

# **Diplomatic Interpreters in Post-World War II Japan: Voices of the Invisible Presence in Foreign Relations**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Interpreters have been indispensable from antiquity to the present in almost every sector of human society, especially today's borderless world, where diverse languages and cultures interact. Nonetheless, interpreters have remained mostly invisible.

The present study examines the role of such interpreters, who have hitherto been treated as virtually non-existent in official history. While in recent times, there has been a shift in the perception of the interpreter's role, primarily in community settings, the focus of the present study is placed on interpreting in Japanese diplomacy, an area which has been accorded only limited attention.

The primary research questions the study addresses are (1) What kind of people became interpreters in post-WWII Japan? (2) How did they perceive their role as interpreters? (3) What kind of role did they actually play in foreign relations?

In search of answers to these questions, the living memories of five pioneer interpreters in Japan have been collected, in the form of life-story interviews, which were then categorized and introduced in three distinct parts based on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of '*habitus*,' 'field' and 'practice.' The experiences of the five interpreters are presented as case studies and examined in the light of Erving Goffman's 'participation framework.' Then, based on the pioneers' narratives, interpreting practice is studied from four different aspects: comparison of oral interpreting with written translation; illuminating the salient features of orality in interpreting; the issue of 'culture' for interpreters; and finally, the role of interpreters explored based on Claudia Angelelli's study, leading to the final discussion on future perspectives of the study for interpreting and interpreters.

**KEYWORDS:** diplomatic interpreters, *habitus*, interpreter's role, *kurogo*, oral history, participation framework.

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