

The Japanese translation of Chuck Palahniuk's *Lullaby* An examination of some translation strategies and choices

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Summary

An analysis of the translation strategies evident from a textual comparison of Chuck Palahniuk's *Lullaby* with the Japanese translation by Mariko Ikeda. Comparison with translations facing similar issues and reference to translator interviews indicate that business pressures for quick translations influence the translator. Economic and time pressures may account for decided differences in style. Differences in tone are particularly noticeable in both biological terms for invasive species and unique terms created by the author. In spite of the need for a fast, profitable translation the Japanese version of *Lullaby* may satisfy certain ethical considerations.

Key words: translation strategies, translation ethics, audience reception.

Translators on Translation

As famed translator Gregory Rabassa states a translator is another reader and each reader brings a different understanding to a text. Rabassa refuses to judge other translator's work, simply stating that he would do the work differently, he avoids assigning value. He writes "as usual, each reader will be reading a different book" (Rabassa 2005: 174) and "it is a common notion to say that if a work has 10,000 readers it becomes 10,000 different books." However the translator's reading is a reading that "is going to spawn 10,000 varieties of the book" in the target language. This reading is "also writing" (ibid.: 8). This reading and writing is seen as a heavy responsibility by *Lullaby*'s translator, Mariko Ikeda, and fraught with ethical choices by translator and translation studies scholar Lawrence Venuti (佐乃; Venuti 1998).

In his memoir, Rabassa ponders the provocative Italian adage "traduttore, traditore" and explores the various betrayals of which the translator as traitor may be accused. With the possibility, almost inevitability, of betraying the language and culture of the author with words, that are treacherous themselves, he concludes that translators should at least avoid betraying themselves. Translators must trust their instincts and avoid "sacrificing [their] best hunches ... in fear of betraying the task we were set to do (Rabassa 2005: 3-9).

In examining the translation strategies evident in a comparison of the English and Japanese texts of *Lullaby* we seek to explore one way of navigating the contradictory pressures brought to bear on translations, and do not intend to render value judgments. There is a certain "inherent" (Rabassa 2005: 163), "essential impossibility of translation" (ibid.: 34) about which many translators seem to agree and which should prevent all of us from too severely judging reasonable translations.

Writing for a professional translators' publication Mike Collins states "The goal of translation is to produce a text that does not read like a translation - one that conveys the sense of the source without additions or subtractions. Although it is difficult to do practically speaking, that does not mean we should settle for the lower rungs on the ladder" (Collins 2008: 21). This may represent the view of translators working in technical fields but literary translators may have more various goals related to "convey[ing] a sense of the source." Translator and translation studies scholar Lawrence Venuti cites Berman "Good translation is demystifying: it manifests in its own language the foreignness of the foreign text" (Venuti 1998: 11). Venuti also discusses the ethical issues involved in choosing works to translate and the translation strategies applied to reach domestic audiences (ibid.: 67-87). Lullaby's Japanese translator seems to recognize this ethical dimension to some extent as she discusses the heavy responsibility of translators with an interviewer, she also comments on observing what the market will allow (翻訳人 chapter 7).

The Japanese translation of Lullaby provides an opportunity to explore how conflicting pressures may shape translation strategies and their possible ethical results. "Most literary projects are initiated in the domestic culture, where a foreign text is selected to satisfy different tastes from those that motivated its composition and reception in its native culture" (Venuti 1998: 11) Lullaby's translator is given projects from a publisher and observes the work of other translators to make decisions regarding how closely to pull her work towards Japanese (翻訳人 chapter 7).

「ただ単に英文を和訳したのでは商品としてつまらないし、かといって著者が書いていないことは創作できません。訳がすごく上手と思った作品の原書を買ってきて、どう意識しているか突き合せ『ここまでは市場として許容されているらしい』という線引きをしました。ただ、その加減は作品によっても違いますし、今でも行ったり来たりです…」(佐乃)

"Merely translating English text into Japanese makes for an unappealing product, but then again you can't simply create something the author didn't write. I will go and buy the original book for a translation that I have thought was well done, I'll say to myself "this is what the market allows" and draw the line there. However, the amount of leeway differs with the work; I still come and go on this..." (Trans. Brian Small)

Ikeda admits to market pressures and publisher choices but also says that the book itself decides on the style she adapts for her writing.

文体を決めるのは 私ではなくてあくまでも原文ですから。(翻訳人 chapter 7)

What decides the style is not me but definitely the original writing. (Trans. Brian Small)

However her reading and writing of Lullaby brought to mind translator Hiroaki Ike's view on difficult kanji characters and insistence that translators should be permitted their own style in the same way as authors (翻訳人 chapter 8).

作家がそれぞれの文体を持っているように、翻訳の文体だって、人それぞれであっていいはずでしょう。(ibid.)

Just as authors each have their own writing style, well as far as translator's style, shouldn't each person have their own style. (Trans. Brian Small)

Tone and Style

Ikeda's use of kanji characters instead of the phonetic hiragana characters for "cigarette" (Palahniuk 2002: 115; パラニューク 2005: 123) and the choice of the less vernacular expressions for addiction terms seem more in line with Hiroki Ike's description of his own approach.

私は「難しい漢字を沢山使う訳者」として、捉えられてしまうことが多い…、(翻訳人 chapter 8)
I'm often perceived as "a translator that uses a lot of difficult kanji"… (Trans. Brian Small)

The following examples from the English and Japanese texts further illustrate Ikeda's strategies for *Lullaby* approaching Ike's stance in addition to presenting other ethical choices.

These sound-oholics. These quiet-ophobics (Palahniuk 2002: 15).

音依存症。無音恐怖症 (パラニューク 2005: 21)。

These music-oholics. These calm-ophobics (Palahniuk 2002: 18).

音楽依存症どもきたら。静穏恐怖症どもきたら (パラニューク 2005: 24)。

These talk-oholics. These listen-ophobics (Palahniuk 132).

おしゃべり依存症どもきたら。傾聴恐怖症どもきたら (パラニューク 2005: 140)。

The above examples of conversational word play in English effectively create new terms for addictions and phobias perceived by the narrator. Found throughout the novel these terms' translations may reflect a strategy following the English novel's consistency at the expense of its conversational tone. Perhaps 「中毒」 the conversational Japanese stand-in for intoxication and poison as well as addiction would better capture the vernacular style of "-oholic" but it would not have been as parallel with 「恐怖症」 for "-ophobic." The alternative term would perhaps be more difficult to apply as broadly as "-oholic." The choice is also consistent with the less vernacular style of the Japanese translation.

The translator is faced with contradictory pressures and ethical dilemmas (Rabassa; Venuti). The popular novel *Lullaby*, by famously shocking yet critically deep Chuck Palahniuk, is a fine illustration of how translation strategies, shaped by opposing forces, may result in ethical effects regardless of market-driven intent. Perhaps, like *Kitchen*, the decision to translate *Lullaby* served an ethical end (Venuti 1998: 84-87) of educating a Japanese audience regarding power struggles and turmoil (generational warfare and religious fanaticism) in American society, a society with such great social and political influence on their own.

Reception and Results

One reviewer expresses surprise at the contrast between his image of America and the strong current of the occult in the novel.

科学文明、物質文明の象徴的な存在であるアメリカで、オカルトが浸透しているのは何とも皮肉な感じですが、人間というのは、どこかで超自然なもの、神秘的なものがないと不安になるものなのかもしれません。(とみくら)

It seems ironic that America, an example of scientific, material civilization, should be so permeated by the occult. Perhaps human beings are insecure without supernatural, mystical elements. (Trans. Brian Small)

Japanese audiences might be surprised to learn that the United States has levels of religious fundamentalism that rival Bangladesh and Iran (Chomsky 2002: 50). Polls consistently show that eighty percent of Americans believe in miracles (Harris Interactive; Salmon 2008). That a small country town in Nevada converts to Hinduism may not be such an outrageous proposition after all, if the reader ignores the talking Judas cow that prompts the conversion (Palahniuk 2002: 191-194, パラニューク 2005: 199-202). Only Canada and the United States, among industrial societies, exhibit the kind of religious fanaticism found in “pre-industrial societies.” The society Chuck Palahniuk depicts may reveal a bit of the “shattered peasant society” aspects of the U.S. in which “very close to Iran [,] eighty percent of Americans literally believe in religious miracles” (Chomsky 2002: 50).

Just as Megan Backus’ English translation of Banana Yoshimoto’s *Kitchen* changed American perceptions of Japan (Venuti 1998: 86), the above reviewer’s reaction suggests that the publisher and translator’s decision to make *Lullaby* available in Japanese may alter domestic images of the US. Polls on “religious fanaticism” suggest reassessed views are liable to be more accurate. What would seem a sound commercial decision to publish the works of the popular *Fight Club* author may have resulted in a more critical awareness of the United States of America.

Flora and Fauna

Another translation strategy of note in *Lullaby* is the approach toward the many scientific names for flora and fauna that appear throughout the novel. Finding an equivalent term for species that the target language speakers may have no experience with, therefore no need to name may offer no alternative but a reliance on the Latin scientific names, which themselves are in flux (Tudge 2005: 34-36; タツジ 2008: 61-63).

Gregory Rabassa comments on the difficulties in translating the “exotic flora and fauna” of Latin America and being thankful for the ability to place the English word “tree” after names from other languages when his searches of the botanical lexicon proved unsuccessful. His comparisons with the French translation showed the simplification necessary in a target language that does not allow the addition of tree to modify borrowed names (Rabassa 2005: 67-68, 76).

Keiko Watarai, the translator of Colin Trudge’s definitive volume *The Tree*, comments on the pain of translating scientific classification into Japanese. The editors responded to her cry for help by bringing in Hideaki Ohba, a native speaker of the target language and area specialist, who shares the original author’s enthusiasm for the subject. This strategy raised the quality of the publication and remained true to the zealous author (タツジ 2008: 522). Ikeda’s transliterating of the Latin classifications, may have served the ethical purpose of foreignizing (Venuti 1998) the translation while also avoiding the need to involve specialist consultation. This strategy may have been commercially motivated but comes to serve the ethical end of appropriately foreignizing the discussion of invasive species. However, the transliterated names may deprive Japanese readers of the more useful “nonfiction nuggets” (Burana) that scholarly Japanese names would have provided.

While Palahniuk’s English reading audience appreciates well researched information in his novels, the transliterated Latin names in the Japanese translation are probably not any more obscure than the italicized Latin in the source language. This technical and foreignizing tone is preserved in line with the author’s intent. While English is limited to the ‘foreignizing’ and italicized Latin of *Zelkova* for a tree common in Japan, *The Tree*’s translators supply the Japanese name without comment choosing transparency and respecting the author’s desire to increase awareness and appreciation for trees both common and exotic (Tudge 2005: 118; タツジ 2008: 243). The same approach for the translation of

Lullaby would have resulted in additional costs and, while satisfying Palahniuk's Japanese readers' appetite for well researched information, may not have contributed any greater equivalency to the tone of the characters' conversations.

The following example shows how *Lullaby*'s translation avoids scholarly names in Japanese.

The twisted dark trees we just passed, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, black locust (Palahniuk 110).

たったいま通り過ぎたねじれた黒っぽい木は、学名ロビーニア・スードアカシア、ニセアカシアだ (パラニューク 2005: 118)。

While Ikeda translates "*Robinia pseudoacacia*, black locust" as 「学名ロビーニア・スードアカシア、ニセアカシア」 Watarai and Ohba, fittingly enough for a non-fiction book with an educational mission, supply 「ハリエンジュ属」 and 「ニセアカシア (ハリエンジュ)」 for the same black locust. (Tudge 2005: 183; タツジ 2008: 236)

The translator of Michael Pollen's *Botany of Desire* left the scientific classifications in the chapter title pages in English. Just as in the original, the Japanese version gives each chapter heading a full page. Serving as an informative and balancing aspect of the page's design and not a part of the text, the retention of the English alphabet does not attract the reader's attention with transliterating katakana characters, technical Japanese classifications or translator's notes. The first chapter traces the apple and Johnny Appleseed in American history sharing the theme of invasive species with *Lullaby*. The iconic figure of Johnny Appleseed in America prompted the rare translator's note in *Lullaby* (Pollan 2001: 113; ポーラン 2003: 122).

Switching to the Japanese classification for the black locust (Palahniuk 2002: 110; パラニューク 2005: 118; タツジ 2008: 237) common in both America and Japan may have maintained the same degree of scientific accuracy while satisfying Palahniuk readers' appetite for reliable trivia (Burana). However, consistently translating Latin classifications to Japanese terms causes difficulties with more difficult plants like Sahara mustard, an example of a plant with multiple 'mixed' names in English in addition to a nonexistent or difficult to find Japanese classification (Palahniuk 109; パラニューク 2005: 117).

Alternative Readings and Japanese Society

Mariko Ikeda's Japanese translation of *Lullaby* presents an opportunity to explore one translator's approach to reading and writing a commercial American novel. Concrete examples of the choices taken in the translation, illustrated with observations and advice from other established translators and scholars, suggest resulting ethical consequences regardless of whether or not they were intended. Further inquiry into the difference in tone between the source and target languages may suggest alternative readings that would reach Japanese audiences' equivalent to the American audiences enjoyed by Chuck Palahniuk's novels in English. The commercial pressures for speed (佐乃) are probably responsible for mistranslations (Palahniuk 2002: 115; パラニューク 2005: 123) and missing pages (Palahniuk 2002: 228-229; パラニューク 2005: 241).

One can imagine an alternative project with the same book, read not as a popular suspense novel but as a story told with the immediacy of a conversation in a bar or café or even as an attempt at creating a "new social model" or instilling a virus capable of changing lives (Palahniuk 1996: 214; Hari). Such a reading would take into account the author's social stance in *Fight Club* and *Rant* as well, maybe looking to Japan's present day "precariat" literature for inspiration. "Precariat" is a term created by the Japanese combination of the English words "precarious" and "proletariat." The insecurity of around a third of Japan's workers working as part-timers and nonregular contract employees makes them a "proletariat" in "precarious"

situations. Like many of Palahniuk's themes and characters these insecure youth are "increasingly standing in open rebellion" (Ueno).

Such a reading and writing, perhaps looking to Ira Ishida's novels or the cell phone novels of internet café refugees (雨宮15-16) might provide the kind of inspiration Gothic novels like *Dracula* provide for Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1998 :14-17), and *Paradise Lost* provided for Gregory Rabassa's problematic title *In Evil Hour* (Rabassa 2005: 103). An ethical project to reach an audience made up of the people identified by this new Japanese word "precariat" might come close to attaining an equivalence of impact with Chuck Palahniuk's American English works.

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