

Friday  
January 29, 1993

Japan Edition

Six pages  
© 1993 The New York Times

# TimesFax

FROM

## The New York Times

### *This Phone Translates, for People With Lots of Time*

KYOTO — Toshiyuki Takezawa sat down at a bank of powerful computers and spoke into a microphone. "Moshimoshi," he said.

Instantly, the computers whirred to life, furiously digesting and analyzing this morsel of Japanese speech. About 12 seconds later and half a world away, a computer in Pittsburgh spoke up, conveying Dr. Takezawa's message in English. "Hello," it said, in its electronic voice.

It might not be as dramatic as

Alexander Graham Bell's call to Watson, but it began what researchers describe as the first public demonstration of an overseas phone conversation being automatically translated from one language to another.

The day of being able to dial up anyone in the world and chat freely is probably two decades away, if not more, researchers say. But they think that by the end of this decade, interpreting telephones will be in use for limited applications such as making travel reservations.

The "experiment is just one tiny, tiny step," said Kohel Hōbara, of the Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International, the research center that conducted the demonstration. "But we think historically, it's a very important one."

As the test showed, the systems are now very limited. Any system that requires 12 seconds to translate "hello" obviously needs to be improved. That will come with time and faster computers.

By ANDREW POLLACK