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ABSTRACT

This article explores translation strategies in English and French versions of Japanese comic books, comparing English and French dialogue text regarding local color, atmospherics, and characterization. Section 1 describes Japanese comic books. Section 2 examines translation strategies. Sections 3 and 4 discuss local color and character locus (translation of culture-specific items and of non-standard dialect and foreigner talk). Section 5 discusses the translation of register (situations of language use). Section 6 highlights comic book character role (the soldier, schoolgirl, and vamp). Section 7 discusses atmospherics (jargonization). Section 8 concludes that American translators used naturalizing strategies, both culturally (name changes and insertion of references to American culture) and linguistically (stereotypical use of dialects and use of heavily marked register). Strategies used in the French versions are less naturalizing than those used in the American versions. Culturally, they are more foreignizing in conserving names and culture-specific items. Linguistically, in some translations, transfers and calques from the English version are used, and as a result, the dialogue reads like a translation, but not from the Japanese original. Other French translations reveal linguistic neutralization with regard to dialect and register. This results in a destylization that reduces the expressive impact of the original dialogue. (Contains 49 references.) (SM)

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Strategy and Style in English and French
Translations of Japanese Comic Books

Peter Howell

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1

STRATEGY AND STYLE IN ENGLISH AND FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF JAPANESE COMIC BOOKS.

Peter Howell (TAAL)

Abstract

This article explores translation strategies in English and French versions of Japanese comic books, and compares the English and French dialogue text with regard to local colour, atmospherics and characterization. English translations are found to be strongly naturalizing, whereas a variety of strategies, including neutralization and intermediate translation via English, can be identified in the French versions.

1. Japanese Comic Books

Narratives combining verbal and visual texts are an important part of contemporary culture. A particular feature of Japanese popular culture is the ubiquity and importance of the comic-book (*manga*) medium. Kinsella (2000:41) reports that comic books are read by all sections of the population in Japan and in 1997 made up 38% of all published titles. She also points out that in recent years the prolific comic book industry has tended to receive more official approval from institutions regulating culture in Japan such as universities and cultural agencies, and an increasing number of Japanese comic books are being translated into Asian and European languages. Despite some notoriety in Europe and America, partly caused by the fact that fewer examples of girls' and women's comics are translated, it is far from certain that Japanese comics focus more on sex and violence than comparable Western media such as television. *Manga* are also used for educational purposes: translated into English in parallel text form, they are used as a material for foreign language learning, both English by Japanese learners, and Japanese by English-speaking learners. Since comic books represent a significant part of the expressive texts translated between Japanese and English, and may moreover be used in language and cultural education, it is relevant for those who help mediate between the cultures (e.g. language teachers and translators) to find out about the strategies and procedures of translation that occur.

From a semiotic point of view, comic books combine visual and verbal codes in a spatially-juxtaposed narrative sequence, whereas narrative in the related medium of film is temporally sequenced (McCloud 1993). Although both codes combine to create the meaning of these types of multi-channel narratives, it is sometimes argued that the verbal code is subordinate to the visual in terms of defining the medium (Groensteen 1999). Kaindl (1999:273-4) lists the linguistic signs used in comics: titles, dialogue texts, narrations, inscriptions, and onomatopoeia. However, Rommens (2000) is not alone in pointing out the relative absence of narrations in *manga*, and although onomatopoeic effects are on the contrary ubiquitous, I will focus on speech as represented within balloons.

2. Translation Strategies

In Schreiber's outline of different methods of translating, one of the contrasts drawn is between "verfremdende" and "einbürgende Übersetzung" (foreignizing and naturalizing translation) (Schreiber 1993:73-76). Schreiber explains that the difference is that in making a foreignizing translation the translator believes the reader expects it to read like a translation, whereas the reader expects a naturalizing translation to read like an original. A further distinction is then drawn by Schreiber between "sprachliche vs. kulturelle Verfremdung/Einbürgerung" (linguistic vs. cultural foreignization/naturalization). Linguistic foreignization/naturalization has to do with the degree to which the translation conforms to stylistic and idiomatic norms of the target language, while cultural

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foreignization/naturalization is concerned with translation of culture-specific aspects of the source-text. He points out that in practice a combination such as linguistic naturalization and cultural foreignization may be common.

Naturalizing methods of translation into English, which tend to render the work of the translator invisible, have been viewed unfavourably in some recent discussions of translation (Venuti 1995). But invisibility is a goal explicitly stated by Toren Smith, the head of Studio Proteus, one of the two main *manga* translation companies in America. In relating the story of the translation of Miyazaki Hayao's *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*, he writes:

...we wanted our work to be totally invisible to the readers. We hoped that, when we were done, the English-language readers would never notice the translation, the sound effects or the lettering—they would simply read and enjoy this incredible story without ever thinking about the fact that it was translated from another language (Smith 1995).

The American *manga* publisher Viz sometimes produces the English dialogue in two separate stages: first a literal translation is made of the Japanese text, and then a specialist in scriptwriting adapts the dialogue to make it read more like an American comic. It is thus a process designed to be linguistically naturalizing.

The two-stage process can also be found amongst the *manga* released by French publishers. An example is the French version of Fujisawa Tōru's *GTO, Great Teacher Onizuka*, the story of an urban punk who becomes a high-school teacher. Linguistically, the adaptor François Jacques naturalizes Matsushima Ayumi's initial translation by writing dialogue incorporating French youth slang. However, culturally, the dialogue is foreignizing in that a number of culture-specific words are conserved in the speech balloons and explained in notes.

It is possible to identify two other general strategies of translation from a reading of French *manga* in comparison with American versions and Japanese originals. Some French translations show a linguistic neutralization, in which features of language variety in the Japanese dialogue are omitted or standardized in the target-text. This results in a destylization of the dialogue. Other French versions are based primarily on the English translation rather than the original Japanese dialogue, and may also transfer English sound effects and inscriptions (for example the language used in signs). This results in a comic with imagery from Japan, English sound effects and sometimes heavily anglicized French dialogue.

In considering the stylistic effects of these different translation strategies, it is difficult to perceive any effect on the sequential plot-advancing functions of the dialogue. These remain largely invariant in translation. However, the type of strategy chosen has stylistic relevance for other functions of the dialogue such as local colour and character identity, character roles and relations, and atmospherics.

3. Local Colour and Character Locus: the Translation of Culture-Specific Items (CSIs)

Culture-specific references are generally considered to include "local institutions, streets, historical figures, place names, personal names, periodicals, works of art, etc." (Aixelá 1996:57). Lists of cultural references are useful, but Aixelá points out that they are static and might suggest that CSIs are permanent rather than related to the dynamics of the target language-culture. His definition is more fluid, allowing more scope for shifting intertextualities, describing CSIs as:

Those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text (ibid.:58).

He categorizes procedures for translating CSIs into two broad headings: conservation, which includes procedures such as transfer, calquing and glossing; and substitution, which includes procedures such as universalization, deletion, and cultural naturalization.

With regard to names, although they are usually transferred into English in the case of works of 'mainstream' literature, in children's literature publishers sometimes request that character names should be changed to target-culture names (Crampton 1990). Such name substitution also occurs in *manga* translation. One example is the English version of Kishiro Yukito's cyberpunk comic *Gunnm*. The adaptor Fred Burke reportedly perceived artistically undesirable connotations in some of the original names when transferred into English (anonymous website author 2001). Thus *Gunnm*'s heroine is renamed *Alita* from *Gally* (and the comic retitled *Battle Angel Alita*), while her love-interest *Yugo* is changed to *Hugo* because the former was the name of a "cheap and tiny compact car" and thus unsuitable for a romantic role. Burke also argued that the name *Zalem* had undesirable associations with witch hunts in America and changed the name of the story's city in the sky to *Tiphares*. By contrast, the French version, although it has clearly used the English as one of its source texts, retains the original Japanese names: *Gally*, *Yugo* and *Zalem*.

In the girls' comic *Sailor Moon*, while the class nerd is still called by his Japanese name *Umino* in the French version, in the American edition he becomes *Melvin*, just as the heroine *Tsukino Usagi* becomes *Serena*. The same American publisher, Mixx Entertainment, also changes the names in other girls' comics such as Clamp's *Magic Knight Rayearth*. Mixx also naturalizes speech by teenage-girl characters, substituting possible American equivalents for CSIs and autonomously inserting items referring to American culture, even where there is no CSI in the Japanese. Thus in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, a reference to the Tsujiki fish market in Tokyo is conserved in the French translation, but substituted in the English:

Japanese (J) Volume 1/Page 32:

Sore izen ni anna ōki na sakana itara tsukiji no uoichiba ni hairanai desho?!

Gloss: Before that such big fish if-is Tsukiji fish market into not enter [copula-presumptive]

English (E) Volume 1/Page 32:

Besides, this thing's way too big to fit in Safeway's seafood section!

French (F): Volume 1/Page 38:

Avant de parler des ailes...s'il y avait un si gros poisson, il ne rentrerait pas dans le marché des poissons de Tsukiji!

And in the English version of *Sailor Moon*#1, the line *I wanna eat Pringles* is inserted beside a speech balloon, where there is no corresponding line in either the French or the Japanese original. Another autonomous insertion occurs, for example, in a reference to Arnold Schwarzenegger:

J 1/9: Konogoro wa gōtō no hoka ni mo hen na jiken ga zokushutsu shitemasu kara ne. Nyūsu mo yō chekku desu yo!

Gloss: these days [topic particle] burglary [case particle] other too strange incident [case particle] appear in succession because [sentence-final particle]. News too necessary check [copula] [sentence-final particle]

E 1/9: With all the bizarre and hideous crimes nowadays, the news is more action-packed than a Schwarzenegger movie.

F 1/9: De drôles d'incidents se produisent en ce moment, il faut s'informer!

In the sample of comics analyzed here, French publishers are also less reluctant than their American counterparts to use the procedure of transferring Japanese linguistic items into the target text. In the French version of *Oh My Goddess!* the Japanese word *senbei* is transferred, whereas in Dark Horse's American edition *senbeis* (rice crackers, which are not shown visually in the frame) can be easily naturalized to *chips*. Similarly, in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, a Japanese-specific term stereotyping a certain social category of young women – *ojōsama* – is simply transferred in the French comic, but explicated in the American as *rich girls from snobby families*.

4. Local Colour and Character Locus: the Translation of Non-Standard Dialect and Foreigner Talk

Three procedures can be identified in the translation of non-standard geographical dialect. These are:

- (i) standardization by use of standard language in the target text;
- (ii) substitution by elements from an 'equivalent' target-culture dialect;
- (iii) substitution by elements from spoken style in the target culture.

In some works of verbal art the use of dialect may be essential to understanding the plot, as in *Pygmalion/My Fair Lady*, and recourse cannot be had to standard language (Herbst 1994). Even if the use of dialect is not related to plot, standardization will result in an expressively impoverished target-culture text with regard to local colour and character identity. However, Herbst's view is that the option of substituting a target-culture dialect should not be used in the medium of film, except for comic effects, because dialect is associated with a geographical location and this disrupts the illusion on which film is thought to depend. Similarly, Hervey and Higgins claim, "having broad Norfolk on the lips of peasants from the Auvergne could have disastrous effects on the plausibility of the whole [target text]" (Hervey and Higgins 1992:118). Instead, says Herbst, a kind of indirect equivalence is usually aimed at in German dubbing, whereby language variety with geographical associations in the source-culture text is replaced in the target-culture text by dialogue which is standard, but marked phonetically and lexicographically for spoken style (op.cit.:108-9), and still conveys qualities of the interaction such as social intimacy, directness and emotionality; although the possibility is alluded to that stereotypical associations will be replaced by new specifically-individual meanings.

In the English version of Takahashi's *Inuyasha* published by Viz, medieval Japanese peasants who speak represented dialect in the original, are made to speak in the kind of represented archaic rural English that Hervey and Higgins warned about, in lines such as:

E 1/29-30: Be you a stranger?
She's come spyin'. I wager!
Then another battle's a brewin'?

Inuyasha has yet to be translated into French, but Viz's version contrasts with the more neutralizing fan-translation made available on the internet by Chris Rijk and Igarashi Akira:

Are you from a foreign province?
Could she be a spy?
Could be war again.

In *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (henceforth *Evangelion*), Suzuhara Tōji is an aggressive 14-year old boy who speaks Kansai dialect. In the transfer into French, and into English subtitles and dubbing, his lines are rendered in a socially-marked spoken style; but in the Viz comic book, he is made to speak a stereotypical version of Brooklynese in lines such as:

E 2/20-2: It ain't da goin' dere I mind..but supposin' she ends up with some scar --? She'll never be a babe!
and,
It ain't none of yer concern! Shaddap!

as compared to the less stylized French version:

F 2/22-23: Je me fiche de ce qui peut m'arriver...mais ma petite soeur, c'est pas pareil...ça serait horrible s'il lui restait des cicatrices sur le visage...
La ferme! Occupe-toi de tes oignons!

This use of a substitutionary dialect may or may not strike readers as implausible, depending on the conventions of the reading community they belong to. But it is a not uncommon expressive device in the transfer of Japanese popular texts into English.

Apart from dialects, other features of language variety that have to be dealt with in the translation of comic books are elements of foreign languages and other foreigner-talk. In *Evangelion*, Asuka is a 14-year-old girl of mixed Japanese-German parentage and so she sometimes uses German words. It is an important part of her characterization. However, in the French comics the German she uses in the Japanese original is sometimes rendered by French (e.g. Scheisse > merde) and thus expressively neutralized, while in the Viz version it is maintained. Similarly, minor Chinese characters in Takahashi's *Ranma 1/2*, are made to speak in stereotyped foreigner-talk in the Viz version, but their original 'broken' Japanese is neutralized in the French version published by Glénat, as in these lines from two consecutive speech balloons:

E 1/42: You very strange one, no, sir?
F 1/44: Vous êtes sûrs de vous

E 1/42: This place very dangerous. Nobody use now.
F 1/44: Ce site n'est pas vraiment ordinaire...

In the French version of Tsuruta Kenji's *The Spirit of Wonder*, the translator neutralizes the exoticizing use of the English phrase "Ladies and Gentlemen!" (*Redisu ando jenterumenu!*) by the eccentric English inventor Dr. Breckenridge by translating it into French, whereas in the American version, although this particular line is inevitably destylized, it is compensated for elsewhere by the use of stereotypical archaic Britishisms (e.g. *By Jove!*).

5. The Translation of Register

Unlike *dialect*, which is a feature of the language user, Halliday uses the term *register* to characterize situations of language use. Register is "the configuration of semantic resources that the member of a culture typically associates with a situation type" (Halliday cited in Marco 2000:1). However, the context of situation in expressive texts such as comic books is double-layered. Comic-book dialogue is not 'real' dialogue in the sense of belonging to what Bakhtin called primary (simple) speech genres. Rather it is 'represented' dialogue and can be said to be part of secondary (complex) speech genres (Bakhtin 1986). Unlike in primary speech genres, dialogue in secondary speech genres has a dual addressee: the characters being addressed in the film, comic etc., and the audience or readership; and it has a variety of narrative functions springing from this double universe of discourse: e.g. advancing the storyline, helping create clear characters, contributing to atmospherics and local colour. Studies on literary language have suggested that secondary and expressive speech genres enjoy a certain degree of *sovereign* freedom from any immediate social environment determining linguistic expression, and must therefore integrate "social meanings made outside the literary universe of discourse into the text" (Downes 1994: 3510). This view of register in expressive works had been pioneered by Jean Ure and her colleagues in an article on the application of Hallidayan theory to literary translation:

Register choice correlates with the immediate situation of utterance of the text, but when it comes to works of imaginative literature we have a special case, since what the author is doing is to *create* a further situation; this he does by choosing a register suitable to the imagined situation he is creating. (Ure, Rodger and Ellis 1969:8)

The most salient variable of register in terms of the translation of comic-book dialogue is that which is used to create interpersonal meanings of role and relationship. It has been argued that certain aspects of tenor in Japanese, for example politeness (Matsumoto 1988), are fundamentally different from what is found in languages such as English and French, and it is certainly true that Japanese lexicogrammatical resources for realizing interpersonal meaning are very different (for example in the systems of address and self-reference, and in the conversational use of sentence-final particles).

Naturalizing translation procedures which make use of 'equivalent' lexicogrammatical resources in American English tend to make the characters sound like American comic-book characters.

6. **Character Role: the Soldier, the Schoolgirl, the Vamp.**

Comic-book characters, as the figurative use of the phrase implies, are often heavily stereotypical, especially in the case of supporting characters. Translators into English rely on a rich tradition of expressive conventions to re-create lexicogrammatically dimensions of tenor in English that will make the characters sound like American stereotypes. The most important lexicogrammatical device is the use of non-standard lexis in the major clause, but address forms, and the exclamatory use of secondary interjections and interjectional phrases – adopting Ameka's (1992) categorization of interjections – also play an important role.

In Japanese the rough masculinity of soldiers, for example in the works of Shirow Masamune, may be conveyed by masculine sentence-final particles (e.g. *ze*) and the graphological representation of non-standard masculine pronunciation (*nē* instead of *nai*), as in the following line from *Ghost in the Shell*:

J 113: Omoshiroku *nē ze*.
interesting/fun is-not [sentence-final particle].

In English, this masculine tenor is realized by a combination of secondary interjection and non-standard lexis. The French translator, using the English as a source text, also uses a secondary interjection:

E 115: **Man**, am I pissed...
F 111: Putain, j' suis énervé.

In the following example, the rough masculine first-person pronoun *ore* and the exclamatory end-particle *na* are translated into English by a stereotypical imperative + vocative, which is then translated word-for-word in the French version:

J 112: Ore mo wakai goro wa iroiro yatta kedo na [...]
I too young time [topic particle] various things did but [sentence-final particle]
E 114: Listen, kid – I did all kinds of stuff when I was your age, [...]
F 110: Écoute gamin! J'ai fait pas mal de conneries à ton âge, [...]

A procedure of lexical vulgarization may be used to enhance characterization even when there are no markers of rough language in the Japanese, e.g.

J 31: Togusa. Kinkyū dasshutsu.
Togusa (name) emergency escape
E 35: Togusa! Get your ass out of there!
F 31: Togusa! Casse-toi en vitesse!

In the case of the teenage schoolgirls in *Magic Knight Rayearth*, similar procedures of lexical stylization and exclamation are used to reproduce the tenor suggested by the Japanese end-particles *na* and *ne*, whereas the corresponding French lines are register-neutral e.g.:

J 1/11: ...ureshi na. Na!
happy [sentence-final particle] [sentence-final particle]
E 1/11: [...] I'm psyched!
F 1/17: Je suis contente [...]

J 1/15: Kirei na ko ne.
pretty girl [sentence-final particle]

E 1/15: God, she's gorgeous!
F 1/21: Elle est très belle.

Non-standard spelling is also a common method of indicating informal tenor relationships in American comic-books, e.g.

J 1/10: Hikaru mo sō omou desho
Hikaru (*name*) also so thinks [*copula-presumptive*]
E 1/10: Whadda you think, Hikaru?
F 1/16: Tu ne trouves pas Hikaru?

Address (terms of endearment) and suggested taboo lexis are also used in English to help create a tenor of sexual aggression in the vampish character of Urd in *Oh My Goddess!*, while the French translator also makes use of nonstandard orthography.

J 2/111: Hazukashiku nai hazukashiku nai
not shy not shy
E 1/[no page numbers]: Come on, hon...don't be shy!
F 2/111: Ne sois pas timide!

J 2/112: Ā mō!!
ah enough already
E 1/[no page numbers]: Oh, for *#!
F 2/112: Y m'énerve!!

7. Atmospherics: jargonization

In sci-fi comics the English translators sometimes use military and medical jargon, words characteristic of technical discourses, in lines where the original Japanese is register-neutral. The French translations are less jargonized, except where they sometimes borrow jargon from an English source text. We can find examples of this in *Evangelion*:

J 1/153: Jōhō sōsa no hō wa dō natteru?
information manipulation [*case particle*] side of things [*topic particle*] how is-
becoming

E 1/151: Now, how is the intel op progressing?
F 1/151: Les informations seront-elles bien manipulées?

J 1/160: Kurai... ..kurasugiru.
gloomy... ..too gloomy
E 1/158: So gloomy... ..like some kind of mood disorder.
F 1/158: Sombre... ..trop sombre.

J 3/79: Nōha ijō
brainwaves abnormal
E 3/75: EEG abnormal!
F 3/77: Anomalie dans les ondes cérébrales!

J 3/82: Shinzō massāji o...
heart massage [*case particle*]
E 3/78: Commence CPR!
F: 3/80: Faites un massage cardiaque!

Further examples of the use of jargon in the English translations can be found in *Ghost in the Shell*. In the French version, the translator has chosen a non-jargonized translation in the first example, but has followed the English jargon in the second example by borrowing the English lexis.

J 15: Jōkyō wa
situation [topic particle]
E 19: What's the sitrep?
F 1/15: Comment ça se présente?

J 31: Tsūshin o kōseibōheki mōdo ni kirikaeru
communications attack barrier mode to switch
E 35: Switch com-links to attack barrier mode
F 1/31: Switchez vos com-links en mode offensif

8. Conclusion

Comparative reading of this sample of comics reveals that the translators of the American versions used naturalizing strategies, both culturally (name changes, and insertion of references to American culture) and linguistically (stereotypical use of dialects, and use of heavily marked register). The strategies used in the French versions are less naturalizing than those adopted in their American counterparts. Culturally, they are more foreignizing in conserving names and culture-specific items. Linguistically, in some translations, transfers and calques from the English version are used, with the result that the dialogue reads like a translation, but not a translation from the Japanese original. Other French translations reveal linguistic neutralization with regard to dialect and register. This results in a destylization which reduces the expressive impact of the original dialogue.

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