Culture-specific items in Japanese-English literary translation: comparing two translations of Kawabata's 'Izu no Odoriko'

SHANI TOBIAS
MONASH UNIVERSITY

Cultural considerations influence many aspects of the translation decision-making process. When translating literature, the translator frequently is faced with culture-bound items such as physical articles, customs and expressions which must somehow be conveyed to the target audience in their own language. What strategies do translators use in dealing with culture-specific items, and how successful are these strategies in promoting cross-cultural understanding? This paper examines these questions with regard to English translation of Japanese literature, comparing two translations of Yasunari Kawabata's short story 'Izu no Odoriko' as a case study.

1. Introduction

The translation studies discipline has shifted focus over the past two decades, moving away from the search for linguistic 'equivalence', to examining how the wider cultural context affects translation decisions. In the case of literary translation, this context includes (Lefevere 1992): (i) the influence of professionals within the literary system (such as reviewers and critics) over the production and reception of a text; (ii) the patronage of powerful bodies such as the publishing industry, the media, and government; and (iii) the dominant poetics and the status of translated literature in the target language (TL) literary 'polysystem' (see Even-Zohar 2000:194-7).

Of particular importance with regard to the above three factors are the power relations based on ideology and economics, which produce the 'norms' (sociocultural constraints) that influence translation strategies both consciously and unconsciously. Ideological pressure bears on translation decisions particularly when a pre-existing dominant stereotype of the source culture exists within the target language (TL) readership. Translators may then be influenced to pursue strategies that reaffirm and solidify cultural stereotypes (Carbonell 1996). The economic component of patronage provides a direct incentive for translators to conform to the ideological imperatives of their patrons, and they will be concerned to produce a translation that is marketable to the TL readership.

If the translation is a re-translation, translators may also be motivated by a desire to offer a different interpretation to the previous translation, or to reflect a change in the status of the author or text, as well as changes in the literary norms, ideologies, stereotypes or reader expectations since the earlier translation.

The theoretical framework of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) (Toury 1995) has become the basis for analyzing translation strategies and the norms constraining them. Through carrying out case studies that examine target texts (TT) within the sociocultural context of the TL readership and literary system, comparing the TT with the source text (ST) to
Culture-specific items in Japanese-English literary translation

determine what 'shifts' have occurred, DTS aims to offer a mechanism by which the norms affecting translation strategies can be identified and implications can be drawn for future translation decision-making.

At the top of the hierarchy of norms is the translator's general choice of whether to adopt a ST orientation or translate according to the norms of the target language (TL) and culture (initial norm) (Toury 1995). This decision to 'foreignize' or 'domesticate' will be influenced by what Chesterman terms 'expectancy' norms, namely the expectations of TT readers about what an appropriate translation is, which are often reinforced by publishers, reviewers and so on. For example, publishers may encourage translations that meet TL criteria of readability. These norms will also determine a lower level of 'professional' norms, including ethical issues of translator accountability, the social role of the translator to maximize communication, and the linguistic norms governing ST and TT relations (Chesterman 1997).

Since norms exert a prescriptive force on translators and are value-driven, able to be evaluated positively or negatively, it makes sense to approach them critically, so that case studies can be used to make recommendations to future translators in similar situations. While Toury's (1995) approach attempts to be solely descriptive, Venuti (1995) takes a strongly prescriptive stance. He emphasizes the ideological force of norms, and writing in the North American context. He is particularly critical of the role of publishers in constraining translation strategies to produce domesticating translations, whereby the ST is absorbed into the cultural and ideological discourse of the TL readership. He contends that the prevailing view held by publishers, reviewers, translators and readers alike, that a translated text should read 'fluently', encourages translators to adopt strategies that smooth over cultural differences, minimizing the 'foreignness' inherent in the ST. This provides an illusion of transparency, in other words it tends to make the translator 'invisible', so that the reader is often unaware that he or she is reading a translation (Venuti 1995:1). An important factor in this is the notion of translation as derivative and of secondary importance to authorship. However, although a domesticating strategy may attract a wide popular audience, because it manipulates the text to make the cultural context more familiar to TL readers, it will not usually facilitate a truly accurate understanding of the foreign culture and text (Venuti 1998:12). Venuti sees this as part of an 'ethnocentric violence' of translation, particularly into the English language, that translators have an ethical responsibility to resist (Venuti 1995:20).

Thus Venuti (1995) encourages translators to adopt a 'foreignizing' strategy, that is, a strategy that makes the foreign nature of the text, and thereby the presence of the translator, more visible (1995:305-6). Such a non-fluent, defamiliarizing style has the benefits of enriching the TL as well as promoting an understanding of the foreign culture (Venuti 1998:10-11) and fostering a similar interpretation of the text for both ST and TT readers (Venuti 2004:487-8). Venuti (1998) recognizes that at the same time it is important that the TT remains accessible to a wide audience, and therefore foreignization and domestication are not binary opposites but a question of degree in the individual circumstances (1998:12-13).

2. Culture-specific items in Japanese-English literary translation

The issues discussed above are brought into focus in the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) (Aixela 1996). CSIs are linguistic items that cause problems for translation due to differences in cultural understanding. They include proper nouns, objects, institutions, customs, expressions and concepts embodied in the ST that do not exist in the culture of the TL readership or would be perceived differently. A range of strategies is used by translators to deal with CSIs. Those that aim to preserve the foreign flavour of the ST as much as possible include the literal translation of CSIs, direct transliteration of proper nouns from an ST with a different alphabet, borrowing (for example, hakama is kept as 'hakama' in the TT), and calques (that is, the appropriation of a particular ST expression through literal translation (Munday 2001:147)). Strategies that may disturb the ST somewhat more include replacing the CSI with a similar source culture CSI that is more understandable to TL readers, and explicitation, either extra-textually through footnotes, glossaries and use of brackets, or intratextually. On the other hand, strategies that have a 'domesticating' effect on the ST (cause the TT to conform to norms within the target culture) include adaptation (replacing CSIs by references to aspects of the target culture seen as functionally equivalent), seeking terms that are more general or 'universal' than the CSI, deletion of the CSI, addition of new information seen as relevant to the TT reader, and changing the sentence structure, syntax and style to make the TT more 'readable'.

MONASH UNIVERSITY LINGUISTICS PAPERS 2006
Translating CSIs is likely to be more difficult the further apart the two languages and cultures are, and it is undoubtedly the case that Japanese-English literary translation can pose many challenges in this regard. Much will also depend on the points in time when the ST was written and when it was translated. Thus a description of Japanese family life before the Second World War may contain more CSIs than a description of contemporary family life, due to the Westernization of post-war Japanese society. Moreover, the interaction between source and target cultures also changes, and greater cultural exchange has increased knowledge of Japanese culture in the West, making translation of some CSIs easier.

Japanese literary tradition, and Kawabata in particular, places a strong emphasis on the qualities of language and style, more so than plot. This feature makes it doubly difficult for the translator attempting to render into English the rhythm, atmosphere, and emotion conveyed by the Japanese language. Japanese is also rich in sound symbolism (onomatopoeia, etc.), both in the spoken and written language. These words conjure up images and sensations and give the prose a rhythm that may be difficult to reproduce with English adverbs lacking in mimetic features. The translation of Japanese dialogue poses a significant challenge due to the very different forms of language used according to the level of politeness, reflecting a strong sense of social hierarchy, together with differences in masculine and feminine speech and dialects.

3. Two translations of 'Izu no Odoriko': A comparative analysis

Two English translations of Yasunari Kawabata's short story 'Izu no Odoriko', are analyzed to illustrate the strategies used by translators to deal with CSIs using the DTS theoretical framework outlined above, critically evaluating their effectiveness in transferring meaning across cultures.

'Izu no Odoriko' (伊豆の踊子) published in 1926, was first translated as 'The Izu dancer' by the American Edward Seidensticker in 1954 in an abridged version for the Atlantic Monthly. This was reprinted in 1974 and published with three other Japanese short stories by Charles E. Tuttle Co. as The Izu dancer and other stories. Seidensticker's complete translation was later published in The Oxford book of Japanese short stories (1997). I will use this edition for my analysis.

The second translation, with the title 'The dancing girl of Izu' was produced by another American, J. Martin Holman, in 1997 and published by Counterpoint in a collection entitled The dancing girl of Izu and other stories, which comprises Holman's translations of several Kawabata stories written between 1923 and 1929.

3.1 Introduction to Yasunari Kawabata

Yasunari Kawabata, awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968, was one of Japan's most distinguished modern novelists.

His works bring together the elements of 'beauty and sadness', a phrase which forms the title of one of his last works. It is a theme that is part of the tradition of classical Japanese literature, which Kawabata inherited and aimed to preserve. This is why he is seen as a very 'Japanese' writer, drawing strong influences from classics such as the Tale of Genji and the lyricism and evocative nature of traditional Japanese poetry. His style is marked by a subtleness and economy of words and his works contain much allusion and poetic imagery, sometimes making use of the technique of renga (linked verses). Beauty is expressed through lyrical references to nature and art, and is often portrayed in the person of a girl, whose passions and sexuality are expressed through subtle, traditional symbolism. At the same time, however, influences of European modernism are also apparent in Kawabata's literary techniques, such as his use of startling images and abrupt transitions. In the 1920s he was a key proponent of the 'neo-perceptionist' school which served as a focal point for avant-garde writers taking a fresh approach to literature.

A recurring motif in Kawabata's works, including this story, is of a traveller on a journey, with the accompanying connotations of sentimentality and sorrow that characterize traditional Japanese literature. These are highlighted using seasonal references and the intimate and symbolic relationship between humans and nature. This kind of aesthetic is signified by the Japanese word ryushu, which Tsukimura describes as being the intense emotional discovery of a "home of your soul" or a revelation of the beauty of life, so pure that it moves one to sorrow (Tsukimura 1968). Kawabata incorporates these
Culture specific items in Japanese-English literary translation

elements into his works, and 'Izu no Odoriko' is a typical example. His poetic style is evident in the novel metaphorical imagery and rhythm given to the prose by the frequent use of sound-symbolic language (examples are given in (4) and (5) below).

3.2 Synopsis of 'Izu no Odoriko'
The narrator in 'Izu no Odoriko' is a 19-year-old student who embarks on a solitary journey, walking between hot spring resorts in the mountainous Izu peninsula. He encounters a troupe of traveling performers, and attracted to a beautiful dancing girl, accompanies the troupe on its travels. The story is filled with a sense of longing, but is more than a youthful expression of unfulfilled love, because on discovering that the girl is only 13 and too young for sexual involvement, the student is relieved. We discover that what he is really seeking is an affirmation of his own self-worth. The story ends with the student farewelling the performers and returning by sea to Tokyo.

3.3 Comparative analysis of translation strategies
3.3.1 Physical objects
Written 80 years ago, at a time when Japanese society was much more traditional, 'Izu no Odoriko' contains many references that are bound to the culture of the time. In translating culture-specific objects such as clothing we find that Holman attempts to retain the Japanese terms much more than Seidensticker. When the ST uses the word 着物 (kimono), both translators adhere to "kimono" in the English, reflecting the fact that kimono has now become part of the English vocabulary. はかま (hakama) (a men's pleated skirt-like garment) is omitted or also translated as "kimono" by Seidensticker, while Holman transliterates and italicizes this as "hakama". Similarly, the 黒紋付きの羽織 (kumonon-tsuki no haori) is given a domesticated translation by Seidensticker as "formal kimono", while Holman prefers a literal rendering as "a crested, black haori", explaining in the next sentence that he was "dressed formally". By translating all three clothing-related terms as "kimono", Seidensticker has adopted the strategy of using a term that is more 'general' and familiar to the TC. In contrast, Holman uses the strategy of borrowing, incorporating two Japanese terms (hakama and haori) into the English text. Even if most readers will not know the nature of the garments referred to, Holman's approach makes them aware first that these are specifically Japanese garments, and secondly, that people of the time wore a greater variety of clothing than can be expressed by the general term "kimono". His approach also makes readers aware of the class differences portrayed by the different clothes worn.

A comparison of translations of housing-related CSIs also shows a similar pattern. 布団 (futon) is "bed" or "quilt" in Seidensticker's translation, while Holman expresses it as "futon", the non-italicized rendering reflecting that this word has recently been adopted into the English language. 置子 (shōji) is translated as "sliding paper doors" by Holman and 柵 (fusuma) as "sliding panel doors", whereas Seidensticker simply translates both as "doors". Similarly, the nature of an 床 warming (iron) is expressed by Holman as a "hearth in the middle of the floor" while Seidensticker merely describes it as an "open fire". Thus, Seidensticker's translation invites readers to picture the rooms of teahouses and lodgings as Western-style, because he domesticates the CSIs. Conversely, Holman's strategy here is generally one of intratextual explicitation that at least serves to make apparent some of the uniqueness of traditional Japanese interiors. An alternative would be to use the Japanese term and then footnote its meaning or provide a glossary, but neither translator adopts these strategies. This may have been a requirement imposed by the publisher, since none of the stories in either anthology contain footnotes. Footnotes may disrupt the flow of the narration if used too often, but limited footnoting can aid understanding.

Thus, in general Seidensticker's strategies show a strongly domesticating approach: omission, replacement with a more general CSI, adaptation to TC equivalents, or neutralization. In contrast, Holman retains the Japanese nature of these CSIs to a much greater degree using strategies of transliteration, borrowing, literal translation, and intratextual explicitation. This approach provides a more accurate picture of Japan at the time, and also makes readers aware of the class structure of Japanese society, through the association of different characters with different CSIs.
3.3.2 Customs

There are a number of actions performed by the dancing girl for the student that are reflections of her lower social status and gender. For example, the girl turns over the cushion she has been kneeling on and gives it to him, pours tea for him, brushes dirt off his clothes, and arranges his shoes so he can step into them easily. Whether readers understand the gender and class roles behind these surface descriptions may depend on their knowledge of Japanese society, yet neither translator generally provides contextual information. Seidensticker adds the word "politely" in describing the girl turning over her cushion, and translates the sentence:

靡下に手を突いて芸者のようにお辞儀をした

as:

"They offered formal greetings from the veranda."

While this makes the reader aware of the performers' formality, it is a neutral description that does not express the uniquely Japanese style of greeting. Holman's closer translation is:

". . bowed to the two of us, kneeling on the floor like geisha".

For those with some knowledge of Japan and geisha, it will be evident that bowing from a kneeling position in this way is both formal and refined. The translation at least highlights the culture-specific nature of the action for readers, even if they are not aware of its full significance.

In regard to the translation of customs of politeness it must to some extent be left to readers to draw implications from the context as to the degree of formality and the different class and gender roles that are expressed. Spelling everything out to readers would distort the text in ways Berman (2004) warns against, such as overtranslation, disrupting the rhythm of the prose, and making explicit what is only meant to be implicit (2004:288-90).

3.3.3 Dialogue, terms of address

In 'Izu no Odoriko', the main challenge in translating dialogue is how to convey levels of politeness in the speech—information which is very obvious in the Japanese text because of the specific verb structures. The different way in which the student and the performers are spoken to accentuates their different positions in society. For example, a teahouse proprietor says to the student:

おや、旦那様、お濡れになってるじゃないございませんか。こちらでしばらくおあたりなさいまし

She thus uses the polite, honorific form of speech, but this does not come across in Seidensticker's translation:

"But you're soaked! Come in here and dry yourself".

On the other hand, Holman is more successful in this regard:

"You're all wet, aren't you, sir?" She spoke with great deference. "Come in here for a while. Dry your clothes".

"She spoke with great deference" is an addition to the text, but is justified in that the degree of politeness cannot be expressed in English through the dialogue alone.

The male-female and dialect differences in the Japanese speech are also lost in both translations. Thus we see the deforming tendencies of translation (Berman 2004) at work in the destruction of vernacular networks. Instead of the lively, heterogeneous nature of Kawabata's dialogue, we get a rather bland, homogenous English version.
Japanese ways of addressing people and kinship terms likewise pose challenges in translation. The many distinctions based on the occupation, age, gender and relative position in the social hierarchy of the speaker and addressee are often omitted or replaced with a simple pronoun in English. Where translation is attempted it is often unsuccessful. For example, the dancing girl addresses a poulterer as おじさん (ojisan), a term used by young people to address middle-aged men. Seidensticker’s translation, “addressing him like an old friend”, and Holman’s “addressed the man as ‘uncle’” are probably both too familiar, and “old friend” fails to convey the age difference that the Japanese implies. 旦那様 (danna-sama) is the very polite way the teahouse lady addresses the student, translated by Holman as “sir”, while Seidensticker first omits the term and then uses “young man”. The politeness is not apparent in this rendering.

3.3.4 Idiomatic and metaphoric expressions

Idiomatic and metaphoric language is dealt with by the translators using a mix of strategies, but in general Holman sticks closer to a literal rendering. For example, the description of the dancing girl standing naked by the bath:

若桐のように足のよく伸びた白い裸身を眺めて
wakagiri no yōi ashi no yoku nobita shiroi rashin o nagamete

is translated literally by Holman as:

“When I gazed at her white body, legs stretched, standing like a young paulownia tree....”,

whereas Seidensticker replaces the simile with a common English metaphor:

“I looked at her, at the young legs, at the sculpted white body”

Seidensticker tends to adjust idiomatic language to fit with ordinary English uses such as 極が降っても (yari ga futtemo) (“even if it’s raining pitchforks”) instead of Holman’s “even if it’s raining spears outside””, and 浮島の鳥 (watari-dori no su) (“shelter for migratory species”) versus Holman’s more literal “temporary roost for these birds of passage”. Another strategy Seidensticker uses is to translate an original ST metaphor using a simile. Thus, 頭が濡んだ水になって (atama ga sunda mitu ni natte) becomes “It was as if my head had turned to clear water” (Seidensticker) rather than “My head had become clear water” (Holman). By preserving the metaphors in their literal rendering, Holman captures the poetic sense of Kawabata’s prose much more effectively. Seidensticker’s preference is rather for the prose to sound ‘smooth’ to the English ear, which negates the culture-bound nature of the idiomatic language. However both translators use an English equivalent for a metaphor where a direct one exists: 八百屋 (yaoya) (lit. he’s a greengrocer) is translated as “he has as many wares as a dimestore” (Seidensticker) and “he’s a jack-of-all-trades” (Holman).

3.3.5 Mimetic words

Japanese is rich in sound symbolism—words with mimetic and iconic features—and ‘Izu no Odoriko’ contains approximately 40 of these. The translators adopt strategies of either omission, use of an adverb or adjective that expresses the sense of the word, or choice of a verb that carries a similar sense. While these strategies may be adequate to convey meaning, they cannot convey the sound or iconic features of the Japanese. For example, when the student sees the dancing girl naked and realizes she is a child, the Japanese uses two mimetic words in one sentence:

ほうっと深い息を吐いてからことこと笑った。
Hōtto fukai hiki o haitte kara kocho ko wa rawata

The words are ほ (the sound of breathing out in relief) and ことこ (the sound of gentle, happy laughter). However, Seidensticker simply translates this as “I laughed happily”, and Holman as “I breathed a sigh of relief and laughed out loud”. The signifying richness of these words in Kawabata’s prose produces vivid images in the minds of ST readers. These words also play an important role in the rhythm of the prose. The translations thus exhibit a degree of qualitative impoverishment but this may be inevitable since the corresponding category of words in the English language is more limited.
4. Concluding remarks

Overall, Seidensticker’s translation approach is one of ‘fluency’, smoothing over CSIs to enable TL readers to relate to the story according to the terms of their own culture and literary norms. His sentence structure, syntax and style also depart significantly from the ST, so as to be more ‘readable’ from an English language point of view. Consequently, the story reads smoothly and easily but its imagery and rhythm is flattened. Holman’s more foreignizing approach, by contrast, exposes the cultural differences in more detail and by so doing caters for readers who are interested in Japanese society, and promotes cultural understanding. Holman’s translation adheres much more closely to the wording and sentence structure of the ST (see Appendix), which means that Kawabata’s unique style, such as his bold metaphorical imagery and the beauty and sorrow inherent in the simple but lyrical descriptions of the dancing girl and autumn scenery are preserved to a greater extent. It therefore facilitates a similar interpretation of the text among readers of both cultures.

A number of reasons can be suggested for these two very different approaches. First, the status of translated literature in general in the Anglo-American context has always been secondary, which has tended to produce translation strategies that favour the cultural norms and literary traditions of the English language readership. Secondly, the pressure to domesticate would have been particularly strong in Seidensticker’s case, because although the Seidensticker translation used here is his full translation published in 1997, it basically reproduces his 1954 version. Therefore, the conditions that influenced his basic translation style and approach to CSIs would have been those existing in the 1950s. The fact of the abridgment itself is an indication that Seidensticker was pressured by norms (or bound by the instructions of the publisher to follow these norms) regarding the appropriate length of a short story for the North American market. In the 1950s Japanese literature had only just begun to be introduced to the West and ‘The Izu Dancer’ was the first translation of Kawabata. Americans would have known little about Japanese culture, and for Japan during and after the Occupation, the cultural flow was very one-sided. The average North American reader would have cared little about the subtleties of a defeated culture, so the need to attract a readership would have encouraged an approach that played down cultural differences.

In the 1950s and 60s, many American publishing houses released translations of Japanese novels, short stories and poetry collections. However, the focus was on a relatively small number of writers (particularly Jun’ichiro Tanizaki, Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima), who came to represent the canon of Japanese literature for Western readers. Fowler argues that this narrow focus on writers who expressed nostalgia about traditional Japanese culture and aestheticism was deliberate and based on ideological considerations of portraying Japan as exotic and very different from its wartime image (Fowler 1992). Thus, literature that portrayed the ‘real’ westernized, post-war Japan, or different genres such as comedy were not translated or given a peripheral position, only taken up by small, specialized publishers and not widely read.

This situation continued into the 1970s and 80s, but in the last 20 years there are signs that the canon of Japanese literature in the West is being significantly transformed. At the end of the 1980s, a number of new anthologies of popular Japanese fiction by writers born and raised in post-war Japan were published, such as Monkey brain sushi, edited by Alfred Birnbaum and Helen Mitsuo’s New Japan voices. These, and novels by contemporary writers such as Banana Yoshimoto and Haruki Murakami, have been printed in paperback and have been successful in attracting a ‘middle-brow’ general audience for Japanese fiction in translation. These new novels often depict an Americanized Japan and deal with modern themes, and their debunking of the former image of Japan prevalent in the West may be partly responsible for their success. Such moves to translate a broader range of Japanese literature for a wider audience are welcome as they begin to restore areas of Japanese literary tradition that were previously neglected, and contribute to the reformation of a more accurate cultural identity for Japan in the West (Venuti 1998:82).

This push to translate more Japanese literature and eradicate cultural stereotypes, which accompanied the different climate that existed in Japanese-Western relations by the 1990s, is perhaps why Holman felt able to resist ethnocentric tendencies to domesticate the TT. First of all, being a retranslation, he would have wanted to distinguish his approach from Seidensticker’s, and may have been motivated by a desire to produce a more foreignizing translation. Moreover, he and his publisher would have been less concerned about finding a market for the translation, since Kawabata was now well-known in the West, his novel Snow Country having won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968. This rise in the pres-
Culture-specific items in Japanese-English literary translation

tige of Kawabata may also have influenced a new translator to be more faithful to the author's style. Finally, the increased interaction between Japan and the US accompanying Japan's economic rise has led to increased knowledge of Japanese culture in America and a greater number of Japanese words being introduced into the English vocabulary, as well as a heightened general interest in all things Japanese. Thus Holman would have recognized that a foreignizing translation was no longer greatly problematic in terms of alienating readers, and could indeed serve to meet the expectations of readers with an interest in, or background knowledge of, Japanese culture.

This case study has shown that the translation of Japanese literature into English poses many challenges and two translators of the same text may adopt very different strategies regarding CSIs. Apart from the ideological pressure to domesticate or to uphold a certain stereotype, since the translator is writing in the TL, there will also be a natural tendency to neutralize or assimilate CSIs, as this is the easier option. However, the case study illustrates that the translator can resist the tendency to translate fluently, instead transporting readers to a different culture, and opening their minds to a different linguistic style. Yet, at the same time, translators need to negotiate the appropriate balance, so that translations remain accessible to a wide readership. Otherwise, of course, translated literature will fail to be a force for cross-cultural understanding. Holman's translation of 'Izu no Odoriko' shows that it is possible to adopt strategies that highlight the Japanese nature of CSIs relating to physical objects, customs and idiomatic language. Japanese words can be introduced to the extent that this does not confuse readers, and cultural and literary nuances can be signified to a certain degree by adhering closely to the style, imagery and forms of expression of the author, as opposed to using more familiar TL 'equivalents'. However, this case study also shows that it is much more difficult to capture in translation the flavour of Japanese dialogue using a language as different as English, where strong distinctions between male/female and polite/casual speech do not exist. Culture-bound customs are also difficult to express without risking overtranslation, and words with mimetic features inevitably lose some of their iconicity when rendered into English.

Further research into translation strategies dealing with these latter challenges would be of great assistance to Japanese/English translators in their process of negotiation and decision-making.

Notes

1. The reason for the abridgment was that the full story (20 pages) was considered too long to publish in a magazine. In his memoir, Tokyo central (2002), Seidensticker remarks that he now regrets the abridgments because he cut out "all traces of ugliness" and "everything that seemed to me to approach the sentimental" instead of being evenhanded about what he omitted, which "would have preserved the delicate balance which I now think makes the story succeed." Further, he regrets that he did not inform readers that the translation was abridged.

2. However, it should be noted that not all TL readers would have the same idea of what is denoted by a "kimono" in this text, especially those not familiar with Japan, since the historical use of the word in English meant that it came to be associated with a loose silk gown rather than the type of garment understood by Japanese readers.

3. Japanese speech has three main levels of politeness: the plain form of speech generally used among family, close friends and to people who are younger than you and lower in the social hierarchy; the standard polite form, used with respect to people who are older, strangers, new acquaintances, and business colleagues; and the humble/honorific form, which is more formal and polite, and used to superiors, clients and customers.

Appendix: Paragraph from 'The Izu dancer'

The following is a typical paragraph that shows the extent to which the translations differ, and how Holman has adhered much closer to the sentence structure and wording of the ST.
Seidensticker:

She had an open way of speaking, a youthful honest way of saying exactly what came to her, which made it possible for me to think of myself as, frankly, 'nice'. I looked anew at the mountains, so bright that they made my eyes ache a little. I had come at nineteen to think myself a misfit, an orphan by nature, and it was depression that had sent me forth on this Izu journey. Now I was able to think of myself as a 'nice' person in the ordinary sense of the expression. I find no way to describe what this meant to me. The mountains grew brighter. We were approaching Shimoda and the sea. I swung at the heads of the autumn grasses with my walking-stick.

Holman:

This exchange had an echo of simplicity and frankness. Hers was a child's voice expressing her sentiments without censure. I, too, was able to meekly consider myself a nice person. Refreshed, I lifted my eyes and surveyed the brilliant mountains. I felt a vague pain behind my eyelids. Twenty years old, I had embarked on this trip to Izu heavy with resentment that my personality had been permanently warped by my orphan's complex and that I would never be able to overcome a stifling melancholy. So I was inexpressibly grateful to find that I looked like a nice person as the world defines the word. The mountains looked bright because we were by the ocean near Shimoda. I swung my bamboo walking stick back and forth, lopping off the heads of the autumn grasses.

References


Shani Tobias is a MA candidate in the Japanese Studies Programme, School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash University. She has spent three years working as a translator in Japan.