the way it can draw readers' attention to the plurality of languages.

Two respondents selected options relating more directly to translation: the format can draw readers'

attention to the process of translation (in other words making it “visible”), and because the format was decided in advance, placing the original and translation on adjacent pages enabled them to experience academic writing in a novel way. Although I had expected A and B, with expertise in using English, would choose these options, these answers were actually selected by a mixture of A, C and D. That is to say, these perceived benefits of the process are not necessarily limited to those already possessing a high level of expertise in the two languages being used.

General impressions

Regarding overall impressions, all participants who submitted an English-language paper for the second part of the publication agreed to varying degrees that the use of multiple languages (English and Japanese) and translation throughout our collaborative research had an impact on how they approached writing a paper in English.

One respondent, participant A, said they were prompted to think of non-native readers of English and Japanese while writing. Participant B wrote that the experience made them more aware of which words and phrases are intelligible to speakers/readers of English and prompted them to incorporate such language into their own writing in English, which could be said to be a contrasting view. Participant D wrote that the experience has led them to reassess how they produce English versions of their own Japanese texts in the future (for example in the case of abstracts for academic journals). Instead of producing a direct symmetrical copy, they now intend to rewrite their abstracts, taking into consideration readers who, because they do not share Japanese as their mother tongue, might read different connotations from the same message: “I became able to think about the difference between the way the language materializes in the mind of a reader of the English abstract and the way I see the language myself” (“英語要旨を読む相手が浮かべる言葉と、自分が浮かべている言葉の違いに目を向けられるようになった”).

Although there were some contrasting views



Image 3: Results from the survey answered by project participants, conducted in Japanese.

about the future of bilingual and/or multilingual study/research, all respondents to the survey replied that they “actively want to take part in more bilingual/multilingual collaborative research in the future”.

Discussion of Results

To summarize findings from the survey, while all participants who took part agreed that “bilingual study” incorporating translation was worthwhile, each seems to have taken something different from the process. A common theme could be said to be the development of intercultural competency, in terms of gaining an enhanced appreciation of the asymmetry between separate languages and the communities which use them.

One major issue is the impact caused by my own participation and facilitation as a native speaker of English with experience of translation of Japanese texts, which may have resulted in the reinforcement of linguistically defined identities. To elaborate on this point, the lengthy introduction explaining the process of the project and the book’s creation, written by myself in Japanese and then translated, with the cooperation of two Japanese colleagues, into English, cannot be easily presented as a model for future bilingual study. While on one hand, it is possible to extol the benefits of “writing in a language that is not one’s own” and “translating into a language that is not one’s own”, the reality is not so straightforward.

My choice to write the introduction in Japanese within the first part of the book reflects my involvement in a study group in which Japanese was the primary mode of communication, and by extension, my own identification as a participating member of Japan’s Japanese linguistic community, so to call Japanese a “language not my own” would be misleading. Additionally, requesting a non-native speaker of English to translate the Japanese writing of an English native speaker “back” into English to be published in print is quite a daunting thing to ask. Although I suggested other participants in the project also took an active role in the translation process, that is, in the translation of their own Japanese-language manuscripts into English, this did not take place on a significant level. This resistance could be interpreted as respect for the high level of skill required to perform translation, and additionally, respect for the initial word choices made by the translator.

This, in turn, could be seen as a not-necessarily-desired outcome of the project: participants, rather than gaining confidence in expressing themselves in a “foreign language” either through direct output or via the mediating role of translation, were perhaps prompted to reaffirm their linguistic identities as non-English speakers, or writers of another language, in this case Japanese. While not necessarily

desired, this does not need to be considered as a negative outcome, for reasons that will be discussed further in the conclusion.

Conclusion

The project discussed in this paper was influenced by the “precedent” demonstrated by previous academic work published in a bilingual format but attempted to make the process of “bilingual study” more apparent to both participants and readers. This enabled us to bring issues such as the symmetry and asymmetry between different languages into focus. However, this approach was dependent on rather unique and privileged circumstances, especially vis-à-vis competency/expertise in English and prior experience of cross-cultural exchange such as study abroad, which makes the findings difficult to generalize.

If translation is defined narrowly, there is the question of who translates whom. This could potentially lead to the reinforcement of linguistically defined monolingual identities, that is, an aversion to writing in a language not considered “one’s own”. However, this apparent conflict between developing competency in multiple language use (an aim of plurilingualism) and the assertion of the value of writing, thinking, and producing knowledge/an academic discourse in a particular language (which has a local aspect, i.e., does not claim to be absolutely “universal”) is not necessarily a “one or the other” style conflict. It is possible to consider these two aspects, or potential outcomes, of “bilingual study”, rather as being complementary. That is to say, the emphasis of these two aspects could potentially aid in the goal of developing competency in multiple languages while also fostering respect for the internal unity and relative independence of specific languages and speech communities. This is a possibility to be considered in greater depth in future research.

Rather than being a model for future “bilingual study”, this project might be better approached as a case study of how the conscious use of multiple distinct languages can facilitate thinking about “the Other”/alterity and developing inter-cultural competency. A major question that remains is, what does a bilingual text demand and/or enable of its readers?

Acknowledgements and References

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the findings.

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Appendix: Questions from the survey (in Japanese)

第一部の作成過程における翻訳活動についてお尋ねします。	
1	本書第一部の「序論」では、「ここに収まっている両言語の文章は双方とも原著者に帰されるものとして理解される」と述べていますが、第一部の原稿の英訳過程に実質的に関与できたと思いますか？ ・とてもそう思う／どちらかと言えばそう思う／どちらとも言えない／それほど思わない／とてもそう思わない
2	二言語併用のテキストを作成する上で、日本語と英語の間の非対称性を感じましたか？ ・とてもそう思う ～ とてもそう思わない
3	日本語テキストと英語テキストの関係はどのように感じていますか（どのように捉えていますか）？ ・日本語原文（主）と英語訳文（従）の主従関係がはっきりしている ・むしろ英語訳文が主であり、英訳に合わせて日本語原文が従の関係にある ・どちらとも言えない
4	英訳過程に参加することにより、論述対象に対する認識・捉え方に変化がありましたか？ どのような変化だったか、ご記入ください。
5	今後、同じようにご自身の日本語による原稿の英語訳を作成することになった場合、どのように関与したいと思いますか？ ・できるだけ自分の言葉で英訳を作成したい ・日英翻訳の経験のある人に翻訳を用意してもらい、表現の選び方等をその人に任せたい ・自分で英訳（英語版）を作成し、文法の正確さ、意味の伝達に関する確認・修正だけを英語の母語話者をお願いしたい ・英訳者と相談し、共同作業で訳文を作りたい
6	上記の質問とつながりますが、今後、他人との共同作業を通じて翻訳を作成した場合、自分の関与をどのように示したいと思いますか？ ・「共訳」として、共同作業で作成したものであることを明記したい ・まず自分による翻訳であることを明記し、協力を受けたことについては脚注などで示す程度 ・訳文を確認し、必要に応じて翻訳者に訂正をお願いすることはあるかもしれないが、基本的には他人による翻訳として読者に渡したい（自分の関与は最小限に示す）
7	【自由記述欄】その他、第一部の作成における翻訳活動について思うことがあればここにご記入ください。
本書全体の形式および第二部について 本書全体の形式および第二部（英語論文）についてお尋ねします。	
8	本書第一部の二言語併用（鏡写しのレイアウト）の形式に関する決定に関与できたと思いますか？ ・とてもそう思う ～ とてもそう思わない
9	二言語併用の第一部は教育活動で活用できると思いますか？ ・とてもそう思う ～ とてもそう思わない
10	実際に教育活動で取り入れる経験または予定がある場合は、その方法についてご記入ください。
11	本書の二言語併用形式の意義はどこにあると思いますか？（複数選択可） ・英語と日本語による概念の違いを確認できること ・英語学習、または日本語学習に活用できること ・言語の複数性に対する読者の意識を喚起できること ・翻訳の過程に対する読者の意識を喚起できること ・原文と訳文を同じページに載せることにより、二つの読者を意識し、普段とは違う執筆経験ができたこと
12	第二部に論文が収録された方にお訪ねします。第一部の作成をはじめ、本共同研究活動における多言語使用（日本語使用）と翻訳活動は、ご自身の英語論文の執筆に影響を与えたと思いますか？ ・とてもそう思う ～ とてもそう思わない
13	先の質問の続きです。共同研究の中での多言語使用・翻訳活動はご自身の英語論文の執筆に与えた影響についてご記入ください。
14	本プロジェクトに参加して、人文学の領域における二言語併用・多言語使用の共同研究の展望についてどのように考えていますか？（複数選択可） ・二言語併用・多言語使用の可能性を追求する意義を以前より強く感じている ・二言語併用・多言語使用の共同研究は今後ますます増え、主流になると思う ・共通語としての英語の一言語内でのコミュニケーションは今後も国際的共同研究の中心をなすべきだと思う ・二言語併用・多言語使用の共同研究に今後も積極的に携わりたいと思う
15	【自由記述欄】その他、本書全体の形式および第二部の作成について思うことがあればここにご記入ください。
16	【自由記述欄】その他、本共同研究に携わる上で、翻訳を含む多言語使用について感じたことがあれば、ご記入ください。