Review of Joby, C. (2021) The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900): a cultural and sociolinguistic study of Dutch as a contact language in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan

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Review

Christopher Joby:

The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900): A cultural and sociolinguistic study of Dutch as a contact language in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan

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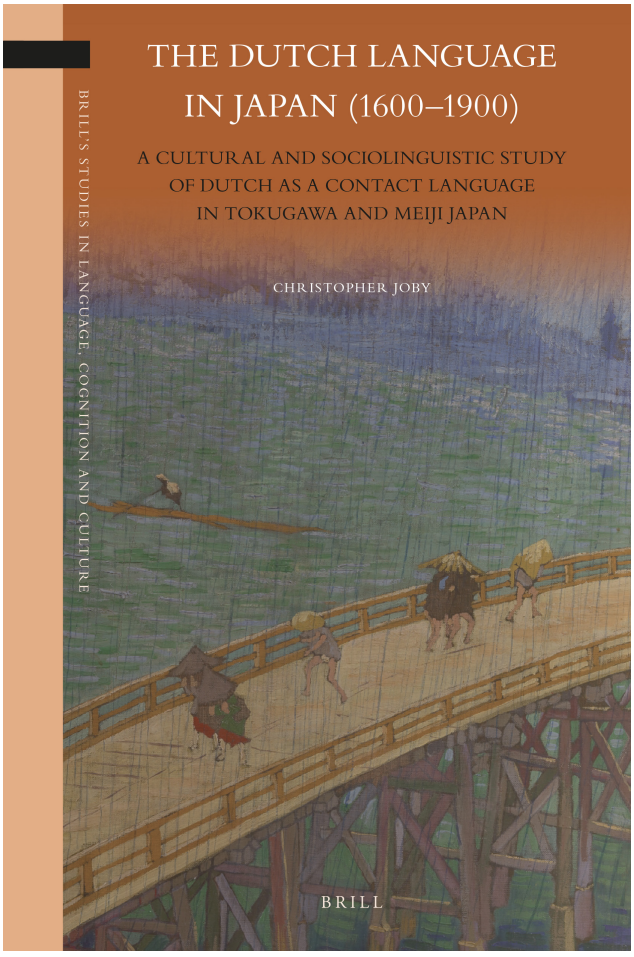

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Quite a few Japanese begin their day with a *kōhii* ('coffee') and end it with a *biiru* ('beer'). The names of both these drinks are loanwords from Dutch, and both words have been in use in Japan for over two centuries. In between drinks, the Japanese are likely to have used a *pen* ('pen'), another loanword from Dutch that is a good two hundred years old. These are but some of the tidbits that one can glean from Christopher Joby's new, rich book *The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900)*.

Many may be aware that between 1639 and 1854 the Dutch were the only Europeans with whom early modern Japan traded. Apart from the Chinese, nobody else was allowed access to the country. One consequence was that news about what was happening in the world, especially in Europe, and developments in Western sciences, was very much filtered through the Dutch and entered the country via the Dutch trading post in Nagasaki. Therefore, in the last quarter of the 18th century a new field emerged, called 'Hollandology' (*rangaku*), in which Japanese researchers who wanted to gain more in-depth knowledge of Western knowledge devoted themselves to learning the Dutch language. Thus, both trade and academic studies necessitated familiarity with the Dutch language, studied by the several thousands of professional interpreters working in Nagasaki and Hollandologists throughout the country. As a result, several Dutch loanwords entered the Japanese language. Estimates differ, but some 170 are still in use today in modern Japanese. These loanwords are but one consequence of this prolonged language contact. However, the role of the Dutch language in Japan during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) was much more diverse than simply furnishing words.

Joby's book is a comprehensive answer to his simple question, "what happened when Dutch came into contact with other languages in Tokugawa Japan?" (4, 429). It is a question, curiously, not often asked. The ambitious undertaking of its complex answer builds on Joby's longstanding knowledge of the early modern varieties of Dutch outside the Low Countries. Three of his other books are *The multilingualism of Constantijn Huygens, 1596-1687* (2014), *The Dutch language in Britain, 1550-1772* (2015), and *John Cruso of Norwich and Anglo-Dutch literary identity in the seventeenth century* (2022). *The Dutch language in Japan* builds on previous partial studies by other scholars dealing with or touching on the presence of Dutch in Tokugawa-period Japan. His impressive bibliography shows that he has gone to extraordinary lengths to cover relevant academic literature, even if a number of Japanese publications are omitted, and he provides a handy index of relevant early modern Japanese sources. However, Joby's book is more than the first book-length synthesis of what has been studied before. It is a systematic and exhaustive description and analysis of different aspects of language interference in early modern Japan and

what we may learn from this about the interactions between people. Such individuals were almost exclusively men. Joby does refer in passing to the Japanese sex workers whose clientele were the Dutch traders sequestered on the artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki harbour. However, we have very few records of their use of Dutch. Yet we know that these women, too, were speakers of what Dutch traders at the time referred to as *Japansch-Nederlandsch* ('Japanese-Dutch'), the creole language specific to the international world of early modern Nagasaki.

Joby's interest lies in the social history of language, and his historical approach to a large degree informs the structure of his book. It is bookended by chapters that are very much chronologically organized, with thematic chapters about aspects of language contact in between. The first two chapters describe the presence of Dutch in early modern Japan, especially the early stages, and focus on the people who employed Dutch, introducing the sources on which a study such as this one must ultimately base itself. Joby takes care to note that there were many non-Dutch speakers of Dutch, not only Japanese but others of several European and Asian nationalities who found themselves in Japan and made use of varying degrees of Dutch. This is followed by two chapters on "The many uses of Dutch in Japan" and "Language contact." Here and elsewhere, Joby emphasizes that language contact involved many languages: Japanese, Portuguese (the Portuguese had been a presence in Japan in the period 1543-1639), Latin, Malay, varieties of Sinitic (classical Chinese), Korean, Ainu, German, Russian, Manchu, French, and English. All these languages had some, albeit often very small, role in *interference* in both Dutch and Japanese texts. A larger point of this book is that language contact must always be viewed in the context of multilingualism.

While professional interpreters and sex workers in Nagasaki interacted with Dutch traders on an almost daily basis and while a handful of Hollandologists could meet members of the Dutch embassy when they visited Edo (as Tokyo was then called), most language contact and especially its most far-reaching instances occurred through and in books. Because of the practically exclusive link between books in Dutch and the professional use Japanese readers made of them, it was men who activated such language contact. The poet Ema Saikō (1787-1861), one of the rare women to compose poetry in literary Sinitic, illustrates such a gender division in a double portrait of two readers when she describes her aged father, a doctor trained in 'Dutch medicine' (*ranpō*), and herself with Chinese books: "The old father studies books from Holland; / his child reads verses from the Tang and Song" (adapted from Saito 1998, 116). During the late 18th and first half of the 19th century, more than a thousand Dutch books (often themselves translations from French, for example) were

translated into Japanese. Joby demonstrates how such translation projects resulted in a deep engagement with the Dutch language.

Joby's longest chapter, which deals with the lexical, syntactic, and graphic interference by Dutch in the Japanese language, is rather technical in especially its comprehensive listing (over 600 entries!) of varieties of loanwords. Even so, it is instructive in, for instance, its observation that the Japanese struggle to indicate the agent in passive clauses was aided by the Dutch word *door* ('by'), translated with the compound suffix *ni yotte* ('by'); this is still a dominant grammatical construction in modern Japanese. Gratifying to see in a book about language contact, Joby also notes that Japanese borrowed a number of grammatical terms from Dutch, following the principle of *loan translation* (for example, *mōchō*, 'appendix,' but a compound literally meaning 'blind' and 'bowel,' from the Dutch *blinde darm*). In other words, the language to describe language also became indebted to Dutch.

The final chapter deals with the swan song of Dutch in Japan after that country opened it borders to other foreigners. Dutch went with a bang: mid-19th century negotiations between Britain and Japan were conducted through translations from and to Dutch as mediating diplomatic language. Also, Dutch was a steppingstone to learn other European languages. But the usefulness of Dutch had withered by the end of the century.

The Dutch language in Japan (1600-1900) is a dense, yet eminently readable book that underscores the enormous importance of language contact in the development of languages. Joby's history on the sustained contact between the Dutch and Japanese languages is both a fascinating tale of a not very widely known fact of Japanese immersion in the Dutch language and an exceedingly convincing argument for further studies of multilingual language contact.

References

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About the reviewer

Ivo Smits is professor of Arts and Cultures of Japan at Leiden University (Netherlands). He teaches about literature and film in Japan. He studied at the universities of Leiden, Cambridge, and Tokyo, as well as Waseda University, and was visiting faculty at Yale University and Tōhoku University. He specializes in traditional Japanese literature, especially classical court poetry in both Japanese

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