

Title	A Lexical Ghost Story : *Vicious Hair
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Citation	人文研究 (1983), 66: 29-44
Issue Date	1983-08-31
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10252/1956
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A Lexical Ghost Story: **Vicious Hair*

Michael Carr

A lexical ghost is an accidental word that only exists as a mistake in a dictionary.¹⁾ A ghost word is not the lexical spirit of an obsolete word, it is merely a defect in a dictionary, metaphorically related to a ghost image in a defective television or telescope.²⁾ The term *ghost word* was first used in 1886 by Walter Skeat, who scorned them as

...mere coinages due to the blunders of printers or scribes, or to the perfervid imaginations of ignorant or blundering editors. (OED, *ghost* 14e)

The linguistic problem with a lexical ghost is that after it is mistakenly entered into a dictionary, it becomes an “accepted” word even though it is not an acceptable word.

**Vicious hair* is an excellent illustration of a lexical ghost. The mistaken compound **vicious hair* is not an actual English word; it is neither acceptable to native speakers nor found listed in English dictionaries. Nevertheless, the ghostly **vicious hair* has been printed myriad times. It has been listed in various editions of Kenkyusha’s Japanese-English dictionaries—in the definition of *kuse-ge* 癖毛 ‘kinky/frizzy hair’—for more than sixty years. And it was printed in an advertisement in Pacific editions of *Newsweek* for several years. Credulous people who use diction-

Manuscript received April 26, 1983.

- 1) A *lexical ghost* is also known as a *ghost word/form/name, phantom word, or vox nihili*. The Japanese equivalent is *yūreigo* 幽霊語. For some reason, the *Kokugogaku daijiten* 国語学大辞典 (1980:703) mistakenly gives “ghost word” as the definition for *kasekigo* 化石語 (literally “fossil word”) ‘obsolete word’.
- 2) There are many life/death metaphors for languages and linguistics.

aries are the victims of lexical ghosts.

1. THE HISTORY OF *VICIOUS HAIR

The ghost word **vicious hair* can be traced back through all four editions of Kenkyusha's unabridged Japanese-English dictionaries under the definition for *kuse-ge* 癖毛. The definitions read as follows³⁾

1918: vicious hair

1931: curly (kinky, frizzy) hair

1954: curly (kinky, frizzy, vicious) hair

1974: vicious (kinky, frizzy) hair.

**Vicious hair* first appeared in the 1918 edition, was partially omitted in the 1931 edition, and reappeared in the 1954 and 1974 editions.

In the original edition of Kenkyusha's Japanese-English dictionary (Takenobu 1918: 1187-8), the ghost **vicious hair* is found under the fourth meaning of *kuse*.

kuse (癖). 1 [習癖] *n.* A habit; a trick; a vice (悪癖) ... 4 [髪 of] ㊦ 癖髪 (クセゲ) vicious hair. ㊦ 癖直しをする to straighten out one's hair.

Note that the definiendum *kuse-gami* 癖髪 is glossed as being pronounced *kuse-ge* クセゲ (i. e., 癖毛). This pronunciation gloss is odd, but the definiens **vicious hair* is much odder.

In the second edition (Takenobu 1931: 1120) the word *kuse-ge* is listed separately from the *kuse* definition.

kusege (癖毛) *n.* Curly (kinky, frizzy) hair.

㊦ 癖毛になる develop kinky hair.

At first glance, it would seem that the life of the ghost **vicious hair*

3) The punctuation of these definitions is standardized to that of the fourth edition. The original punctuations are given in the full quotes.

had been mercifully ended. The 1931 edition corrected the mistaken ghost from the 1918 edition. But actually the lexical ghost is still found under the (1931: 1120) definition for *kuse*.

kuse (癖) *n.* [習癖] A habit; a way; a trick; a vice (悪癖); ... [髪の毛] a curl; a kink; a frizz; waviness ... ㊦癖のある髪 curly (vicious) hair ...

The second edition correctly defines *kuse-ge* without using **vicious hair* but erroneously repeats the ghost word under the example of *kuse no aru kami*.

The third edition (Katsumata 1954: 998) gave continued life to the lexical ghost with the following definition

kusege 癖毛 *n.* curly (=kinky, frizzy, or vicious) hair. ㊦癖毛になる develop kinky hair.

The third edition added the aberrant adjective *vicious* to the second edition's correct definitions of *curly*, *kinky*, or *frizzy hair*.⁴⁾

In the fourth edition (Masuda 1974: 994) definition, the lexical ghost is strengthened because the modifier *vicious* is moved up to the initial position, thus:

kuse-ge 癖毛 *n.* vicious [kinky, frizzy] hair.

Why was *vicious* used to replace *curly*? The result of this change in the fourth edition is that it appears as if **vicious hair* is the primary definition of *kuse-ge*, while *kinky hair* or *frizzy hair* are secondary synonyms. Why was *vicious* moved to the initial position of the definiens instead of being deleted? The fourth edition also added a new

4) The third edition (Katsumata 1954: 997) definition of *kuse* 癖 notes a semantic extension from 'kinky hair' to 'wrinkled cloth' as "...2 [髪・布などの] a curl; a kink; a friz; waviness;..."

definition for *kuse-naoshi* 癖直し 'hair straightening' as a separate compound.⁵⁾

The ghost definition **vicious hair* is found in all four editions (1918, 1931, 1954, and 1974) of Kenkyusha's unabridged (*New Japanese-English Dictionary*). This publisher's small condensations—*New Little Dictionary* or *New Pocket Japanese-English Dictionary*—do not gloss *kuse-ge*; but their abridged *New School Japanese-English Dictionary* (Masuda 1968: 580) defines *kuse-ge* as "vicious (kinky) hair."

The history of **vicious hair* begins with the above dictionaries but it does not end there. Kenkyusha's unabridged edition is probably the best available Japanese-English dictionary. Because of its overall excellence, this dictionary is widely used. Yet a person who uses this dictionary cannot always rely upon its definitions. (The same could be said of a person who either watches a television or looks through a telescope with a ghost image.) The user has the ghostly problem even though it originates from an error in the dictionary (or television or telescope).

From a lexicographical perspective, **vicious hair* is only one small mistake in a generally reliable dictionary. But from a linguistic perspective, usage of this ghost word can magnify the mistake. **Vicious hair* was printed for several years in the Pacific editions of *Newsweek* magazine.⁶⁾ The Jujin Hospital (and Beauty Parlor, *sic*) ran a series of display advertisements for hair-straightening. The headline of this advertisement was:

KINKY OR VICIOUS HAIR
MAY BE CHANGED
TO A LOVELY, GLOSSY HAIR.⁷⁾

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- 5) The fourth edition (Masuda 1974: 994) definition of *kuse* 癖 also includes "...2 [髪・布などの] a curl (巻き毛の); a kink (縮れ); a friz (縮れ)..."
- 6) This advertisement appeared sporadically in the Pacific editions of *Newsweek*. From a cursory inspection, it may have first appeared in November 22, 1976 (p. 39) and last in February 18, 1980 (p. 49).
- 7) For information—including brochures with before and after pictures—concerning the Jujin hair-straightening process, write in English or

Disregarding the problem of the word *a* in the phrase “to *a* lovely, glossy hair” (after receiving the patented Jujin process, does one only have *a* hair?), there is the problem of how to parse the word *or* in the phrase “kinky *or* vicious hair.” Does this mean the straightening process works for ‘either kinky *or* vicious hair’ (as for ‘either black *or* blonde hair’)? Or does it mean that ‘kinky’ *or* ‘blonde’ are somehow synonyms (as for ‘golden’ *or* ‘blonde’ hair)? Either way, there is little doubt of how *vicious hair found its way into this advertisement. This mangling of English is almost certainly the result of trusting Kenkyusha’s definition of *kuse-ge* 癖毛.

2. THE SEMANTICS OF *KUSE-GE*

The ghost definition of *vicious hair for *kuse-ge* 癖毛 ‘frizzy/kinky hair’ probably originated from a false analogy based on *kuse* 癖. *Kuse* 癖 means ‘habit’ and can mean ‘vicious habit, vice’. This sense of ‘vicious (habit)’ for *kuse* 癖 is the suspected cause for the ghost of *vicious hair for *kuse-ge* 癖毛.

The word *kuse-ge* 癖毛 is defined in the SJD (日本国語大辞典 3:137) as ‘hair that is unusually curly and unmanageable’.⁸⁾ The first written usage of *kusege* 癖毛 was (according to this same SJD definition) in 1921, in Shiga Naoya’s 志賀直哉 “An-ya koro” 暗夜行路; but *kami no kuse* 髪 of the 癖 is much older, and is noted (SJD 3: 127) to have been used in 1757.⁹⁾

Kuse 癖 is the base for *kuse-ge* 癖毛, and this base has an unusual semantic history. The word *kuse* 癖 has meanings (and first recorded usages, according to SJD 3:136) of: 1. ‘habitual personal inclination/partiality’ (c. 950), 2. ‘characteristic way/practice/custom’ (1187), 3. ‘defect/weakness in a person (or a person’s manner of expression)’(c. 1050), 4. ‘something that has been curved/bent/folded/wrinkled and will not revert to its original shape’(1757). This fourth sense of *kuse* is the one applied to hair in *kuse-ge*.

Japanese to: Jujin Hospital and Beauty Parlor, 1-12-5 Shinbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan.

8) “妙に曲がったりしてすなおでない毛髪。”

9) In 雑俳 (川柳評万句合)

The etymology of *kuse* 癖 probably derives from *kuse* 曲 'bend, curve' (according to the *Daigenkai* 大言海, Ohtsuki 1933 2: 22). And this is further said to be semantically related to the word *kuguse* 屈瀬 'shallows, bend in a river'.¹⁰⁾ Note the semantic parallel in the English *bent* which can mean 'personal bias, particular inclination'.

Kuse 癖 is used in expressions other than *kuse-ge* 癖毛. Some common compounds are *kuse-uma* 癖馬 'horse with a bad habit, vicious horse' (*vicious* is quite suitable here), *kuse-goto* 癖事 'idiosyncrasy' (cf. *kuse-goto* 曲事 'crookedness'), and *kuse-mono* 癖者 'ruffian, villain'. And some phrases are *kuse ni naru* 癖になる 'acquire/get a habit', *kuse ga tsuku* 癖が付く 'acquire/get a habit' (or 'get kinky hair, frizz up'), *kuse o naosa* 癖を直す 'cultivate a habit' (or 'straighten kinky hair').

Writing the Japanese word *kuse* 'habit; custom; defect; bent' with the Chinese character 癖 is far afield from this character's original meaning of 'constipation, lump in the stomach'.¹¹⁾ The ancient Chinese word 癖, pronounced *p'iek* or *p'ek*¹²⁾, had three meanings: 1) 'constipation, indigestion, lump in the stomach', 2) 'swelling of the spleen', 3) 'habit, weakness'. The modern Chinese word *pǐ* 癖 usually means the third, as seen in *pīhào* 癖好 'special fondness' or *pìxìng* 癖性 'propensity, eccentricity'.¹³⁾ When the ancient Chinese *p'iek* or *p'ek* 癖 'constipation; swelling of the spleen; habit' was adopted into ancient Japanese, it expanded in pronunciations and meanings. The Kan'on 漢音 pronunciation of *heki* is

10) This *kuse* 'bend (in a river)' is found in the *Manyōshū* 万葉書 (11:6) transcribed as *tamakuse* 玉久世.

11) The Chinese character 癖 is written with the "sickness/illness radical."

12) Bernhard Karlgren and Tung T'ung-ho reconstruct this as *p'iek*, but Chou Fa-gao and Tōdō Akiyasu reconstruct it as *p'ek*. The *Guang-yun* 廣韻 distinguishes a pronunciation of *p'iek* for the meaning of 'swelling of the spleen'.

13) The first and second ancient meanings of this word are only marginally used in modern Chinese medical terminology, e. g., *pībìng* 癖病 '(habitual) constipation/indigestion' or *hánpi* 寒癖 'swelling of the spleen'. (Note the phonetic similarity of *pí* (ancient *b'ieg*) 脾 'spleen'.) The modern Chinese word *pǐ* 痞 'constipation, lump in the stomach; enlarged spleen; scoundrel, ruffian' is homophonous with *pǐ* 癖.

peki is still used in compounds such as *seiheki* 性癖 'natural disposition, idiosyncrasy', *tōheki* 盜癖 'kleptomania', and *kempeki* 痠癖 'stiff shoulders'. The Go'on 呉音 pronunciation of *hyaku* is no longer commonly used. And the native Japanese pronunciation of *kuse* (or *ashinae*) was used for the sense of 'bent, curved'. The Chinese *pì* 癖 does not mean 'bent, curved'; the Japanese *kuse*, *heki*, etc. 癖 does not mean 'constipation; lump in the spleen'.

The modern Japanese word *kuse-ge* 癖毛 is but one member of a lexical field for words meaning 'kinky/frizzy/curly hair'. This field contains common words such as *hami-kuse* 髮癖, *chijire-ge* 縮れ毛, *chiri-chiri* ちりちり, *maki-ge* 巻毛, *maki-gami* 巻髪, *motsure-ge* 纏れ毛, *pāma* パーマ, and *kāru* カール. In the following discussion of this lexical field of Japanese words that mean 'curly hair', the definitions from the four editions of Kenkyusha's unabridged dictionaries will be quoted.¹⁴⁾ The diachronic changes in these definitions provide a perspective for the changes of *kuse-ge* 癖毛 and *vicious hair.

The word that is closest to being a synonym for *kuse-ge* 癖毛 is *kami-kuse* 髮癖.¹⁵⁾ The first two editions (1918 and 1931) do not gloss this word (except indirectly under *kuse* 癖), but the last two define *kami-kuse* 髮癖 as:

1954: a kink; a twist in hair

1974: a kink; a twist in hair.

Chijire-ge 縮れ毛 is another near-synonym, and it comes from a verb meaning 'curl, frizz'. The Kenkyusha definitions for *chijire-ge* are:

1918: fuzz; curls

1931: frizzled (wavy) hair; frizz; curls

1954: frizzled (fuzzy, wavy) hair; frizz; curls

1974: curly (frizzled, fuzzy, wavy) hair; frizz; curls.

14) These are Takenobu 1918 and 1931, Katsumata 1954, and Masuda 1974.

15) Both *ke* 毛 and *kami* 髮 mean 'hair', but the latter is restricted to hair on a human head.

Two cognate words are *chiri-chiri* ちりちり and (the dialectal) *chin-ju* ちんじゅ, both mean 'fuzzy/curly hair', but neither is listed in the Kenkyusha dictionaries.

Maki-ge 巻毛 and *maki-gami* 巻髪 both come from a verb meaning 'roll/wind up'. The definitions for *maki-gami* 巻髪 are:

1918: a tress; a coil

1931: a tress; a coil

1954: a tress; a coil.

Maki-gami is not defined in the 1974 edition. Did the editors feel that it had become obsolete? The definitions (and usage notes) for *maki-ge* 巻毛 are:

1918: a lock; toupee (禿を隠す)

1931: a curl; a ringlet

1954: a curl; a ringlet

1974: a curl; a ringlet; a heartbreaker (婦人の); a quiff (額に
なで降ろした)。

The 1918 edition gives the definition of 'toupee' and notes that this is used to conceal baldness, but this was dropped in the later editions. The 1974 edition adds two dubious definitions for *maki-ge* 巻毛: 'a heartbreaker' and 'a quiff'. *Heartbreaker* has a common meaning of 'one who breaks hearts' and a restricted literary meaning of 'curl, love-lock', that derives from Butler's poetic description of Samson's hair. *Quiff* (from *whiff*) usually means 'puff of smoke/air' but can mean 'forelock of hair' in British usage.

Motsure-ge 纏れ毛 comes from a verb meaning 'tangle, snarl, kink'. The compound *motsure-ge* 纏れ毛 is not defined in either of the first two editions, but the applied sense for hair is noted under the definitions for *motsureru* 纏れる¹⁶⁾. The two definitions for *motsure-ge* 纏れ毛 are:

16) The meanings given under the definitions for *motsureru* are—1918: "tangled (tousled) hair" and 1931: "a kink; a frizz; tangled (matted) hair."

1954: tangled (matted) hair

1974: tangled (matted) hair; elflocks.

The fourth edition has again—as seen for *maki-ge* 卷毛—gone out of its way. *Elflocks* is a fairly limited term that means ‘hair matted as if by elves’.

The lexical field of Japanese words meaning ‘kinky/curly hair’ contains a number of loans from English. In the late 1920’s permanent waves became fashionable in Japan, and related loanwords started to enter into the Japanese lexicon. The Kadokawa dictionary of loanwords (Aragawa 1967) gives the following chronology for the earliest written usages of these words: 1929 *kāru* カール, 1931 *uēbu* ウェーブ, 1935 *pāmanento uēbu* パーマネント・ウェーブ, 1950 both *pāma* パーマ and *kōrudo pāmanento* コールド・パーマネント, 1951 *kōrudo pāma* コールド・パーマ, and 1962 *pāmanento* パーマネント¹⁷⁾. Two more recent loanwords in this field are *kāri-hea* カーリ・ヘア, and *ten-nen pāma* 天然パーマ (which is semantically contradictory—‘natural (curly) perm’). Of course, none of these modern loanwords for ‘curly hair’ are defined in the first two editions (1918 or 1931). The third and fourth editions define *kāru* カール as: ¹⁸⁾

1954: curl (ringlet) of hair; a lock (of hair)

1974: curl (ringlet) of hair; a lock (of hair).

They define *pāma (nento)* パーマ (ネント) as:

1954: a permanent (wave); a perm

1974: a permanent (wave); a perm.

17) This 1962 usage example from the *Mainichi Shimbun* says that permanents began in Japan in 1923.

18) Both editions also list a secondary definition of *kāru* カール in the geographic sense of ‘cirque’ and this comes from the German *Kar*, not the English *curl*.

And *uēbu* ウェーブ as:¹⁹⁾

1954: a wave

1974: a wave.

The 1974 edition also added a definition of *kōrudo-pāma* コールド・パーマ as “cold wave.”

The meaning of *kuse-ge* 癖毛 is ‘curly/kinky/frizzy hair’ and there may be sociolinguistic factors involved in the connotations of this word. It was noted above (section 1) that the earliest recorded usage of the word *kuse-ge* was in 1921, and this is about the same time that permanents became a fad in Japan. The hair of most Japanese people is rather straight. Is it possible that when the ghost definition of **vicious hair* was first published in 1918, there was some sort of “vicious” connotation to having curly hair?²⁰⁾

3. THE CAUSES OF *VICIOUS HAIR

What kinds of mistakes can cause a lexical ghost? Three common causes of ghost words are typographical carelessness, blind copying, and false analogizing. The latter is the most likely cause of **vicious hair*.

The first type of mistake that can cause a lexical ghost is typographical, such as a misprint or a misreading. Any proofreader knows that typographical mistakes are easier to make than to correct. Even the best lexicons have lexical ghosts caused by typographical mistakes. For example, Ohno and Hamanishi’s excellent thesaurus of Japanese (1981: 518) notes a misspelled “English” origin of “parmanent” (*sic*) for パーマネント. At the end of the OED (pp. 333–336) there is a “List of Spurious Words” with several hundred fantastic lexical ghosts.²¹⁾ One typical

19) In the 1954 edition, this ウェーブ is spelled *wēbu*, not *uēbu*.

20) There is a semantic opposition between *nihon-gami* 日本髪 ‘hair coifed in Japanese style’ and *yō-hatsu* 洋髪 ‘hair coifed in foreign style’. Note the “Japanese” pronunciation of *kami/gami* for 髪 versus the “foreign” (i. e., Chinese) pronunciation of *hatsu* for 髮.

21) This list gives details of 82 “more important spurious words” such as

example is the ghost word **phantomnation*.

Phantomnation. Explained as: Appearance as of a phantom; illusion. Error for *phantom nation*. [1725 POPE *Odys*. X. 627 The Phantome-nations of the dead.] Entered as one word in 1820 JODRELL, in accordance with his method of writing compounds: *Phantomnation*, a multitude of spectres. Hence the following entries: 1860 WORCESTER, *Phantomnation*, illusion. Pope. 1864 WEBSTER, *Phantomnation*, appearance as of a phantom; illusion. (*Obs. and rare.*) Pope. So in OGLIVIE (Annandale) and *Cassell's Encycl. Dict.*

The second type of cause for lexical ghosts is blind or careless copying. Lexicographers naturally use available lexical resources and attempt to improve upon them. The above ghost of **phantomnation* was copied by Worcester, Webster, and Oglivie.²²⁾ **Vicious hair* has been copied in all the later editions of Kenkyusha. It seems to be easier to put a bungled definition into a dictionary than it is to take it out.

It is possible, but not yet verified, that **vicious hair* was copied into Takenobu 1918 from an earlier dictionary. This ghost may have originated in some Meiji era Japanese-English dictionary that Takenobu used as a reference. No such reference has been found, but it may well exist.

The third common cause of lexical ghosts is false analogizing. This type of ghost form is usually made by a non-native speaker of a language. Even a renowned linguist like Leonard Bloomfield could make a mistaken analogy that created a ghost word. William Bright (1973: 741) notes that two of Bloomfield's papers in the 1940's cite the Fox ghosts **nesiči* 'my foot' and **nesitani* 'my feet', neither of which is attested in Fox. Bright says that such falsely analogized ghosts "are likely to be especially tenacious since not many control these languages sufficiently to make corrections in them."

**phantomnation* and notes 263 other spurious forms that are entered in main body of the OED.

22) Note that Webster's describes this ghost as "obsolete and rare."

The probable cause of **vicious hair* as a ghost translation for *kuse-ge* 癖毛 was a false analogy based on a meaning of 'vicious habit, vice' for *kuse* 癖. All four editions of the dictionaries in question define *kuse* 癖 as having a meaning of "vice" and parenthetically explain this as *akuheki* 悪癖. The definitions of *akuheki* 悪癖 are:

- 1918: a bad (pernicious) habit
- 1931: a bad habit; a vice
- 1954: a bad (vicious) habit; a vice
- 1974: a bad (vicious) habit; a vice.

These dictionaries also use "vicious habit" and "vice" in their definitions of *akushū* 悪習, *akuhei* 悪弊, *akufū* 悪風, and *akushō* 悪性.²³⁾

Another analogy—this time quite correct—between *kuse* 癖 and 'vicious' is seen in the third and fourth editions, both of which give the example *kuse no aru uma* 癖のある馬 'vicious horse' under the *kuse* 癖 definitions. *Vicious horse* is an excellent English translation—**vicious hair* is not.

In summary, the lexical ghost **vicious hair* is an error that was made in 1918 and repeated ever since. **Vicious hair* is a mistaken translation of *kuse-ge* 癖毛 that probably originated through a mistaken analogy for the meaning of 'vicious (habit)' for *kuse* 癖. A *habit* can be *vicious* in English, but *hair* cannot. It is especially easy for a non-native speaker of a language to make mistakes with semantic selectional restrictions.

4. THE PROBLEM WITH LEXICAL GHOSTS

The reason why **vicious hair* is unattested in English is because it violates the selectional restrictions on the meanings of *vicious* and *hair*. *Hair* can be modified by many adjectives, but not *vicious*. Many things can be *vicious*, but not *hair*. *Vicious* can describe people, animals, statements (especially 'rendered void'), writings (transferable to writers,

23) Blatant sexism can be seen in the 1918 edition's definition of *akushō* 悪性, said to mean either "an evil-natured (ill conditioned) man" or "a vicious woman; a she-devil."

like *kuse* 癖), logic, and arguments. And in a special sense, even a circle can be *vicious*.

To nearly any native speaker of English, **vicious hair* is not an acceptable word (though some find it amusing). In certain limited contexts, hair could be described as being "viciously tangled." "Vicious Hair" might even be a good name for a Punk band, cf. Sid Vicious. But **vicious hair* is definitely not a translation of *kuse-ge* 癖毛.

Erronious ghost translations often occur from taking Japanese words over-literally. The word *abura-ase* 脂汗 'sweat (especially during extreme pain)' is defined in all four editions of Kenkyusha as the literal ghost **greasy sweat*. Such possibilities are endless. One could easily mistranslate *gomashio no atama* 胡麻塩の頭 (lit. "salted sesame head") 'grey/grizzled/frosty hair; salt and pepper hair',²⁴ or *dojō-hige* 泥鰯髭 (lit. "mud-loach beard") 'thin moustache'.²⁵

Lexical ghosts are much more common in bilingual dictionaries than in monolingual ones. Even the best available Japanese-English dictionaries list far too many "English" words that are obsolete, semantically inappropriate, or even non-existent. This is an editorial problem in interlingual lexicography. The introduction to the fourth edition of the Kenkyusha English-Japanese dictionary (Masuda 1974: vi-viii) does mention the importance of consultation (actually *tōgi* 討議 'discussion, debate') with native English speakers, and three are acknowledged. But in the list of the "Editorial Staff," only one of them is listed along with twenty-six Japanese scholars.

Lexical ghosts like **vicious hair* are only a minor problem in Japanese-English dictionaries. But they create many more problems for the people who use these dictionaries. Idehara Hiroaki (1980: 52) calls this problem "being misled by the dictionary" and gives the example of the ghost translation **eye-wax* for *me-yani* 目脂 'eye-mucus'.²⁶ Idehara relates that

24) Why do the major English dictionaries list *pepper and salt hair* as preferable to *salt and pepper hair*?

25) Inoue (1971: 87) notes a similar mistake for the same style of moustache. The *English Duden* lists the ghost **imperial moustache*, apparently coming from the *imperial beard*.

during his graduate studies in America, he trusted a Japanese-English dictionary and wrote the sentence "Her eyes opened a little against sticky eye-wax." This error was corrected and Idehara was told by the corrector "that he had never heard such a term used by any native speakers of English." How far can one trust a dictionary?

This **eye-wax* ghost translation for *me-yani* 目脂 and *me-kuso* 目屎 'eye mucus' is a specter of other questionable "English" translations for words based on *kuso* 屎 'excrement'. *Kuso* 屎 is a lexically productive word, just like the impolite English word *shit*. The semantic field for this group includes *me-kuso* 目屎 (lit. "eye-shit") 'eye mucus', *hana-kuso* 鼻屎 ("nose-shit") 'nasal mucus', *mimi-kuso* 耳屎 ("ear-shit") 'earwax' [the source of **eye wax*?], and *ha-kuso* 齒屎 ("tooth-shit") 'tartar'.²⁷⁾ The Kenkyusha definitions for several of these words contain some unusual English. The definitions of *hana-kuso* 鼻屎 are:

- 1918: nose-dirt; hard mucus of the nose
- 1931: nose-dirt; nasal mucus; (卑) snot
- 1954: nose dirt; nose wax; nasal mucus; (卑) snot
- 1974: nose dirt; nose wax.

**Nose dirt* cannot be attested in modern English, but it may have been an old euphemism. **Nose wax* certainly is a ghost and does not mean 'nasal mucus', but it may have possibilities as a product name.

Japanese-English dictionaries—even the best ones—list lexical ghosts

26) Idehara (1980: 52) quotes Kenkyusha, but this ghost comes from Nelson. The Kenkyusha definition (Masuda 1974: 1085) for *me-yani* 目脂 is "discharge from the eyes; eye mucus; gum (in the corner of the eye)." Nelson (1974: 642) defines *me-yani* 目脂 as "eye wax, eye secretion," and *me-kuso* 目屎 as "eye wax, eye discharge." *Gum* may not be a ghost, but it is questionable. **Eye wax* is definitely a ghost form. Why is *sleep* not glossed in this sense in English dictionaries? Is it restricted to slang or juvenile usage?

27) The colloquial expression *me-kuso ga hana-kuso o warau* 目屎が鼻屎を笑う ("eye-shit laughing at nose-shit") loses something in the English translation of "The pot calling the kettle black."

such as **vicious hair*, **eye wax*, and **nose dirt*, ad nauseam. In remarkable contrast, English-Japanese and Japanese-Japanese dictionaries have far fewer lexical ghosts. Why is it that the same publishers and lexicographers can produce semantically more reliable dictionaries when the definitions are in Japanese?²⁸⁾ The deplorable answer is a long-established editorial policy. Not only Japanese-English dictionaries, but many other Japanese "English" publications are alive with mistaken ghosts. In Japan speakers of English are often employed as proofreaders or rewriters, but final editorial decisions are frequently made by non-native speakers. How can a non-native speaker be sure if he/she is seeing a lexical ghost?

**Vicious hair* is a good illustration of a lexical ghost because of its long history and wide circulation. It has been published in dictionaries for over sixty years, and in a magazine advertisement for over three years. How many times has *kuse-ge* 癖毛 been mistranslated as **vicious hair*? Millions?

Lexical ghosts are part of a "vicious circle" in interlingual lexicography. Once a ghost translation is erroneously included in a dictionary, it tends to get repeated and re-repeated. Future lexicographers can exorcise the ghosts from dictionaries. There are reasons for optimism. Several new Japanese-English dictionaries are currently being compiled, and they can only be more reliable.

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28) It might be argued that the cause behind ghosts in Japanese-English dictionaries is gaps between the semantic structures of English and Japanese. But if this is the case, why are Kenkyusha's English-Japanese dictionaries so much more reliable than their Japanese-English ones? The individual linguists and lexicographers are not to blame, it is editorial policy and this will eventually change.

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