

# Interpreting the interpreter

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1. The purpose of this paper is to interpret the personal attitudes towards language which Father João Rodrigues, the interpreter, maintained through his stay in Japan.

2. Rodrigues arrived in Japan in 1577 having left Portugal probably in 1574 or at least no later than Spring of 1575, proceeding via Goa and Macau. During the next 56 years that he spent in Japan and China, as Michael Cooper describes in his book *Rodrigues the Interpreter* (Note 1), Rodrigues won the friendship of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, and was also actively involved in the silk trade between Japan and China. Cooper asserts that Rodrigues was for some years the most influential European in Nagasaki and in the entire country and this would certainly seem to be the case.

Rodrigues visited Kyoto in late 1577 or early 1578 just 4 or 5 years after Oda Nobunaga had forced the 15th Ashikaga shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiaki, to retire, although there is no record of Rodrigues actually meeting Nobunaga on that occasion. Rodrigues' actions and movements in the subsequent ten-year period are difficult to trace but he was apparently involved in teaching in some of the schools established by the Jesuits in Kyushu and in Kyoto.

Reviewing the studies of Rodrigues in Japan, by the autumn of 1581, he began studying humanities at Funai, finishing the course

in the summer of 1583 and beginning philosophy, also at Funai, in the autumn of 1583. Two years later, in 1585, he finished the philosophy course and began theology studies, but due to internal political and military events his studies were interrupted. In late 1586 the Funai Jesuit College was evacuated to Yamaguchi and in August of 1587 Hideyoshi surprisingly issued an edict ordering the Jesuits to leave Japan. For this purpose, they assembled in Hirado, ostensibly to wait for transportation, but since the edict was not strongly enforced none actually left the country on that occasion. In 1588, Rodrigues began teaching Latin in a boys' school in Hachirao and the following year he finished his teaching there and resumed his theological studies.

In 1591 most of the year was spent in Kyoto on diplomatic business and he continued his theological studies at Nagasaki from 1592 to 1593 with occasional absences for diplomatic business at court. It is possible that Rodrigues was in a group of Jesuits who were received by Hideyoshi in Osaka Castle in May of 1586 and also that he was included in a group which met Hideyoshi the day on which he signed his edict expelling the Jesuits. While the certainty of Rodrigues having met Hideyoshi on these dates is not completely definite, it is definite that he did meet Hideyoshi as the interpreter to the Jesuit Visitor Valignano in March, 1591. Since Hideyoshi had previously issued an edict expelling Jesuits from Japan, it was a very volatile situation, but Hideyoshi appears to have been impressed by the embassy that Valignano headed, including some young Japanese who had just returned from a visit to Portugal, Spain and Rome. It also appears that Hideyoshi was extremely impressed by Rodrigues, and even after the extremely successful embassy visitation of Valignano he indicated that he

wished to meet Rodrigues further and there were several more meetings. Hideyoshi gave Valignano permission to return to Nagasaki and wait for the next boat for Portugal the following year but repeatedly reminded him that he wished Rodrigues to stay in Kyoto.

Hideyoshi seems to have several changes of mind over the next couple of years concerning Christianity and the Jesuits and each time it was Rodrigues who was drafted in to help resolve the problem. In September of 1591, Rodrigues was called and entrusted with carrying the reply to the letter brought by Valignano from the Viceroy of India. As a result of Rodrigues' negotiations, permission was given for 10 missionaries to remain at Nagasaki, as long as they did not try to teach the Japanese people or to convert any to Christianity. This was taken to indicate that the Jesuit mission could continue its activities as long as they were unobtrusive. It was in 1593 that Rodrigues in his capacity of lobbying for the Christian cause visited Tokugawa Ieyasu, apparently on the invitation of Ieyasu.

From 1595, at the direct request of Hideyoshi, Rodrigues became involved in obtaining silk from China. The silk trade was an extremely important part of the funding of the Jesuit mission and although it gave Rodrigues prominence, it also caused many problems and eventually led to his expulsion.

In addition, from the late 1500's other Catholic orders, apart from the Jesuits were attempting to enter Japan and although various popes gave instructions concerning the relative roles of orders in Macao, the Philippines and Goa etc. the stage was set for a conflict among the different orders and the different nationalities, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian.

It is interesting to know that Hideyoshi was acutely aware of the spread of the power of Spain and he inquired of Rodrigues whether the King of Spain was also king of Portugal, Mexico and the Philippines, indicating a fear that the Christian missionaries, including the Jesuits, were front men for colonialism.

Rodrigues was also a witness to the killing of 26 Christians in February, 1597 at Nagasaki, triggered by events stemming from the wreckage of a Spanish galleon from the Philippines bound for Mexico. The political events that were triggered by this shipwreck are extremely difficult to reconstruct. The pilot of the San Felipe was reported to have told the Japanese that Spanish and Portuguese colonial domination was always preceded by missionaries. This news, when received by Hideyoshi, made him extremely angry with the Christian missionaries and that event led eventually to the crucifixion of 26 martyrs in Nagasaki.

This was the first time that foreign missionaries had been killed by the government and it meant that the situation was extremely sensitive. This was further compounded by the fact that Hideyoshi was ill and aging. In the same year, 1597, all Jesuits, with the exception of Rodrigues, were ordered to be expelled by Hideyoshi. At this juncture, Hideyoshi made a point to call Rodrigues and point out that the Spanish king had always prepared his colonialization by sending advance missionaries. (It could be that Rodrigues used his Portugueseness as a defense for (a) himself and (b) the Jesuits.) In 1598, further orders were made for the Jesuits to leave and in March of that year, 11 Jesuits left as scapegoats to satisfy that decree. However, Hideyoshi was becoming more severely ill and the last times that Rodrigues met him were September 6th and September 7th of 1598. Hideyoshi

died on the 16th of September of that year. In the same year, 1598, Rodrigues became the treasurer of the Jesuit mission. In the following year, 1599, Rodrigues met Ieyasu and discussing with him the position of the Christian mission, was told to be patient, indicating that if things went well with Ieyasu politically, there might be a place for the Jesuits in Japan.

In 1600, Ieyasu won the battle of Sekigahara, giving him control over the entire country. Rodrigues met Ieyasu in 1600 and 1601 and that year Ieyasu granted permission for the Jesuits to have residences in Nagasaki. In 1601, Rodrigues was officially admitted to the priesthood. Ieyasu decreed that all Portuguese merchants should deal through Rodrigues, and although this gave Rodrigues much power at the time, it also caused a reaction later in 1609 and he was criticized for his commercial activities. Rodrigues continued to visit court in 1604 and 1605, and it was during this time that, despite all this frenzied political activity, in 1604 the *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam* was produced, bearing on the title page the name Father Joao Rodrigues of the Society of Jesus.

The last of the folios of the *Arte* was printed in 1608, but it is likely that the bulk of the work was produced before 1604 and that printing began in that year. Nevertheless, by 1608, the problems related to the municipal politics and the international politics related to the silk trade and also within factions in Japan, led to the events that culminated in the expulsion of Rodrigues.

In the description made later in 1619 by the Jesuit Visitor Francisco Vieira, he said that Rodrigues was capable and willing and he had much influence with the leaders of Japan and many other lords but that he made a great mistake in involving himself in trade and the administration of Nagasaki and through this, he

had made many enemies, and that these enemies eventually persecuted him unfairly and forced him to leave Japan. This was compounded by events in Macao, in a fight between Japanese seamen and the Portuguese, which was further complicated by the attack on a Portuguese galleon off Nagasaki commanded by the person who had commanded the Portuguese troops in Macao, during that problem. In the end, after several attacks on the ship off Nagasaki, the Portuguese blew up and scuttled their own ship with its extremely valuable silk cargo and this precipitated the events that led to the expulsion of the interpreter, probably in March of 1610, and the eventual expulsion of all Christians by the edict of January 27th, 1614.

After he was expelled to Macau, he compiled the *Arte Breve da Lingoa Iapoa* (1620), "the compendium of the *Arte (Grande)*, meant for beginners" (October 31, 1622). Actually, however, this is not just a compendium of the *Arte (Grande)* of 1604-08, but a thoroughly refined or elaborated version.

3. Rodrigues seems to have his own criteria concerning Portuguese orthography and he was very stubborn about them, compared to other contemporary Portuguese missionaries. First of all he was very strict about the distinction of S and Ç in Portuguese. Generally speaking, confusion of S and Ç was already prevalent at least in the southern part of Portugal by the time of "discovery". (Note 2) Actually, the confusion of these two kinds of graphs can be seen even in the works compiled by contemporary Portuguese missionaries in Japan — Rodrigues' colleagues. (Note 3) Rodrigues not only vigorously maintained the S-Ç distinction in all of his works including his manuscripts and his own letters, but also corrected spelling concerning this

distinction in other colleagues' manuscripts. (Note 4) Considering that he was born and (probably) was brought up in the northern part of Portugal where there still exists nowadays the phonological contrast of S-Ç (Note 5), the above distinction must have been Rodrigues' phonetically motivated orthographic criteria even though it was probably opposed to the general tendency of confusion of S-Ç in the southern part of Portugal. (Note 6)

In spelling individual words there are basically two types of orthographic criteria, namely the general vs. personal orthographic criteria anchored in specific words. Some of the former examples are *ano*, *uma*, *ele*, *ela* which were spelled *anno*, *hũa*, *elle*, *ella* respectively at the time in question, basically without exception, in Rodrigues' published and unpublished works as well as in contemporary grammars like those of Oliveira, Barros, Gandavo and Nunes do Leão. (Note 7) Rodrigues, however, continued to abide by another type of orthographic norm, namely his personal standard anchored in specific words like *significar*, *oje* (*hoje*), *melhor*, *sogeito* (*sujeito*). Rodrigues stuck to his own norm in writing these words, that is to say, he always spelled *significar* (not *sinificar*), *oje* (not *hoje*), *melhor* (not *milhor*), *sogeito* (not *sojeito*). Contrary to Rodrigues' criteria, oscillations like *significar-sinificar*, *oje-hoje*, *melhor-milhor*, and *sogeito-sojeito* were seen not only in the contemporary documents but also in Rodrigues' published works (AG & AB) probably due to the influence of supervisors or printers. (Note 8) The stubbornness in orthographic standard which Rodrigues showed through his writing in Portuguese brings us to believe that he was fairly confident in his linguistic competence and hence he maintained his own way of writing Portuguese, even contrary to the general contemporary

orthographic custom in sixteenth and seventeenth century Portugal.

4. Writing his two Japanese grammars, João Rodrigues showed remarkable adherence to his own norms. First of all, unlike the other Jesuits in Japan at that time, he set up his own way of romanizing Japanese. For a Japanese voiced affricate, he chose DZ instead of ZZ, common among the works compiled by the other contemporary Jesuits. He also preferred Ç to S for a Japanese voiceless sibilant. In the *Arte Breve*, Rodrigues newly introduced the letter K instead of C or Q for a Japanese verbal conjugation. All of these independent criteria were often employed by phonetic and/or morphological motivation. Without a strong confidence in his own linguistic capability, he could not have decided to establish his own norm, free from the control or the influence of others, in the romanization of Japanese.

Contrary to the Jesuits who compiled the grammars of the other indigenous languages of the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Note 9), Rodrigues set up ten different parts of speech instead of eight, highly influenced by the Latin grammar: noun, pronoun, verb, participle, postposition (instead of preposition), adverb, interjection, conjunction, particle and article. This framework of ten parts of speech, including the last two categories that Rodrigues set up in describing Japanese was very unique in the contemporary linguistic tradition. Roughly speaking, he called particles and verbal endings expressing honorifics, voice, tense, mood, ... PARTICULA, and the case markers attached to nouns PARTICULA ARTICULAR or ARTIGO. This attitude viewing the particle independent from the other parts of speech is clearly influenced by the contemporary grammatical tradition by



Japanese scholars, the study of TENIFA or TENIVOFA (the study of particles and verbal endings). At the same time Rodrigues' naming of case markers ARTIGO or "article" is not free from the contemporary grammatical tradition in Portugal. The PARTICULA ARTICULAR or ARTIGO was something that unites nouns to other words in the sentence. In spite of the highly academic introspection by Nunes do Leão (Note 10) insisting that DO is the contraction of the preposition DE and the article O, and AO is the contraction of the preposition A and the article O, for the other contemporary scholars like Oliveira, Barros, DO or AO are articles which unite nouns to the other words in the sentence. (Note 11) Rodrigues must have thought the same way, in that Japanese case markers equivalent to DO, AO etc. in Portuguese are all "articles" (PARTICULA ARTICULAR or ARTIGO).

5. Rodrigues in his letter to the Jesuit General presents an introduction to the philosophy of Buddhism and Brahmanism and before it he makes an explanation as to why he is doing this, especially because it is obvious that previous documents written by others before him have described the religious practices of China and India and Japan. In making his excuses, he says that he only does so because it is very necessary although "I will say what I will say because by nature I am not eloquent and have difficulty in writing these things". (January 22, 1616) Yet his description of the teachings of Buddhism and Brahmanism is very succinct and clear. In the middle of this section, it becomes also clear that he is probably writing an opinion that differs from that of the late Father Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who had enjoyed an enormously good reputation. The above quote therefore seems to be a combination of political astuteness in professing unwillingness to

write on the topic and also perhaps some false humility.

This was a very serious matter and eventually required the recalling of the catechism of Father Matteo Ricci and the burning of a book by Father Vagnoni. The reasons he gives are very clear and he could not be accused of lacking in clarity of expression. His criticism in the letter of January 22, 1616, condemning the practice of other Jesuits in conforming to local burial customs for either native persons or dead Jesuits themselves is described as follows “and when our men die, we see heathens doing the same, introducing new ceremonies with our men—something completely unnecessary. All this is done under the pretense of conformity”. This short passage indicates that Father Rodrigues was not one to be overly influenced by the need for conformity or agreement with those and may reflect his strict following of his own policy concerning orthography in Portuguese.

Later he complains of Jesuit scholars in Peking bending the Christian faith in order to agree with the Chinese educated classes and he again criticizes the exalted Father Matteo Ricci about this. “They had not thought it wrong to dissimulate for the time being with basic errors in order to agree with the literati, declaring that up to now Father Matteo Ricci and others had done this. To which I replied that this was not so for the Fathers could not do this nor would the law of God allow this. I continued that if the Fathers had dissimulated, they had not done so to reach agreement; rather, because they were foreigners, they had not fully comprehended their occult sciences with symbols, nor had there been anyone to explain to them,···; but once the hidden poison was understood, it was impossible to dissimulate.”(January 22, 1616) However, later in the same letter he talks about “the high reputation for sanctity

which the good Father Matteo Ricci left in the whole kingdom. Everybody has heard of him and speaks of him as a saint, as indeed he was." Thus we see that concerning the books and catechism and dogma, Father Rodrigues is very willing to stubbornly go up against some people with extremely exalted reputations and authority for the sake of what he believes is right.

Again in the same letter he says, "although I don't have a very elegant style, I am writing this history and later on somebody will polish the style." "My principal aim has been facts rather than style, because style will be the task of somebody else with a reputation" but he also adds concerning his text being polished by others, "and thus it will end up full of mistakes and unfounded guesses of those who put it together and it will not contain true things." (January 31, 1622)

We think these passages indicate that he has a commitment to facts and truth, perhaps more so than others who might be more concerned with form rather than substance. In his 1627 letter to Nuno Mascarenhas he makes a long disclaimer about having no style in Portuguese because he was brought up in the Orient "among the thickets and brambles of these nations" and also he does not have "the ability to write briefly what is required; so I do what I can, rather like miscellany without any order, to express my opinions. And so I hesitate to write unless I have to do so out of obligation, because I do not want to bore the people to whom these dull letters are sent." Nevertheless, in the letters of Father Rodrigues that are available, the meaning is clear, the order in which ideas are presented is very logical, there is no duplication within a given letter, he is extremely circumspect yet he gets his point across. The statement here can only be an attempt at

humility, especially immediately thereafter, he thanks the Reverend Mascarenhas “for writing to this man of Beira of Our Lady of Lapa, from the town of Cernancelhe, for I can be considered a native of that place as I grew up there.” The phrase “this man of Beira” and his statement as to where he is from is very strong and to thank somebody for writing to this man or woman of X, furthermore from the town from Y, is much more proud claim than to say “I was born in the town of Y in the region of X” and it gives one cause to think that Father João Rodrigues was very proud indeed to be from where he was within Portugal. This in itself would tend to strengthen his idea that the language that he used, that is the language of this district, was the correct form of Portuguese and it would give him the motivation to protect and to continue to use the orthography that he had learned as a child.

It is not clear within the sociolinguistic environment of Portugal at that time whether there was an accepted consensus that the Portuguese of Lisbon was the correct Portuguese as opposed to the dialects of other areas. At least the Beira accent was considered to be a minor dialect. Thus Oliveira says that, in his boyhood, he was made fun of by his colleagues in Evora because of his Beira accent. (Oliveira 1536 36v) (Note 12) However, in other countries, for example the United Kingdom of today, some local areas consider their pronunciation to be an older and therefore more genuine or correct form, compared to the English of modern day London or of received pronunciation. It could be that this phenomenon was also at work in the mind of Father João Rodrigues in his approach to Portuguese orthography. There is also the possibility that the Reverend Mascarenhas, to whom this

letter was addressed, was familiar with the area from which Father Rodrigues said he was from, because later in the same letter Father Rodrigues again in an apparent self-criticism that is obviously aimed at the Father Visitor, says "the new Father Visitor who has come here knows about this work, but he has not said a word to me about it. It seems that as I am uncouth Portuguese from Beira I can't talk or explain myself well in words, and so he has not paid any attention to it" This is fairly biting condemnation of the Father Visitor and again reaffirms the notion that Rodrigues is in fact proud of his origins.

6. The letters from Father Rodrigues from China give a picture of a man who is politically aware, able to express himself well and very much determined not to give in to the disciples of Father Matteo Ricci and aspects of their teaching which he believes not to be correct. The remarkable history of Rodrigues shows that he led an extremely significant life and he must certainly have felt that he was in a very unique position in the center of a whirlwind of historical change. For somebody to have succeeded in his position, which we think he did, until the commercial events leading to the eventual expulsion, means that he would have had to have had considerable mental staying power. It might not be too much to say that that very mental staying power can be seen in the steadfast and unwavering nature of his orthography and his way of writing.

[Notes]

Note 1 Cooper (1974)

Note 2 Marçalo (1993), for example, concludes that the confusion must have begun already in the thirteenth century in the suburbs of Lisbon.

Note 3 Examples like *çapadoura* (Voc.5v) instead of *sapadoura*, *naça* (Voc.7r) instead of *nassa*, *escaçamente* (Voc.20r) instead of *escassamente*, *çumo* (Voc. 92r) instead of *sumo* etc. can be seen. The confusion between S and Ç is detected in the following examples: *çujar* (Voc. 238v) — *sujar* (Dic 129); *çujidade* (Voc. 76v, 85r) — *sujidade* (Voc. 65r, 78v, 269r) etc. Examples like *sinco* instead of *cinco* in the *Arte Breve* are probably due to the influence of supervisors or printers. (*sinco* in AB: 74v31, 75r10, 76v27...; *cinco* in AB: 07v01, 08r09, 14v05...)

(Voc: *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam* (1603-04); Dic: *Dictionarium Latino Lusitanicum, Ac Iaponicum* (1595), AB: *Arte Breve da Lingoa Iapoa* (1620))

Note 4 *paçasse* → *passasse*, *conuerçam* → *conuersam* (*Historia da Igreja do Japão* — Ms.15r) (Toyoshima 1996)

Note 5 Vasconcelos (1987), Boléo (1974-75), Cintra (1983) etc.

Note 6 The fact that Rodrigues made the following statements clearly shows a phonological distinction between S and Ç in his mind. (The translation is ours.)

In Japanese pronunciation there is no letter (simple) S like in Latin and in Portuguese as Cesar, casa, casar &c. But more properly there is the letter Ç of Portuguese and of Castilian, as we say çapato, çaça, moço, doçura. It is clearly seen in the alternation of syllables, because ça, ço, çu change into za, zo, zu which are double letters. Therefore those who would like to use sa, so, su, should put a little more force than in our pronunciation, and those who would like to use ça, ço, çu should not put as much force as to fall into another extreme of the “cicioso” pronunciation. (*Arte da Lingoa de Iapam* 1604-08, f 57r)

In their pronunciation there are no soft sa, so, su as in Latin and Portuguese, e.g. casa, Cesar, caso, summa, but there are only ça, ço, çu as in Portuguese or in Old Castilian, e.g. çapato, çaçar, moço, almoço, doçura which are like double syllables and therefore alternate or change into za, zo, zu which are double letters. For example, çanzan, çamazama &c. But it should not be loaded as much as to fall into another extreme of the “cicioso” speech. (*Arte Breve da Lingoa Iapoa* 1620, f 12r)

Note 7 (Results of research)

	OL	BA	GA	NDL	AG	AB	MSH	MSC
<i>anno(s)</i>	1	1	4	9	170	42	106	60
<i>ano(s)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>hûa</i>	93	93	18	133	271	65	3	1*
<i>ua(uma)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>ella(s)</i>	29	21	3	18	19	17	9	10
<i>ela(s)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>elle(s)</i>	36	51	3	26	98	59	38	34
<i>ele(s)</i>	1**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

\*(huma)

\*\*only exception in printed form, perhaps due to the printer

OL: Oliveira (1536) BA: Barros (1540) GA: Gandavo (1574)

NDL: Nunes do Leão (1576) AG: *Arte (Grande)* (1604-08)

AB: *Arte Breve* (1620)

MSH: Manuscripts (*Historia da Igreja do Japão*, in the parts of the manuscripts written in Rodrigues' own hand)

MSC: Manuscripts (Letters from China, in the parts of the manuscripts written in Rodrigues' own hand)

#### Note8 (Results of research)

	MSH	MSC	AG	AB	OL	BA	GA	NDL
<i>significar</i>	1	2	c.400	0	0	7	14	40
<i>sinificar</i>	0	0	0	69	39	27	0	0
<i>oje</i>	3	4	4	0	0	0	0	1
<i>hoje</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<i>melhor</i>	5	3	34	10	0	0	7	9
<i>milhor</i>	0	0	2	0	21	2	0	1
<i>sogeito(s)</i>	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>sojeito(s)</i>	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0

OL: Oliveira (1536) BA: Barros (1540) GA: Gandavo (1574)

NDL: Nunes do Leão (1576) AG: *Arte (Grande)* (1604-08)

AB: *Arte Breve* (1620)

MSH: Manuscripts (*Historia da Igreja do Japão*, in the parts of the manuscripts written in Rodrigues' own hand)

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Note 9 The grammars of Konkani and Kiriri (Stephens(1640), Mamiani(1699)), for example, are described in the framework of



Latin or eight parts of speech.

Note10 “De maneira que quando dizemos ao, a he preposição , & o, he articulo.” (NDL 63v. 1116-17 )

Oliveira, on the other hand, considers DO, DA etc. as articles. (OL Cap.XIX )

Barros also showed the following “declination of articles” (BA 12v)

	Masculine		Feminine	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nom.	O	OS	A	AS
Gen.	DO	DOS	DA	DAS
Dat.	AO	AOS	Á	ÁS
Acc.	O	OS	A	AS
Voc.	Ó	Ó	Ó	Ó
Abl.	DO	DAS (sic.)	DA	DAS

Note11 Maria Filomena Gonçalves(1995)

Note12 Information thanks to Profa. Maria João Marçalo of University of Evora in Portugal

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