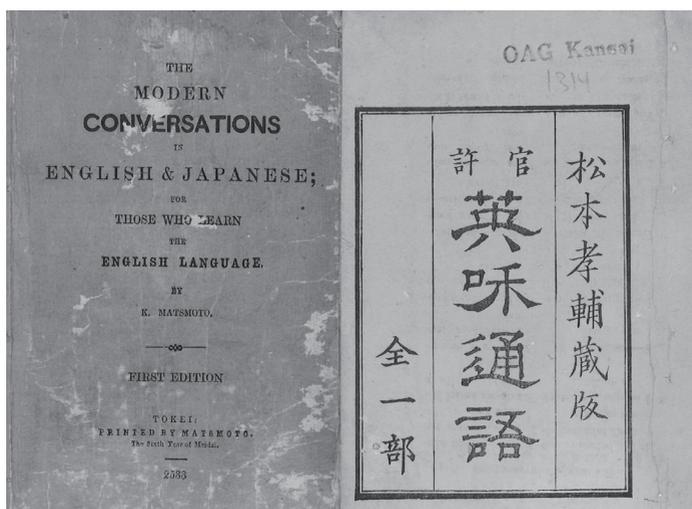


Treasures of the OAG Library (1)

Sebastian Dobson

Matsumoto Kōsuke, *The Modern Conversations in English & Japanese; for those who learn the English language / Eiwa tsūgo*, Tokyo: 'Printed by K. Matsmoto (sic)', February 1873. First Edition, 17 x 11.8cm, [4], 153pp.



(left: front cover outside, right: front cover inside)

1873 is significant not only as the year in which the OAG was founded, but also as the year in which there was an explosion in the study of English in Japan which continued for the remainder of the Meiji era.

It was the year in which the educationalist Mori Arinori declared the Japanese language unsuited to the national endeavour 'to grasp the principal truths from the precious treasury of Western science and art and religion' and advocated the adoption of English in its place. The sixth year of Meiji saw the appearance of a record number of publications devoted to the study of English appeared in Japanese, among them a small, single-volume phrasebook entitled *The Modern Conversations in English & Japanese; for those who learn the English language*; or *Eiwa tsūgo*.¹

1 The National Diet Library catalogue lists seven works published in Japan in 1873 with the words 'ei-wa' in their title, a total which was only exceeded in 1885.

The student of English in early Meiji-era Japan would already have known Matsumoto Kōsuke as the author of a similarly-titled work, *Conversations of English & Japanese*, or *Eiwa tsūshin*, published in Tokyo at least a year earlier.² Consisting of four volumes with a total of 387 pages, Matsumoto's maiden publication revealed the practice favoured by many Japanese authors of phrasebooks at that time of using an existing foreign work, in this case an English-French phrasebook published in New York almost twenty years earlier, and replacing the target language with a translation into Japanese.³ Although comprehensive, it betrayed its lineage from a work originally tailored for an Anglophone readership, and one can only wonder whether Japanese students of English at that time would have made much sense of dialogues such as the following, much less had the opportunity to re-enact them in daily life:

The Riding-School / Baba no Hanashi

Have you good horses in your riding school?

Anata no baba de yoi uma wo mot'te oide nasaru ka.

Excellent horses. There is a dancing horse that it is my delight.

Yoi uma ga ari masu watakushi no suki na odoru uma ga ori masu ka.

Are all the horses well trained?

Nokoradzu no uma ga yoku narete imasu ka.

A few of them are shy and some are wicked.

Kowagaru uma to warui uma ga ni-sanbiki ari masu.

Why do they keep shy or vicious horses?

Naze sore wa okubio dano warui uma no mama de imasu ka.

They are kept for intrepid and skillful riders.

Are wa isamashii jiodzu na norite no tame ni nokot'te imasu.

Has no accident ever befallen you?

H'tots mo okega no at'ta kotow a nai ka.

I had one fall or two.

H'tots ya futats wa ari mashita.

I see that you are courageous, and you give me a desire to see you on horseback.

Anata wa isamashii to miyeru uma ni onori nasat'ta tokoro wo mitai momo (sic) desu.⁴

2 The exact publication date of the four-volume *Eiwa tsūshin* is hard to establish. While the Japanese colophon of each volume bears the same date of 'Meiji go-jinshin-nen san-gatsu', the English text on the cover gives both 'Fourth Year of Meidzi' (vol. ii) and 'Fifth Year of Meidzi' (vols. iii & iv) as the year of publication. On the other hand, Tenri Central Library holds a copy of vol. I with the date 'Meiji yon-shinmi-nen jūni-gatsu', i.e. 1871, in the Japanese colophon. *Tenri Toshokan, Zenpon shashinshū XLII Bakumatsu-Meiji shoki – Honpōkan eigo gakusho/English language texts published from late Edo to early Meiji*, Tenri: Tenri Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1974, 12.

3 Gustave Chouquet, *First Lessons in Learning French*, New York: R. Lockwood & Co., 1853.

4 Matsumoto Kōsuke, *Conversations of English & Japanese; for those who learn the English*

Matsumoto gamely rendered his entire work in Roman script, doubtless in order to accustom the reader to Japanese in its romanised form, only employing Japanese text for the bibliographic information on the inside covers.

Matsumoto's second phrasebook represented something different. Advertisements for *Eiwa tsūgo* in the Tokyo press made clear Matsumoto's debt to Albert Bartels, the principal of a cram school in the London suburb of Clapham and occasional translator of Friedrich Schiller into English, whose English/French/German phrasebook *The Modern Linguist* provided Matsumoto with both a structured text and an exciting new adjective to add to the English title he had coined for his earlier work. Matsumoto's publication was not only issued in a compact single volume, but also reflected recent changes in official historiography; whereas the date of publication for each volume of the *Eiwa tsūshin* had been given according to the Western calendar, the number '2533' in the final line of text on the front cover dated the appearance of the *Eiwa tsūgo* not from the nativity of Christ but in accordance with the mythical founding of the Japanese empire in 660 BCE, which had been officially promulgated only the year before.

Whereas *Eiwa tsūshin* (channeling Gustave Chouquet) had launched into 'Easy Conversations of English & Japanese' with no preamble ('Come here, my child/ *Anata koko ye oide-nasai*'), *Eiwa tsūgo* benefitted from Bartels' more thoughtful organisation of his text, with the first 48 pages providing the reader with a basic vocabulary of over 800 words sorted into 33 categories, beginning with 'Cardinal Numbers' (*Kanyoo-no kazu*) and ending with 'Countries and Nations' (*Kuni aruiwa Kokumin*).

The dialogues on the remaining hundred or so pages took the form of interlocking, related phrases rather than self-contained dialogues and occasionally introduce several interesting non-sequiturs (though nothing to compare with that Holy Grail of early phrasebooks, 'My postilion has been struck by lightning'⁵):

In an Hotel

Show me your list of wines.

Go and fetch a corkscrew.

Cut up these partridges.

Give me the address of that man.

How do you call that in German?

Have you fed my horses?

Hatagoya-no Hanashi

Sake-no moku-roku-gaki-wo misete kure.

It'te koroku-nuki-wo mot'te kinasai.

Kono yamadori-wo okiri nasai.

Ano-h'to-no namai-gaki-wo okun nasaimashi.

German(!)-dewa sore-wo nan-to iimasu.

Omai-wa uma-ni kaiba-wo yat'te kureta ka.

language / *Eiwa tsūshin*, Tokyo: Seisan kaisha, 1872, Vol. 4, 7-8.

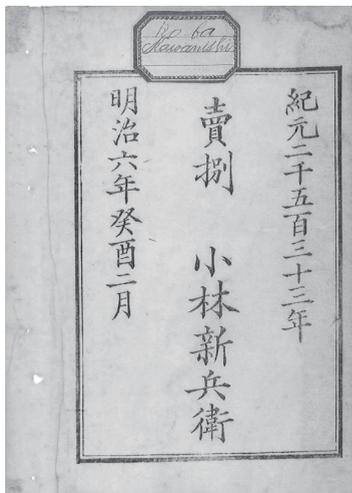
5 The section 'The Stage Coach' (*Hikiaku-sha no Hanashi*) does however offer the phrase 'How much is it usual to give the postilion? / *Saki-no uma tskau-niwa ikura yaru-no-ga atarimai desu.*' Matsumoto 1873, 109.

Numerous other orders for the hotel staff cover the following six pages, ending with

[Give us] some eels, – some mackerels./
*[Watakushi domo-ni] unagi wo, (...) tara wo [okunnasai]*⁶

The popularity of Matsumoto's works was confirmed by their subsequent re-printing in increasingly cheaper editions between 1885 and 1887 ('the years of the great "foreign fever," when Japanese society was literally submerged in a flood of European influence', according to the long-term Japan resident and linguist Basil Hall Chamberlain). It is not clear whether Matsumoto benefitted directly from this later appreciation of his work or was a victim of piracy: his last appearance in the Japanese press occurs in June 1886 when the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported on his invention of a 'yuwakashi yōtōdai', a lamp-stand adapted to boil water, but when the last edition of his phrasebook was published later that same year, the publisher described his location as 'unknown' (*jūsho fushō*) in the colophon.

The extent to which Matsumoto's *Eiwa tsūgo* was used – and found useful – by Meiji-era students of English in Japan is hard to evaluate, though the penciled annotations in *katakana* in the OAG copy indicate that a previous reader grappled with the intricacies of English spelling and pronunciation.



(back cover inside)

A readership which Matsumoto may not have anticipated was the foreign student of Japanese, and one unexpected user of *Eiwa tsūgo* was the French naval officer and novelist Louis Marie-Julien Viaud, better known as Pierre Loti, who found Matsumoto's text useful in teaching himself some basic Japanese in preparation for his first tour of duty in Japan in 1885. His stay in Nagasaki later that year provided the basic material for Loti's best-known novel *Madame Chrysanthème*, and one can only imagine how the 'dull hours spent in idle and diffuse conversation' with his temporary Japanese wife O-Kane were made easier – or more difficult – by his recourse to Matsumoto's *Modern Conversations*. It is a strange thought that this work, conceived in the archetypal London suburb of Clapham in the 1850s and repackaged in Tokyo in the early years

of the Meiji era to assist in the modernisation of the nation, should form part of the bedside reading of one of the most influential foreign detractors of Japan in the Meiji era.

6 Matsumoto 1873, 102-108