

## ***FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS***



At his birthday party in 1991  
(Takesi Sibata behind him)

### **Willem A. GROOTAERS (1911-1999)**

«Geography reflects history, in other words, space reflects time.»

(In one of his lectures delivered in Japanese at Tokyo Metropolitan University in 1964.)



- *Grootaers: A Belgian Preacher of Dialect Geography in Japan*

Willem A. Grootaers is a Belgian dialectologist who transplanted and disseminated linguistic geography in China and Japan. 2011 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth.



- *Main works*

A bibliography of Grootaers' works is included in the volumes of his collected papers (Grootaers 1976, 1994, 2003).



- *Life in Belgium*

Willem A. Grootaers was born in Namur, Belgium in 1911. As the son of the dialectologist, Ludovic Grootaers (1885-1956), he witnessed the process of map-making as a youngster. After graduating from high school he entered a monastery in 1930. Following that he studied dialectology under his father's guidance at Leuven Catholic University between 1935 and 1939. Thus he can be located as one of the second generation of European linguistic geographers.



- *Life in China*

Grootaers was trained as a Catholic priest and sent to China in 1939. He remained in China until 1948, where he experienced life in a Japanese prison camp during the China-Japanese war. In China, he carried out field surveys, and several reports were published during the Second World War on the microscopic dialect distribution of the Great Plains. After the Second World War Grootaers became a professor of Fu Jen Catholic University and continued his field research with young Chinese scholars. At that time, dialectal differences in the Chinese language were mainly discussed on the basis of phonological and tonal changes since Old Chinese, and macroscopic classification attracted most researchers' attention (Iwata 2010). The viewpoint of

microscopic dialectal differences between settlements within a given area was new. However, war between Chinese military powers including the Communist Party hindered further activity and he was forced to return to Europe in 1948 without reporting the final results of his research in China.



*- Life in Japan*

Grootaers was sent to Japan as a Catholic priest in 1950 after brief training in the Japanese language. He was initially posted to a small city near Kyoto, but in 1950 moved to Matsubara Catholic Church in Tokyo where he sought out prominent Japanese dialectologists.

Modern Japanese dialectology is said to have been founded by the first generation researchers, as the “father” Kunio YANAGITA (1875-1962) and as the “mother” Misao TOJO (male) (1884-1966). Minoru UMEGAKI (1901-1976) is said to be an “uncle”. The second generation is made up of “sons” like Teruo HIRAYAMA (1909-2005), Yoichi FUJIWARA (1909-2007), Haruhiko KINDAICHI (1913-2004) and Takesi SIBATA (1918-2007). Grootaers had personal contact with all of these scholars. He also participated in the joint surveys of the Itoigawa area with Munemasa TOKUGAWA (1930-1999) and Yoshio MASE (1927-), together with Takesi SIBATA.

In this sense, Grootaers was an important and influential “guest” in the history of Japanese dialectology. He worked with the great dialectologist and sociolinguist Takesi SIBATA, who became his life-long co-worker in linguistic geography (See Chapter 1 of Sibata 1998). Grootaers used two ways to introduce linguistic geography, that is, directly through his personal influence and indirectly through an influential person (Takesi SIBATA), which reminds us of the common technique of disseminating Christianity in the “New World”.

As a European and a polyglot, he urged and helped Japanese dialectologists to write and report in English. Yoichi FUJIWARA’s work on linguistic geography in western Japan (Chugoku and Shikoku dialects) appeared early in a magazine of Sophia University, a catholic University affiliated with Grootaers’ church. Works of several Japanese dialectologists appeared in the European linguistics magazine *ORBIS* together with Grootaers’ own works.

In Japan, Grootaers was given opportunities to teach dialectology in several universities and made positive impressions on young scholars. Though he did not have a permanent post in a Japanese university and worked only as a part-time professor in some universities, he influenced many young researchers. Some of them inherited his methodology and even developed new perspectives in dialectology. Grootaers' warm humanity and humorous character no doubt contributed to this influence on other scholars.



*- The Development of the Linguistic Atlas of Japan (LAJ)*

Takesi Sibata, who began research in large-scale sociolinguistic surveys just after foundation of the National Language Research Institute (1948), broadened his interest into dialectological surveys and actualized a plan for a nation-wide survey of dialects in the form of the LAJ or Linguistic Atlas of Japan (NLRI 1966-1974). In the planning stage of this project, Sibata was sent to several western countries to observe the scholastic situation there. It seems to have been Grootaers who introduced Sibata to prominent study centers in Europe, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland.

The LAJ field survey took eight years (1957-1965) with surveyors from every prefecture of Japan, and nearly ten years before the six volumes of 300 maps were completed (1966-1974). During this time, Grootaers visited the National Language Research Institute one day a week and personally made draft maps. At the time, the geographical distribution of the dialect forms for the word “snail” became well-known because the great folklorist and dialectologist Kunio YANAGITA had written an influential book in the early in 1930s based on data from a postal survey. Grootaers drew up a new map of “snail” for LAJ and found that Yanagita's “dialect radiation theory” (the spreading of new words from the former capital Kyoto in concentric circles) was still applicable to the fieldwork data collected after the War.



- *The Development of the Linguistic Atlas of Itoigawa (LAI)*

Grootaers' collaboration with Sibata, of the National Language Research Institute (now NINJAL or National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics) developed into a series of field surveys in the Itoigawa area. There, in the border area between Western and Eastern dialects of Japanese, a complete field survey of every settlement (hamlet) was performed on three separate occasions (1957, 1959, 1961) by W. Grootaers, T. Sibata, M. Tokugawa and Y. Mase.

Tokugawa has told the story of how on the first night of the Itoigawa survey Grootaers brought stamps in a tavern and made a simple map of a word from the information obtained from only a dozen informants. On this map geographical differences could be clearly seen visually. This kind of impressive result attracted many young scholars to the field of linguistic geography.

Grootaers seems to have introduced various essential techniques of fieldwork and map-making developed in Dutch dialectology to his Japanese colleagues in this project. A systematic mesh for locating settlements was introduced from the Netherlands to the maps of the Itoigawa area and the same system was applied to the Linguistic Atlas of Japan (LAJ). An enormous amount of data was gathered in the Itoigawa area and Grootaers and Sibata dedicated much time to drawing up beautiful maps by hand using various stamps with colors. They also reported several interesting distributions in academic journals. The Linguistic Atlas of Itoigawa area (LAI) was published from 1988 to 1995 in three volumes after introducing a computational technique of map-making developed by Sibata's daughter Mie INOKUCHI.

There is an amusing tale about Grootaers in Japan. At the time of the Itoigawa field survey, Japanese farmhouses were thatched and dark inside. When a visitor came it was difficult to see him from the inside when the sun was shining outside. One afternoon Grootaers visited a house, and an elderly man received him. Both bowed very low in Japanese style. However, when the elderly man sat up straight after this greeting and could see how the visitor looked in the dark room, he noticed that the visitor was a westerner. He was so astonished that he could not speak for a moment.

Later, a quantificational analysis of the responses for the Itoigawa questionnaire was executed by Sibata (1998), and it was found that Grootaers acquired more standard Japanese words than the other Japanese researchers. Informants may have been nervous

in responding to a westerner's questions. Later this information was positively utilized to see how standardization occurred in the Itoigawa area (see Chapter 4 of Sibata 1998).



#### *- The Development of Dialectological Works in Japan*

In the survey for the Linguistic Atlas of Itoigawa (SIBATA 1988, 1990, 1995), the group selected several representative settlements, performed all-resident surveys and made use of age differences in order to reconstruct word histories of the area. This approach gave insight towards the technique of the “glottogram” or age-area diagram (Sanada 2010). This technique is convenient to show the dissemination of ongoing linguistic change or change in progress (Inoue 1975, 1983a, 1983b). That is to say, the “glottogram” is a bridge between linguistic geography and sociolinguistics. The term “glottogram” was coined on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1969, in Itoigawa in the presence of Grootaers, according to Sanada (2010). They apparently did not know that the same term was used in the field of experimental phonetics. Scholars who were influenced by Grootaers later paid more attention to the sociolinguistic approach to dialects, so Grootaers can also be regarded as a pioneer researcher in sociolinguistics.

Part of Grootaers' work included papers on subjective dialect division in the Itoigawa area (Grootaers 1959). This was an application of attempts undertaken in the Netherlands. Related works in Japan lead to the study of “dialect image”, which later developed into Perceptual Dialectology (Preston 1999).



#### *- Reevaluation of Dialectology Works in China*

After leaving China Grootaers did not correspond with his former students in China because he was afraid that letters from the western world may be harmful to them. After the Reform and Liberation Policy of China, Grootaers was able to resume contact with the former students and scholars, although microscopic field research was not undertaken.

Instead, Japanese scholars in Chinese Linguistics reevaluated Grootaers' early works (Iwata 2010) and his papers have been translated into Japanese (Grootaers 1994),

and then into Chinese (Grootaers 2003). This group of Japanese scholars continued joint studies in Chinese dialectology and made an atlas based on the oldest dialect dictionary in the world, “Dialect” by Xiong Yang. Also, a beautiful atlas of Chinese dialects using computational techniques was published in Japan (Iwata 2009). This work is rare in Chinese dialectology because it is more concerned with the distribution of individual lexical items than overall phonology or tone. Here too the influence of linguistic geography brought from Europe to Asia by Grootaers can be clearly observed.



*- Activities outside of Dialectology*

Grootaers’ early works on dialectology were published in English and French, and many of Grootaers’ works have been translated into Japanese and Chinese, and published in books (Grootaers 1976, 1994, 2003). Grootaers also published books on “mistranslation” (properly translated by Sibata) and on life in Japan for the general public. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Leuven University in 1981 and was highly decorated both from Japan (1984) and from Belgium (1988). He also disseminated Christianity in Japan as a Catholic priest. However, these secular and divine matters are beyond the scope (or above the level) of this short introduction of early dialectologists. He must have felt more honored if he was able to know that he was regarded as the greatest among the Belgian linguists abroad (Auwera 2011).

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