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Translation Strategies for Japanese

Reconsidering Chesterman's Theory on Translation Strategies

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Introduction

In my previous article in *OTB* (Bode, 2008), I gave a general outline for the field of translation studies dealing with some of its basic tenets, ideas and theories. Whereas the theoretical side of translation studies may be helpful in some cases, this time I would like to set sail into the direction (Odysseus continues) of practical methods or strategies for the translation of written Japanese texts. Chesterman (2000) deals with the topic of strategies in an accessible way in chapter 4 of his book *Memes of Translation*. A book that treats translation studies in its full scope of manifestations, but it is still very accessible and useful for professional translators or novice translators as well. His language combinations or pairs are in fact German and English in chapter 4. In my paper I would like to consider and illustrate his theories in the translation of Japanese.[1]

Japanese as a linguistic phenomenon – some characteristics

Before considering Japanese in translation we must first set out and discuss Japanese as a language in itself. Here, of course, Japanese means the written appearance of the language. In my previous article I stated that some specific Japanese language elements presented some difficulties in the process of translation into the target language. Again I want to emphasise that they are not problematic at all within the Japanese language itself. In other words, the source language elements as they are actually used within the scope of the Japanese culture or society. A major characteristic of the language is placing the verb with or without other inflections at the very end of the sentence. In those cases the translation will continue to restructure the sentence at first. Another characteristic in the written language is the use of three scripts inter-connectedly: the *kanji* (characters) and the two phonetic scripts, referred to as *hiragana* and *katakana*.

The particles (*ga*, *wo*, and *wa* to name a few) in normal Japanese occurring in the sentences can be considered to function as indicators for subject, object and referent. In translation these are kept out of the end translation. Others like *ni*, *he*, *made*, and *kara* receive direct translations, such as *in/to, towards, as far as,* and *from* in certain cases. In other specific cases *kara* or *ni* are used as indicators in passive sentences. In Japanese they form in an integrated part of effective language use, but in translation they are not visible anymore, left out if the target language so requires.

Regarding *kanji* mentioned above, W. J. Boot of Leiden University (Department of Japanese and Korean Studies) observed in his review article in the *Monumenta Nipponica* (Boot, 2006) quite clearly the difficulty in translating certain terms:

> "I think that everyone will in principle agree that it would be preferable not to use several different English words to translate the same Chinese term [yi/gi 義 "Ritual practices" versus "righteousness"]…[but] on the other hand, the differences between the two languages being what they are, sometimes it cannot be helped." (pp. 559-560)

The example I gave regarding *kokuseki* (国籍: "nationality" versus "Name of the country

[1] In this article ST (Source Text), TT (Target Text), SL (Source Language). Not mentioned is TL (Target Language). Depending on the translator the specific languages are alterable categories. In my case the languages are Dutch, English and Japanese. In my case, most of the time Japanese is the ST and English/Dutch are the TT. In a few cases, like government summary translations, the ST and TT are reversed.

Bode, J. (2009). Translation strategies for Japanese: Reconsidering Chesterman's theory on translation strategies. *OTB Forum, 2*(1), 15-21.

regarding nationality") in the previous issue of *OTB* (Bode, 2008) and the recommendation to translate it through a multiple word phrase was born from the fact that I wanted to maintain an intra-textual coherency between *kokuseki* and *honseki*. Nonetheless with this under consideration experienced translators will naturally judge according to the situation if certain strategies or methods should be followed or not.

Another phenomenon of the Japanese language is the amount certain terms, words, names and other linguistic elements being exported outside Japan and finding their respective place in target language dictionaries. Some examples are *tsunami* (tidal wave after an earthquake), *Judō* (one of the unarmed self-defense arts of Japan), and *Sushi* (-). These linguistic terms are being incorporated into other languages and are more and more left as they appear; not being translated at all. If translators do translate them they are judged unfavorably as hindering the smoothness of communication within the target language.

In translating Japanese texts the translator needs to judge quickly four things: (a) what parts should be translated, (b) what parts should not be translated (depending on circumstances: the particles), (c) what should be transliterated (personal names and place names; see Bode, 2008), (d) what culture specific terms should be transferred into another system of expressions (for example linear measures, weights, the year periods versus western calendar). These are just a few of the considerations of Japanese as a language and Japanese in connection with translation. While facing these difficulties everyday I think it is nothing but a natural outcome that translation methods and strategies are worth developing in a non prescriptive way within the field of translation studies. From difficulties via methods and strategies the translator receives possible solution options to produce a readable translation of the original at the conclusion of his/her work ("translator" refers to both genders, of course).

Translation strategies and methods – basic ideas

In his book Chesterman (2000) discussed the topic of translation in a very accessible way. From the major basic theoretical ideas (he refers to them also as "memes", ideas that spread and develop like genes) in chapter 2 and discussing in chapter 3 of the dominant ones becoming (translation) norms. What is the connection with translation strategies in particular in Chesterman's view? On a basic level he says, "Strategies are ways in which translators seek to conform to norms" (p. 88). However, in chapter 3 he introduces the matter of norm-breaking and norm-refining solutions (p. 85) by translators. This seems to be a contradiction in terms, but it is important to remember that translation is a very complicated handling of languages, sometimes as different as night and day (not any positive or negative meaning implied here). He recognises three professional norms and he describes them as being the *accountability norm* (the translator's loyalty to all parties concerned), *communication norm* (the optimization of communication) and the *relation norm* (the maintaining an appropriate relation between source and target language) on page 85. Another point looks at strategies as being connected to processes and ways of doing something. This implies automatically the translators need to be flexible in the strategies they use in accordance with the translation situation.

Strategies are classified in two groups: *comprehension strategies* (analysis of the source text and the whole production of the translation commission), and *production strategies* (target text oriented for maximum effect) (see p. 92). In the subsequent pages are introduced primary (textual manipulation) groups of strategy, *syntactic/grammatical* (G), *semantic* (S) and *pragmatic* (P). They are overlapping and interactively applied in the process of translation. For each group Chesterman give 10 subdivisions, with the pragmatic group as the last group going beyond language restricted examples.

In the next part I will introduce them applied towards the translation of Japanese into other target languages.

Translation strategies and methods – Chesterman's classification applied

Chesterman introduces his system on three levels. On page 107 he restates the main differences between them, succinctly comparing *pragmatic* strategies with *syntactic/grammatical* and *semantic* strategies in the following manner:

> "If syntactic strategies manipulate the form, and semantic strategies manipulate meaning, pragmatic strategies can be said to manipulate the message itself." (Chesterman, 2000, p. 107)

Since these three main groups of classifications contain 10 subgroups each, I would like to introduce here the first group while leaving the other two for a second installment this autumn. Some of the sub-headings in the first group will be discussed further in autumn with updated examples.

Syntactic/grammatical strategies (coded G) have the following 10 classifications in Chesterman's system:

G1 literal translation
G2 Loan, *calque*
G3 Transposition
G4 Unit shift
G5 Phrase structure change
G6 Clause structure change
G7 Sentence structure change
G8 Cohesion change
G9 Level shift
G10 Scheme change

G1: He defines this as follows: "[A translation] maximally close to the SL (Source Language) form but nevertheless grammatical" (p. 94). In translation studies this strategy has received a slightly unfavourable evaluation by some theorists.

As an example the standard translation of "I am a cat" of the book with the same first sentence by Natsume Soseki follows reasonably closely the ST of *wagahai wa neko de aru* [我輩は猫である]. The term *wagahai* in this case is slightly problematic since the English translation does not capture the boasting statement and mood of the original.

G2: Loan and Calque refers to the borrowing of language elements from other languages. *Calques* are in fact imported expressions at first, which in the second stage are translated literally in the TL. Chesterman gives the example of *Übermensch* (G) ⇒ *Superman* (E). At present I have not yet found an illustrative example from Japanese to include.

IT and computer related words in manuals have been adopted most of the time in the TL unaltered. In Japanese they correspond to some degree to the SL when transcribed in katakana (one of the phonetic scripts in Japanese)

Other examples include *Japanese Airlines* as one of the official names of the company through the acronym of JAL. However, on the other hand sometimes Japanese language elements have been adopted in other languages. Judō, kendō, sushi, samurai, and kaizen are terms finding their way into English dictionaries and becoming integrated words in the importing language.

G3: Chesterman describes transposition as changing the word class in the TT (Target Text). For example, shifting in translation from noun to verb, or from adjective to adverb.

To clarify this by the following example: ST (Source Text): "I am driving now" could be expressed in Japanese as (TT) "*ima untenchū desu*" [今、運転中です].

G4: refers to a unit shift. This can be on a level of morpheme, word, phrase, clause, or sentence. A unit shift happens when a ST unit is translated as a different unit in the TT.

Let us peruse an example from the classical Edo-period Japanese text Neko-no-myōjutsu:
ST: [literal transcription] *kano nezumi susumite, neko no tsura he tobikakari, kuitsukikereba, nekokoe wo tate nigesarinu.* [彼鼠進て、猫のつらへ飛びかかり、喰付ければ、猫声を立て逃げ去りぬ。] (Issai Chosan, 1727/1988, p. 36).
TT: <u>But as the cat entered the room,</u> the rat* advanced, hurled itself to the cat's face, and sank its teeth into it. The cat let out a scream and ran away (Issai Chosan, 1727/2006, p. 177).

The English translation has an additional sentence (underlined part) not present in the ST. For the TT reader this is helpful for understanding the story development. The *rat* (*nezumi*) is often chosen as an optional translation in also other available versions (see Stevens, 2001) although considering the time that the story is set in it could as well refer to an oversized monstrous mouse.

G5: This strategy (or rather groups of strategies) comprises a number of changes at the level of the phrase, including number, definiteness and modification in the noun phrase, and person, tense and mood in the verb phrase. The unit itself might remain unaltered, or as Chesterman explains that an ST phrase may still correspond to a TT phrase, although the inter-textual structure might undergo changes.

This is shown by the following example: (ST) *Sōken to iu kenjutsusha ga ari* [勝軒といふ剣術者があり。] (Issai Chosan, 1727/1988, p. 36).
TT: There was a swordsman by the name of Sôken (Issai Chosan, 1727/2006, p. 177).

In translation the tense changed from present to past, furthermore in translation a definite number is given to a single person and the verb - *iu* - in Japanese has been changed into a noun phrase.

G6: This strategy has the do with the structure of the clause in terms of its constituent phrases. Various subclasses include constituent order (analysed simply as Subject, Verb, Object, Complement, and Adverbial), active versus passive voice, finite versus non-finite structure, transitive versus intransitive.

An example from a non-literary source is the following: (ST) I have received your letter on 5 July 2009. (TT) *Anata no tegami ga nisenkyūnen shichigatsu itsuka* ni todoita.[あなたの手紙が 2009 年 7 月 5 日に届いた。].

The *I* in the ST disappeared from the TT to emphasise it from the standpoint of the letter received

G7: This group of strategies has an effect on the structure of the sentence unit, insofar as it is made up of clause units. There also changes between main-clause and sub-clause status, or changes of sub-clause types and others.

This point is clarified by the following example: (ST) *Watashi wa, yabu no mae he kuru to, takara wa kono naka ni umete aru, mi ni kite kure to iimashita.* [わたしは藪の前へ来ると、宝はこの中に埋めてある、来てくれと云いました。] (Akutagawa, 1991, p. 153). TT: When we reached the grove, I told them the treasure was buried in there and they should come inside with me and look at it. (Akutagawa, 2006, p. 13)

ST is basically an unreliable confession in the whole and starting the sentence with *watashi* (I) is natural as the start of this sentence. However, the translator decided a more natural start of English sentence structures by moving *I* further in the main English sentence clause. Actually the first sub-clause does not have a *we* in the ST and is added to the TT. Another option would have been: "Reaching the front of [present in the ST, deleted from the TT] the grove, I…".

G8: refers to a change that affects the intra-textual contiguity, like ellipsis, substitution, pronominalisation and repetition. It also includes the use of various connectors.

In the example below, this point has been applied to a textual occurrence: (ST) *Take de gozaimasu ka? Take wa yoki mo gozaimashita ka?* [丈でございますか？丈は四寸[よき*]でございましたか？ーなにしろ沙門のことでございますから、その辺ははっきり存じません。] (Akutagawa, 1991, p. 147) TT: Was it a big horse?[2] I would say it was a few inches taller than most [, but I am a priest after all. I do not know much about horses.] (Akutagawa, 2006, p. 11)

In the ST the *horse* lexis in the TT is not mentioned, but for the TT reader it is necessary information for clearly understanding what is being discussed. The lexeme "*take(丈)*" in the ST is already implying that the referent is concerning a horse [not the woman for that matter]. This explicit inserting of an additional lexeme in

[2] Here I follow the translated version exactly. It is in effect a repetition of the question asked by the magistrate, although only implied.

the translation will be discussed further in a future article under the section of *pragmatic strategies*: P2 – Explicitness change.

The sentences between the square brackets [ ] form actually in the ST one independent sentence. In the TT the sentence structure is clearly altered. This matter would also fall under the strategy discussed in G7: sentence structure change.

G9: Chesterman recognizes the following levels in his system: phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis. When level shifts occur the mode of a particular item is shifted from one level to another. An important factor in this, according to Chesterman, is the type of languages concerned. For instance, it is important to determine whether they are more analytical or instead more agglutinative in structure. Another determent is intonation expressing meaning, which other languages express through morphology, or instead by word order.

In the following example we can see this strategy applied: (ST) *Sayō de gozaimasu.Ano shigai wo mitsuketa no wa,watashi ni chigai gozaimasen.*[さやうでございます。あの死骸を見つけたのは、わたしに違いございません。] (Akutagawa, 1991, p. 145). (TT) That is true, Your Honor. I am the one who found the body (Akutagawa, 2006, p. 10).

The ST is written in a polite style representing the speaking style of the woodcutter towards the magistrate who investigates the crime and passes judgment onto the offender. With the "your honor" in the TT it becomes clear that the ST language alters according to the social position of the speaker. This polite style in ST is impossible to maintain in the TT by using special polite verbs or copula forms.

G10: In this last strategy (at present only) translators use this kind of change when they translate rhetorical schemes such as parallelism, repetition, alliteration, metrical rhythm to name a few.

There are three basic types:

1) ST scheme X ⇒ TT scheme X (e.g. in the case of alliteration). In this case the scheme is considered relevant to the translation and can therefore be preserved in the TT.
2) ST scheme X ⇒ TT scheme Y. In the case, the ST scheme can be changed to another scheme if this serves an appropriate or similar function in the TT: ST parallelism ⇒ TT chiasmus (= inversion of the order)

In these two cases I have not yet found a good example in Japanese ST source material, but Chesterman for (1) refers to the recurrent lexis in his examples like: Austrian Airlines, JET SHOP, Qualifier [Loan words actually from English], besides a literary example. For (2) he introduced a main sentence followed by a listing in German, versus parallel sentences as a device and adapting the list into sentences for the English TT (see pp. 100-101).

3) ST scheme X⇒ TT scheme Ø. In this case the ST scheme is not kept and disappears out of the TT. The example in G8 regarding altering the intra-textual sentence structures of both ST and TT resembles this alternative.

A fourth possibility resembles (3) inverted:

4) ST scheme Ø ⇒ TT scheme X. In the ST there is no direct scheme present, but the translator decides to adopt a rhetorical scheme, such as we saw the underlined part in G4 or the example in G9. The strategies are as we can see interconnecting with each other. Especially, this is true in the case where semantic and pragmatic strategies form an integrated system with the syntactic strategies.

Conclusion

Since we still need to discuss the other two main constituents in the triad system of strategies (*syntactic/grammatical, semantic and pragmatic*), it is too early in the process to make here final remarks regarding the usefulness of Chesterman' system of strategies for the translation of Japanese. In order not to forget for the next installment article I want to address one point in his discussion wherein he states that "[strategies] are directly observable from the translation product in comparison with the source text. I am therefore excluding here such translatorial actions as looking something up, accessing a database, checking a reference…" (Chesterman, 2000, p. 89). In translating Japanese this is definitely a necessary step towards the translation product and is visible in the final product as well. One of the strategic decisions of using dictionaries is whether to go over from a bi-lingual to mono-lingual dictionary. This especially is the case when finding terms in a completely new setting or context. For example, to translate a simple word like "*(prison) guard*" into Japanese presents the translator with a difficulty. What if this is not part of his/her active vocabulary? The dictionary and other resources will lead him/her to a final decision. Until well acquainted with this kind of nomenclature specialized dictionaries are helpful at the beginning. Next step is to refer to in-house publications to find out if you are using an outdated vocabulary. The word normally for the above example is *kanshu* (看守), but through interaction with other (Japanese) translators (= additional resources) the term was refined to *hōmujimukan* (法務事務官) and subsequently redefined towards *keimukan* (刑務官) as the general term based on in-house resources. *Kanshu* is too specific related to the ranking system in its present connotation and is therefore not usable in summary translation anymore. Translators need to update their knowledge through these textual resources which are reproduced actively in their translation products afterwards.

Although I said in the introduction I would not discuss the theoretical side of translation studies, there are enough reliable studies available to refer to if the reader wishes to do so. For that purpose, I included a short list of useful references in my previous article in the OTB (Bode, 2008). As a professional translator I am not completely bias-free when theories seem to contradict or even suggest an impractical time-consuming approach in the translation process. My approach to translation theory is in a sense similar to the Japanese CID (crime investigation department)'s basic rule that on the spot investigation leads to possibly more accurate identification of the crime than merely staying in the office. In other words, from the actual work information can be acquired by translators to develop and reassess (existing) theories in an attempt to present workable and reliable strategies in overcoming stalemates in the decision/solution process of translators with the time restrictions always on their mind (a sword of Damocles syndrome).

Notes to the reader

1. In some of the descriptions of the strategies I follow sometimes very closely the explanations by Chesterman in chapter 4. This was done so as not to obscure or delete anything essential (see chapter 4, pp. 94–101).
2. The special accents follow the way in which Japanese transcription normally is given.

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About the author: *Jeroen Bode has been working since 2005 for the University of Tsukuba as a lecturer. From 2007 he started also as an independent official translator of Japanese. His translation work led him to redirect his attention to applied language skills during the process of translating. He received his M.A. in Japanese language and culture in 1996 from Leiden University in the Netherlands.*

A New Face…

Editors' note: *A new feature that the OTB Forum will periodically include is an introduction of one of our staff members. In this edition we are pleased to welcome our new associate professor of German, Christian W. Spang.*

I studied Modern and Mediaeval History and English Literature in Erlangen (Germany), Dublin (Trinity College/Ireland) and Freiburg (Germany). I got my M.A. from Freiburg in July 1997 and my Ph.D. in March 2009, based on a thesis on Japanese-German relations during the first half of the 20th century. More specifically, my research deals with Karl Haushofer and the influence of geopolitics on German and Japanese foreign policy during the 1930s and early 40s. My alma mater is in Freiburg, which is a small but rather international city in south-western Germany. France and Switzerland are actually so near that some people can see French mountains from their windows.

In 1998 I came to Japan with a Monbushō scholarship and spent two years at the University of Tokyo. After that, I became Research Associate at the Institute for Asian Cultural Studies at International Christian University (ICU). Concurrently, I have been teaching German at various schools, including Hōsei University, Sophia University, Dokkyō University and Waseda University. Besides teaching at Tsukuba, I am working at Keiō University and the University of Tokyo as Adjunct Professor.

In addition to my interest in German-Japanese relations and "classic" geopolitics, I did some research on the history of the German East Asiatic Society (OAG), which was established in 1873 and still exists in Tokyo (www.oag.jp). Last year I wrote an article about the 2007 G8-summit. With regard to German language teaching, I have published a few articles on writing assignments and on the usage of reverse dictionaries in German classes. In the future, I intend to find out more about the history of German language education in Japan and the role Nazi-ideology played within Japanese German textbooks during the 1930s and early 40s.

Anyone interested in my research might have a look at the following volume: *Japanese-German relations, 1895-1945: war, diplomacy and public opinion*, edited by Christian W. Spang and Rolf-Harald Wippich, London – New York: Routledge, 2006 [pbk. 2008].