
Reviews of Books

**Yoko Hasegawa, *The Routledge Course in Japanese Translation*.
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Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko said that translations are like women: if they are faithful, they are not beautiful, and if they are beautiful, they are not faithful. Borges also quipped that “the original is unfaithful to the translation”. Ridiculed for its purported lack of aesthetic value and for its inability to preserve the original artistic effect, translation has all but been banished from the curricula of foreign language departments. Indeed, there are no rules or recipes for perfect translations. To a certain extent, translation is as much a result of creation and inspiration as the original itself. Japanese translator and author of books on translation theory and practice Tetsuo Anzai attempted to encase some of the English grammatical structure into a so-called “translation grammar”, but, alas, grammar and culture are not easily transferrable into a different linguistic system. The difficulty lies not only in the differences between the two languages involved, but also in the distinct socio-cultural realities they depict. However, despite its complexity and imprecision, translation continues to be indispensable and keeps expanding its utility in today’s interconnected world, and its repositioning as an important foreign language learning component is necessary.

The author of the present *Course in Japanese Translation*, Yoko Hasegawa, discusses translation from the linguist’s viewpoint, sharing Nida and Taber’s optimistic view that any utterance is, in principle, translatable from a L1 into a L2, unless formal equivalence is required. The book, the most recent in a series of courses dedicated to the study of languages other than English, offers insight into some of the issues raised by translating from and into Japanese. The author, who has published a number of Japanese linguistics books and language courses for students of Japanese, is a linguistics professor at the East Asian Languages and Cultures Department of Berkeley University. As she herself confesses, the book draws on her experience of teaching a semester-long course in translation at Berkeley University.

Structured after Mona Baker’s translation textbook *In Other Words*, the present volume proposes itself to raise awareness of the difficulty to transfer meaning between English and Japanese, two languages that use distinct communication strategies to express two different socio-cultural realities. The present Course and Baker’s book differ in that, while *In Other Words* addresses translation issues from the viewpoint of English as a source and target language, with fewer examples from other languages, Hasegawa’s book discusses English and Japanese translations with a focus on Japanese translation, presenting the way in which various translators, professional or not, negotiate meaning, politeness or ambiguity when translating from or into Japanese, and discussing the appropriateness of the target text. Hasegawa notes that, in recent years, the field of translation is once again attracting students who study a second language, because it offers learners the opportunity to observe the different ways through which equivalence is attained in L1 and L2 respectively (p. 3).

The book reflects the author’s background in linguistics, and it addresses students of linguistics with intermediate to advanced Japanese proficiency. The complexity of most of the examples and exercises tends to make it difficult for a reader with lesser Japanese language skills to fully grasp and enjoy the artistic

expression of Japanese classics like Natsume Soseki, Kawabata Yasunari or Mishima Yukio. Nevertheless, instead of offering recipes for translation, as one would expect, the book provides interesting insight into how things are expressed differently between Japanese and English, also explaining how the same message can be expressed differently, sometimes within the same language, depending on register or target audience, which Jakobson calls “intralingual translation”. Oftentimes Hasegawa’s linguistic explanations are interspersed with examples of translations from Japanese and English literature, technical texts, advertisements and everyday dialogues, and exercises that invite the readers if not to test out their translation skills, at least to reflect upon the issues explained previously. The examples and tasks, accompanied by answers and explanations in the appendix, help ease the boredom of long theoretical explanations and enhance the pleasure of discovering different means of expression.

The *Course* begins with a brief introduction of translation, translatability, direction and competence. The author advocates the necessity of introducing translation as part of foreign language curriculum and shows that translation is a more complex process than a simple word transfer from SL (source language) into a TL (target language). However, she suggests that the issue of transferring aesthetic image and effect into a target language is not necessarily a mission impossible for translators. She offers examples from the Japanese traditional poetry genre of haiku, which may be considered untranslatable due to its 5-7-5-syllable pattern and juxtaposition of Japanese traditional culture and season-related imagery. However, as she points out, although various translators may employ different translation strategies, or even images that may differ from the Japanese familiar context, some haiku poetry in translation has had a favorable reception in the Western world. This thinking is in line with Nida and Taber’s concept of *dynamic equivalence* and Newmark’s *communicative translation*, which, as Newmark suggests, “attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original” (Newmark 1981: 39).

In the following two chapters the author introduces an array of examples for translating different types of meaning in L1 and L2, such as proper nouns, polysemy, synonymy, indexicality, as well as more abstract, symbolic and figurative meaning, and interpreting the ambiguity and vagueness in English and Japanese discourse. Discourse translation is discussed in the next chapter, which dwells extensively on the difficulties of Japanese tense and aspect. She then tackles various types of discourse and their peculiarities in English or Japanese (imperative in English for prescriptive discourses, but simple declarative sentences accompanied or not by the request form “kudasai”, clear differentiation of the roles of speakers, with a greater importance attributed to the protagonist in the Japanese repartee discourse, and so on).

Chapter 5 is looking at the problem of thoroughly understanding the source text, which is vital for any translation, and refers not only to its semantic contents, but also to communicative value, style and tone, place, time and target audience. The excessive attention given to content words, such as nouns and verbs, and too little preoccupation with grammatical rules can negatively influence the correct interpretation of a text. Reading is an act of creation whose interpretation is unique and subjective. The correct interpretation of certain texts containing cultural clues may be restricted to natives of these cultures, the so-called *interpretive communities* (Fish 1980, in Hasegawa), who share the same perceptions and values inculcated by that specific culture, and which are not always accessible to those with a less deep understanding of the cultural milieu of the source text. As an example, the Japanese word べル (Engl. bell, ring, buzzer, chime, doorbell, ringtone) may well be translated as “doorbell” or “clock chime”, but most Japanese readers are likely to identify it with the sound of the telephone, and therefore translating it otherwise may lead to an incorrect interpretation of the source text. Hasegawa stresses the difficulty of the complex levels of ambiguity in Japanese with a number of mistranslation examples.

In the next chapter, Translation Techniques, Hasegawa presents seven main types of translation which any translation student should have knowledge of: borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation. She presents a few examples of the best-known examples of words bor-

rowed from Japanese, such as karaoke, manga and zen, and a few English words, which were introduced in Japanese; when not supplementing a non-existing concept in Japanese, their use gives out an air of sophistication, such as charity チャリティー, diet ダイエット or multimedia マルチメディア.

Although rather dense and inaccessible to the monolingual or non-linguistically initiated reader, the book is otherwise fascinating and instructive for the translation/interpretation student of medium to advanced Japanese proficiency, as well as for the bilingual reader or professional translator interested in the complex mechanisms and problems involved in the process of meaning transfer between English and Japanese.

References

Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to Translation*. Oxford & New York: Pergamon.

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