

How was Kango (Sino-Japanese Words) Treated in the Early Days of Broadcasting:

- Exploring the Records of NHK Broadcasting Language Committee -

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(Summary)

This report discusses how kango, or Sino-Japanese words, was used in broadcasting mainly during the period from the commencement of broadcasting in Japan to the start of the Pacific War, focusing on “issues on usage” and “issues on reading.”

(1) Earlier days prior to the launch of the Broadcasting Language Committee

Radio broadcast started in 1925, and the Broadcasting Language Committee was established nine years later. However, a movement advocating the use of easy-to-understanding words in broadcasting existed before the launch of the Committee.

(2) 1934 to 1936

The Committee worked on the standardization of the use of homonyms (words identical in sound and words similar in sound) as much as possible. The Committee also tried to standardize the pronunciation of each kango which had multiple reading variants.

(3) 1937

In the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in July 1937, a large number of personal and place names of China became mentioned in broadcasts. Among them there were some names which listeners could not easily associate with corresponding kanji (Chinese characters) only by phonetic information. Besides, as one kanji usually has multiple pronunciations in the Japanese language, Chinese personal and place names as well as Buddhist terms were often read in different ways. The Committee started organizing the pronunciations of such terms.

(4) 1938

Priorities in dealing with kango idioms with different pronunciations had been rather “commonly-used-pronunciation-oriented,” but a sign of “dictionary-pronunciation-oriented” moves loomed around that time.

(5) 1939 to March 1940

The state intervention in broadcasting started intensifying across the board. More and more kango that were difficult to understand only by phonetic information were used in broadcasts. The Committee, however, attempted to take countermeasures, using paraphrasing and other methods. In March 1940, the inaugural stage of the Broadcasting Language Committee (official name:

“Investigative Committee for Improvement of Broadcasting Language and Pronunciation”) ceased its activities, and related clerical works completed in April.

(6) September 1940 to 1941

The second stage of the Broadcasting Language Committee (official name: “Investigative Committee for Language of News”) was launched in September 1940. The Committee narrowed down its research target from “language used in broadcasting across the board” to “broadcasting language and announcements used mainly in news.” Around that time, the state authorities strengthened the control over broadcasting. Against this backdrop, the Committee prepared references for paraphrasing and supplementing.

(7) 1942 to 1945

After the outbreak of the war, the element that the Committee had been pursuing for the practical use in broadcasting—“phonetically easy to understand”—became less and less valued. In March 1945 the second stage of the Broadcasting Language Committee ended its activities.