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VISUALITY AND FICTIONALITY OF JAPAN AND
EUROPE IN CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & MATTEO FABBRETTI

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A study of Japanese animation as translation: A descriptive analysis of Hayao Miyazaki and other anime dubbed into English – Adachi Reito

Boca Raton: Dissertation.Com, 2012, 293 p.

Review by Jamie TOKUNO | Independent Researcher, Hawai'i, USA

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For years now, scholars have been calling for a more “critical consciousness” of how Euro-American translation theories are applied to East Asian translation studies (Wakabayashi 2012). Judy Wakabayashi suggests there is a need for empirical testing of western paradigms on Japanese translation research (Wakabayashi 2012, 34). To an extent, Adachi Reito’s book sets out to answer that call through the use of references to major western translation theories on an as-needed basis, including the theory of translation universals, Gideon Toury’s translation norms, Eugene Nida’s dynamic equivalence, and literal translation. However, the book does not offer any real synthesis between these theories and the conclusions he draws. Despite this drawback, Adachi’s book constitutes a significant and data-heavy contribution of Japanese language material to three major and relatively new branches of the field: audiovisual translation studies, descriptive translation studies, and corpus-based translation studies. Ambitious in scope, this volume encompasses a survey of the basic concepts of audiovisual translation studies, a discussion of the history of Japanese animation and its reception in the United States of America, a descriptive corpus-based analysis of textual features of Hayao Miyazaki’s films and their American English translations, and a qualitative, diachronic analysis of retranslations of Miyazaki’s films. As a result of this breadth of coverage, each chapter is comprised of a different variation of data sets, with individual conclusions drawn in such a way that each chapter could almost be treated as an independent study. There is some brief discussion of the reception of Japanese animation in European countries, but the bulk of the cross-cultural analysis centres on

Japanese translations and American translations of animated films. Readers who are interested in comparisons of translational attitudes between Asian and western cultures, especially in relation to Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, Lawrence Venuti's concept of domestication and foreignisation, and other similar theories, will find this book rewarding and insightful.

The introductory chapter offers an overview of the process of translation of Japanese animated films, specifically in the context of linguistic and cultural power relations between Japan and the United States of America. It also presents readers with a neat set of summaries for each of the subsequent six chapters, which can be used to guide readers who are mainly interested in specific data sets and their respective methodologies, as no overarching methodological approach is applied to the book as a whole. Chapter one is particularly useful to readers who are new to audiovisual translation studies, as it provides a brief summary of the field's main issues and challenges, with emphasis on previous audiovisual translation studies that focus on Japanese animation. Chapter two presents a general overview of the differences between animation and live action, and the distinguishing features of animated audiovisual texts in the context of translation. Interestingly, here Adachi also expounds upon the use of English as an interlingua, that is "a pivot language" (39), for audiovisual translation, with an emphasis on the increasing rate of audiovisual media being translated into American English. This is followed by an insightful discussion of the target audiences of American English translations of Japanese animation, using Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) ratings for live-action and animated films as supporting data to demonstrate that American audiences of animated features tend to be children and young adults.

Chapter three is the most statistically heavy, featuring quantitative analysis of a small-scale corpus comprised of ten Japanese animated films and ten American animated films with their respective translations. This is the only chapter that directly addresses the call to apply empirical methods to test a western translation theory on data comprised of Japanese language texts. Adachi outlines Sara Laviosa's hypotheses on the universals of translation, and uses the Mann-Whitney U test to run statistical analysis of the data sets pulled from corpus software WordSmith (ver. 4.0) and

alignment tool e-lemma.text (ver. 1.1) to test those hypotheses. He comes to the significant conclusion that the “data clearly support the aforementioned assumption that a limited number of words are used more frequently in the translated films than the original works” (69). However, no further discussion is offered in regards to what bearing his findings have on Laviosa’s theory of the universals of translation. Instead, Adachi shifts his focus to conclusions drawn using line graphs that compare the average number of sentences and the average number of pauses and silences in the originals and translations of the Japanese and American animated films. According to Adachi, the marked increase in number of sentences, and decrease in number of pauses of English translations of Japanese animated films from their original texts, in comparison to the lack of statistically significant variation in Japanese translations of English animated films, suggests that Japanese translations of American audiovisual texts are not strongly influenced by the target culture, whereas English translations of Japanese audiovisual texts favour the textual conventions of American animated films. The crux of his argument here is that “a marked imbalance of the linguistic and cultural dominance relations in translational attitude exists between these two languages” (83), although his analysis in chapter five suggests that this imbalance may be shifting.

Chapter four is by far the longest, its length covering over two-thirds of the entire book. It focuses on the analysis of English translations of selected features of audiovisual texts in Miyazaki’s films released in the 1980s and 1990s. Adachi begins with a history of Japanese animation released in the United States through the 1990s, which helpfully provides a clear socio-historical context in which the translations of Miyazaki’s films are analysed. The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to analysing English translations of selected features of audiovisual texts in Miyazaki’s films of the given period. The list of features is long, and as a result, individual analysis of the translations of each feature is relatively brief. These features include forms of expression, content, specific subjects, pauses and silences, patterns of conversation, figures of speech, taboo, theme and characterization, statelessness, things Japanese, and the vaguely-named “other things to mention”. There is little synthesis between analyses, meaning each section is more or less self-contained, with no overarching theme or theoretical framework to tie all the analyses together. Furthermore, the source text samples given are all presented in Japanese characters, with no romanisation and no back translation

provided. Consequently, any researcher who cannot read Japanese will be at a severe disadvantage. Those non-Japanese speaking readers must rely solely on the English analysis presented by Adachi, and are not given the complete set of linguistics tools with which to critique his analysis properly. One of the stronger sections in this chapter is the comparative analysis of translations of American animated films into Japanese, which substantiates some of the book's earlier claims. Adachi writes, "The faithful attitude to the original American works illustrates that the Japanese version pays strict attention to reproduce not only the semantic content and the communicative function but also the tone and style of each original sentence as much as possible" (167-168). He goes on to reiterate that this tendency in the Japanese translations suggests that the source culture has a stronger influence on the translation process of American animated films into Japanese compared to the influence of the source culture on Japanese animated films translated into American English. Additionally, a discussion of historic trends demonstrates how sociohistorical conditions in the target culture can have direct bearing on the translations of Japanese texts into that culture.

Chapter five presents a diachronic qualitative and quantitative comparative analysis of retranslations of six of Hayao Miyazaki's animated works, looking at pre- and post-2000 releases. Here, Adachi draws upon his findings from the preceding chapter, with the objective of identifying shifts in translation approach. Adachi's objective here is to pinpoint trends in recent English translations of these audiovisual texts that might indicate a shift in the translation attitude towards Japanese animated works as a whole. Relevant translation theories, including Gideon Toury's translation norms, are very briefly touched upon here, but more in-depth discussion of the theoretical underpinnings would have served the study well. However, this chapter does present quantitative data sets illustrating the degree of utilisation of translation techniques from the literal-liberal classification by Molina and Albir (2002) in pre- versus post-2000 English translations of Miyazaki films. In a similar approach to that of chapter three, the quantitative data is presented as line graphs, as well as bar graphs, which show the substantial increase in literal translation techniques in English translations of Miyazaki's films after 2000. Adachi points out that this trend corresponds to an increasing interest in Japanese animation on the international stage. Qualitative analysis of specific samples from first, second and third translations further support

these findings. In his concluding remarks for this chapter, Adachi notes that there is a shift towards more “faithful translation of the source Japanese dialogue in which characters are supposed to share the same knowledge and assumptions” (229), which contrasts with his earlier assertion in chapter three that there is an imbalance between strength of influence of American culture on translations of Japanese animated films and that of Japanese culture on translations of American animated films. Adachi argues that this shift presents a new direction for Japanese audiovisual translation studies, particularly for animated films.

The final chapter offers readers a brief summary of the key points and findings of each chapter, as well as further discussion of the future direction for this study. In this sense, chapter six is the most comprehensive, given the wide variation of data sets, methodological approaches, and conclusions drawn in each chapter. Overall, Adachi’s book demonstrates the value of conducting diachronic analysis of retranslations, and how corpus-based methodologies can be used to shed light on overall trends in translational attitudes between certain language pairs. From an East Asian translation studies perspective, this book takes a significant step towards Judy Wakabayashi’s call for more engagement with western concepts of translation using empirical methodology, but falls short of fully realising its potential. Adachi skirts around any direct engagement with translation theory, western or otherwise, that might have substantiated the extensive empirical data analyses he presents. The connections between his data analyses and the theoretical frameworks into which they fit must be fleshed out by the readers instead. Although a more distinct and focused discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of each of the three major data analyses conducted within the study, as well as their respective methodologies, would have further substantiated the conclusions drawn, Adachi’s comprehensive presentation of statistical data sets as well as qualitative case studies on English translations of Miyazaki’s films, alongside the comparative analysis of Japanese translations of American animated features, reveals the potential for scholars of Japanese translation to contribute substantially to audiovisual translation, as well as to corpus-based translation studies and descriptive translation studies on the whole. While it may not fully address the need for a more “critical consciousness” of how Western translation theories are applied to the East Asian context, this book advances Japanese translation

studies in that direction, and offers multiple potential directions for future studies of a similar kind, perhaps with a more sharply-honed theoretical and methodological approach. Moreover, the shift towards a more faithful translational attitude to the source Japanese culture in animated features, as indicated in chapter five, is an important facet of the recent trend towards the transnationalisation of Japanese popular culture in the media. Scholars of Japanese audiovisual translation studies will find this book insightful and the findings presented compelling. Furthermore, the significance of its contribution as a corpus-based study on Japanese translated texts to the descriptive translation studies field should not be overlooked.

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