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**At the crossroads of the Japanese and Georgian culture  
(Problems of translating diplomatic correspondence)**

**Lasha Bolkvadze**

Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University  
Doctoral Student, Doctoral Program in Philology,  
66 Gorgiladze st. 6010 Batumi, Georgia  
+995 598 090 900, l.bolkvadze@hotmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9751-650X>

**Marine Aroshidze**

Professor  
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University  
Georgia, 6010. Batumi, Ninoshvilist. 32/35  
+995577141030. marina.aroshidze@bsu.edu.ge  
ORCID identifier is 0000-0001-8211-8421

**Annotation**

Modern Georgia is actively establishing diplomatic relations with multiple European and Asian countries. Diplomatic relations represent the most challenging form of intercultural communication, necessitating interdisciplinary studies. This article presents a translation of correspondence between Japanese and Georgian official entities and specific politicians, requiring analysis of linguistic, cultural, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic aspects mentioned in the source text. The empirical data from diplomatic correspondence is sourced from the official website of the Embassy of Japan (<https://www.ge.emb-japan.go.jp>).

The research revealed intriguing aspects in the official Japanese-Georgian correspondence: differences in the type and format of diplomatic letters; unique aspects of Japanese and Georgian etiquette; specific cultural nuances that may be opaque to representatives from other cultures, necessitating pragmatic adaptation for Georgian-speaking readers. Such adaptation can enhance mutual understanding and boost the effectiveness of cultural communication.

**Keywords:** Diplomatic Discourse; Japanese-Georgian Relationships; Cultural, Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Aspects of Translation; Realia; Background Information.

## **Introduction**

The history of Georgian and Japanese relations can be divided into three distinct periods: ancient Georgia and Japan (separate contacts from the 17th to 19th centuries); the tense period during the Soviet Union; and the third period, characterized by modern free Georgia's diplomatic relations with the "Land of the Rising Sun." This third period began on 3rd August 1992, when Japan recognized Georgia's independence (Embassy of Japan in Georgia, 2022).

As Mariam Bibilashvili notes in the political document "30 Years of Diplomatic Relations between Georgia and Japan: Achievements and Perspectives of Partnership" (1997), after the introduction of "Eurasian diplomacy" by Japanese Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto, representatives of the Japanese government began visiting Georgia, leading to democratic and energy rehabilitation projects. Inspired by Japanese Foreign Ministers Taro Aso's "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" and Taro Kono's "Caucasus Initiative," the period since 2006 has been marked by higher level visits, the initiation of significant projects and bilateral agreements, and political support for shared values such as freedom, the rule of law, democracy, and market economy (Bibilashvili, 2022).

In his monograph "The Land of the Rising Sun through the Eyes of Georgians," Niko Javakhishvili, a Doctor of History and professor at

TSU, presents intriguing facts about the history of Georgian-Japanese relations (Javakhishvili, 2014: 12-19).

Any effective cross-cultural communication is essential for any fruitful relationship, and this necessitates learning about the Japanese language and culture. Although Japanese language and culture stimulate great interest in Georgian society, there is a shortage of material forming background knowledge necessary for Georgians to learn about Japanese language and culture. Besides linguistic and cultural aspects, the sociological aspect is equally significant, as diplomatic relations involve many pragmatic subtleties that complicate the translation process.

It is common understanding that adequate translation aims to accurately convey content, emotional nuances, maintain the form, language, and style of the text, and pragmatically adapt it considering the background of the new reader.

### **Methods**

The present article employs a combination of general scientific and specific linguistic methods, including the methods of description and comparison and contrast, analysis and synthesis, as well as discourse analysis. It also incorporates interdisciplinary approaches, particularly focusing on the pragmatic aspect of linguistic and cultural analysis.

### **Research object**

The object of our research is a specific type of Japanese diplomatic discourse: official letters. Given the varied understanding of discourse in modern humanities, we have adopted the following working definitions for discourse in this study: *discourse refers to the process of language activity within a social context and its outcomes.*

From the examples of Japanese-Georgian diplomatic correspondence that we have analyzed, the following issues stand out:

- 1) Characteristics of the formal structure of official letters;
- 2) Differences in addressing protocols;
- 3) Specific aspects of cultural contexts;

- 4) Pragmatic adaptation of contextual background information for Georgian readers.

The analyzed material revealed the following features:

- 1) Distinct characteristics in the type and format of diplomatic letters;
- 2) Contrasts in Japanese and Georgian etiquette;
- 3) Specific nuances in cultural contexts.

### **Peculiarities of the type and form of diplomatic letters**

Diplomacy serves as the mechanism for executing the foreign policy of states, encompassing practical measures and methods considered to suit specific conditions and objectives. In the realm of international relations, diplomacy acts as a mediator to prevent or resolve conflicts, facilitate consensus and mutual cooperation decisions, and foster the expansion and deepening of international cooperation.

International relations, foreign policy, and diplomacy are intricately interconnected, with systematic official correspondence exchanged among representatives of these structures. This correspondence unveils diverse capabilities, cultural nuances, and specific pragmatics inherent in the source language and target language systems.

There are various types of official letters in diplomatic correspondence, categorized as open or closed depending on the sender and recipient. For instance, one government may address another with a memorandum, note, statement, etc. In our analysis, the focus was made on the official letters from the Japanese embassy, which are accessible on the website (<https://www.ge.emb-japan.go.jp/itprka/cultureandinformation20180207.html>). These types of letters encompass a wide range of forms, including informational letters, letter-messages, attached letters, letters of offer, letters of reminder, letters of announcements, letters of requests, letters of informing, letters of

advertisement, letters of complaints, letters of congratulation, etc. In our empirical analysis, we primarily encountered three types of letters:

- 1) letters of congratulation;
- 2) information letters;
- 3) letters of offer.

All diplomatic or business letters typically include the following necessary parameters:

- 1) Contact information of the addresser (author of the letter);
- 2) Date of the letter;
- 3) Addressee's (recipient's) contact information;
- 4) Salutation;
- 5) The main body of the letter;
- 6) Conclusion/summary.

The format of Japanese letters differs from the format we typically have. In this context, we are not referring to the two variants of Japanese writing - horizontal and vertical, but rather analyzing the order of information delivery (see Figure 1).

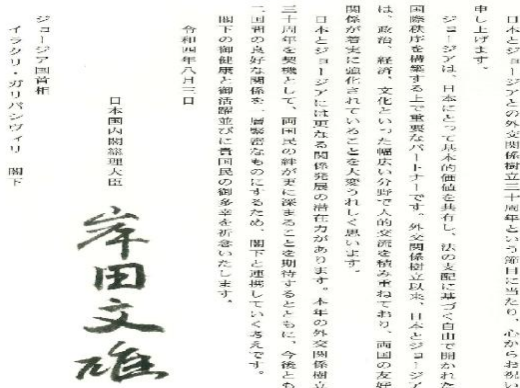


Fig. 1 Letter of congratulation (source: the Japanese embassy website)

In the English-translated versions, the following sequence can be observed (See. Figure 2.):

Fig. 2. Letter of congratulation (in English) (source: the Japanese embassy website)

August 3, 2022

H.E. Mr. Irakli Garibashvili  
Prime Minister of Georgia

Your Excellency,

I would like to extend my sincere congratulations on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Georgia.

Sharing basic values with Japan, Georgia is an important partner of our country in developing free and open international order based on the rule of law. Ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations, Japan and Georgia have been promoting people-to-people exchange in wide areas such as political, economic and cultural ties and I am very pleased that our friendly relations are steadily developing.

Japan and Georgia have potential for further development of the relationship. Taking the opportunity of 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, I hope that the bonds between our peoples will become stronger and would like to cooperate with Your Excellency to further deepen the excellent relations between our countries.

I wish Your Excellency your health and every success in your endeavour as well as well-being of your people.

KISHIDA Fumio  
Prime Minister of Japan

The details of the addresser/addressee are positioned differently, and what is particularly interesting is the signature of the letter's author, often displayed in large and bold hieroglyphs.

Diplomatic letters are designed to be concise and purposeful, distinguishing them from other forms of correspondence that may carry more extensive details. They leverage implicit techniques, such as clichés, condensed content invariants, words with additional connotations, and cultural references to ensure effective communication. This highlights the significance of possessing background knowledge, which we will explore in depth later on.

## **The difference between Japanese and Georgian etiquette**

An interesting aspect showcasing the distinctiveness of Japanese and Georgian cultures lies in their etiquette conventions developed over centuries, encompassing greetings, salutations, addresses, and other linguistic structures.

Speech etiquette encompasses a set of fixed expressions deeply embedded in language and culture, regulating how individuals communicate within a society, especially in situations involving initiating and maintaining contact. These formulas cover a broad spectrum of actions, including addressing, greeting, bidding farewell, apologizing, expressing gratitude, congratulating, offering wishes, sympathizing, offering condolences, extending invitations, seeking advice, and more.

According to the prominent linguist Natalia Formanovskaja, etiquette refers to "rules of speech behavior established by society, compulsory for all members of society - encompassing norms governing our interactions and behavior that is culturally specific, firmly embedded in speaker formulas, yet also subject to historical evolution/changeability" (Formanovskaja, 1989: 5).

Throughout history, Eastern culture has been distinguished from the Western culture by its customs, unique perspectives, speech patterns, and more. The symbolic contrast between West and East is widely acknowledged: the West embodies a "culture of intellect," while the East is associated with "emotions." Georgia occupies a historically significant region that serves as a dividing line and a bridge, connecting both North and South, as well as West and East.

In the letters we have analyzed, we would like to emphasize the following aspects of Japanese etiquette:

- 1) In Georgian culture, there are specific forms of polite address: "ბატონო (Mr)" for men and "ქალბატონო (Mrs/Ms.)" for women.

However, Japanese culture employs the same form of address for everyone, using either "san" or "sama," regardless of gender.

What distinguishes them? The first form, "San," is the standard polite address used in general contexts, while the second, "Sama," is reserved for formal or special speech situations and conveys a higher level of politeness. It is crucial to pay attention to the correct use of etiquette forms, as the Japanese language system is deeply rooted in Japanese culture, traditions, customs, and human factors. Consequently, incorrect usage can lead to significant misunderstandings.

The mentioned letters use this "super polite" form of address.

- 2) In Georgian official letters, the author typically uses a cliché construction where the polite address (Mr., Mrs.) comes first, followed by the position, name, and surname of the official. Conversely, the Japanese cliché phrase is structured differently, starting with the polite form, followed by the last name, and concluding with the position (refer to Fig. 1).
- 3) Another interesting characteristic of Japanese culture observed in the analyzed letters is the use of only the surname or surname and position in addresses, without including first names, which is typical in Georgian culture.

### **Peculiarities of cultural realia**

Intercultural communication involves interactions between individuals from diverse cultures. Through intercultural dialogue, communicators become acquainted with ethno-cultural nuances, which may either be unique to the source culture or hold varying significance and perceptions in the target culture.

As noted by prominent Bulgarian translators Sergey Vlahov and Sider Florin, realia encompass various aspects of social life, covering a wide range of themes. Based on their distribution, realia can be categorized into three main groups:



- 1) Internationalisms;
- 2) Regional realia;
- 3) Ethnocultural realia (Vlahov, Florin, 2009: 12).

From a translation perspective, realia from the first group generally pose no significant challenges, as they operate similarly across multiple languages. Such internationalisms are commonly utilized in diplomatic and political discourse, including terms, for instance:

*Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy, Minister, Ambassador, Press Release, and so forth.*

	Japanese (source language)	English (target language)	Georgian (target language)
Government structure	外務省, 大使館	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy	საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტრო, საელჩო
Position	大臣, 大使, 副首相	Minister, Ambassador, Vice Premier	მინისტრი ელჩი ვიცე პრემიერი
Toponyms	コーカサス, 黒海	Caucasus, Black sea	კავკასია შავი ზღვა
Official documents	プレスリリース	Press release	პრეს-რელიზი

Examples of the second group, referring to regional realia, are less prevalent in diplomatic correspondence, as officials typically represent the entire state rather than specific local regions.

Translation challenges primarily arise from entities in the third group - ethnocultural realia. From our analysis of the letters, we have identified the following examples:

相撲・Sumo・სუმო

平成・Heisei・ჰეისეი

歌舞伎・Kabuki・კაბუკი,

გახდით პირველი ქართველი სუმოსტი, რომელიც ომეკის რანგში დაწინაურდა. .

<https://www.ge.embjapan.go.jp/itprka/tochinoshinozekigeo20180530.html>

ジョージア出身力士として初の大関昇進

[https://www.ge.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_ja/tochinoshinozekijpn20180530.html](https://www.ge.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/tochinoshinozekijpn20180530.html)

It is noteworthy that in the era of modern globalization, Japan's efforts in "peaceful diplomacy" have contributed to the widespread popularity of Japanese cinema, expanding the influence of ethnocultural realia. For instance, the metaphorical name "Land of the Rising Sun" has gained widespread use in mass media, or even recently the exotic dishes like "sushi" and spicy sauce paste "wasabi," made exclusively from a plant native to the mountains of Japan, have become familiar and beloved for many.

### **The pragmatic adaptation of background information for Georgian readers**

The challenges in understanding ethnocultural realia stem from the varying levels of background information found in the source and target languages and cultures. In any text, only a portion of the information is explicitly stated, whereas, the rest may be implied or condensed, requiring readers to infer a deeper layer of context. Translators must analyze the differing levels of communicative backgrounds and in many cases employ pragmatic adaptation techniques to accurately convey the textual information.

In our analysis of the correspondence, several intriguing layers of background cultural information was uncovered.

Japan's calendar is notably distinct compared to other countries. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1873, Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar. Prior to that, the traditional lunisolar calendar, rooted in the Chinese calendar, widely applied until 1873. Presently, the traditional calendar is primarily employed for ceremonial, astrological, and cultural purposes (source: <https://www.ndl.go.jp/koyomi/chapter1/s2.html>).

In everyday life, Japan employs a unique chronology system known as the "Land of the Rising Sun," which counts years based on the reigning emperor's era. Years are calculated from the start of the emperor's reign (元号 りんご:), for instance, 2012 corresponds to Heisei's 24th year.

In the press release celebrating the award of the Emperor of Japan received by Mrs. Nino Ananiashvili, the following date options are indicated.

**In the source text:**

4月29日、日本政府は平成29年春の叙勲の受章者を発表し、ジョージアからはニノ・アナニアシヴィリ国立オペラ・バレエ劇場バレエ芸術監督が旭日中綬章を受章することとなりました。

<https://www.ge.emb-japan.go.jp/files/ananiashviliorder/ananiashvilipressreleasejpnweb.pdf>

**In the Georgian translation:**

ა.წ. 29 აპრილს იაპონიის მთავრობამ გამოაცხადა იაპონიის იმპერატორის ჯილდოს ლაურეატები 2017 წელს გაზაფხულისათვის. საქართველოდან, ქალბატონი ნინო ანანიაშვილი, თბილისის ზ. ფალიაშვილის სახელობის ოპერისა და ბალეტის სახელმწიფო აკადემიური თეატრის ბალეტის სამხატვრო ხელმძღვანელი, დაჯილდოვდება ლენტით დამზვენებული ამომავალი მზისა და ოქროს სხივების ორდენით.

(This year, on April 29, the Japanese government announced the recipients of the Emperor of Japan Award for spring 2017. Among them is Mrs. Nino Ananiashvili, the Artistic Director of the Ballet at the Paliashvili State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater in Tbilisi, who was honored with the Order of the Rising Sun and Golden Rays, adorned with a ribbon.)

(<https://www.ge.emb-japan.go.jp/files/ananiashviliorder/ananiashvilipressreleasegeoweb.pdf>)

In this case, the translator employed pragmatic adaptation by avoiding an extensive explanation and did not overload the content of the document with the explanation of the national peculiarities of Japanese date system and instead directly translated it into a format familiar to Georgian readers.

Several congratulatory letters of the Japanese ambassador are dedicated to Georgian sportsmen. He congratulates the Prime Minister of Georgia on the success of the Georgian sumo wrestlers. In his address to the Prime Minister of Georgia, the ambassador uses notable nicknames familiar in the sumo world, such as Tochinoshin, Kokai, and others, instead of using their full names familiar to Georgian readers.

The fact is that sumo holds a special status as Japan's national sport, and notable sumo wrestlers within their federation are bestowed with honorific titles that carry significant semantic and emotional weight.

"Tochinoshin" refers to the renowned Georgian sumo wrestler Levan Gorgadze, who won the 2018 Emperor of Japan Cup. Understanding his honorific name requires knowledge of the Japanese sumo tradition, where all professional sumo wrestlers are assigned a special title (Shikona) with significant meaning. The first part of the name signifies the wrestler's training school, while the second part reflects their achievements in the sport.

Since Levan Gorgadze is a representative of the Kasugano school, the first part of his shikona (surname) is "Tochi", derived from Tochi prefecture in Japan, where the Kasugano school's owner worked. The second part carries not only significance but also profound emotional weight, symbolizing "heart." Thus, the Georgian athlete is acknowledged as the embodiment of "heart" within the Japanese professional sumo world.

"Kokai," or the full name "Kokai Futoshi" (Kokkai Futoshi)

Levan Tsaguria, known as Kokai (full name Kokai Futo), holds the distinction of being the first European to become Juryo in sumo, an ancient Eastern wrestling tradition. The Japanese nicknamed him Kokai, which translates to "Black Sea" in Japanese, indicating his origin from Sukhumi.

## **Conclusion**

Based on our analysis of diplomatic correspondence, we have reached the following conclusion:

- 1) Diplomatic correspondence, especially official letters, presents a distinctive form of discourse, amalgamating elements from diplomatic and journalistic styles, alongside the typical format found in epistolary writing.
- 2) The Japanese language system is intricately intertwined with Japanese cultural customs, resulting in differences with corresponding English and Georgian texts, particularly in the specific format of official letters and etiquette protocols.
- 3) Regarding translation challenges, the major hurdle lies in transposing cultural realia. Upon analyzing official letters, it becomes evident that while internationalisms with equivalents are present, the region-specific realia are notably absent. This issue particularly is particularly pronounced when dealing with the cultural nuances of

Japan, which we have tentatively categorized into two groups: widely recognized aspects of Japanese culture (like sumo, sushi, and wasabi), and ethno-cultural nuances requiring contextual background. Translators typically adopt two approaches: explanatory methods (as with Tochinoshin), or pragmatic adaptation, such as substituting the Japanese dating system with a format comprehensible to Georgian readers.

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