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## Remember the reader — 城雲図 勉 (Ben Jones)

2011/06/25

### 『日本を翻訳する — グローバルに発信するための英訳研究』 Remember the reader

城雲図 勉 (Ben Jones) : Translator, 英国翻訳通訳協会上級会員

Translators are frequently advised to specialize in some particular area. It is indeed good counsel: if working in your chosen field, you will run less risk of making mistakes, resort to dictionaries and other works of reference less often, and work more quickly – which equates to earning more money. Nevertheless, this approach does not suit everyone, and even specialists will find themselves working outside their preferred realm on occasion, while this is of course a normal *modus operandi* for generalists.



When working within a single, specialist domain, fitting one's style to the audience usually becomes second nature, but when changing domain, it is essential to consider the target readers. For example, when translating patents for information, I strive to reproduce each nuance of the original in the translation, including errors & omissions (which I highlight via translator's footnotes), and ambiguities ("AとBのC" must generally be reversed to become "the C of B and A"). However, if translating for publication, such pedantry will alienate the readership so I have either to elucidate the intended meaning by questioning the original author (who is often unavailable, or sadly unhelpful), or to make somewhat arbitrary decisions based on my own understanding of what is meant, and my sense of what will work for the envisaged reader. Here too the question of "who is the reader?" assumes paramount importance.

One publication I worked on recently is an English translation of David Zoppetti's prize-winning novel *いちげんさん*. As it happens, in this case I was not the translator but the publisher, although I had read the book in Japanese and given some thought to how I would translate it myself. Fortunately the author, the translator (Takuma Sminkey) and I managed to have a very productive discussion about numerous aspects of the translation.

The story is heavily steeped in Japanese culture, so one initial concern was how we should convey such concepts to the reader. For instance, should *床の間* be translated as "alcove", "tokonoma", "tokonoma (alcove)", or "tokonoma" with a footnote or glossary giving its meaning? We eventually decided that the footnote/glossary approach would be too unwieldy, and although the predicted readership were likely to be quite well educated, it was uncertain how familiar they would be with cultural terms of this type, so we adopted the "tokonoma alcove" methodology for all such words. Had the work been a textbook about Japanese architecture for novices, footnotes or a glossary would have been eminently suitable; in contrast, a textbook for those already familiar with such

concepts would have required “tokonoma” to stand by itself; and a story not focused on the Japanese environment could have made do with “alcove” – or possibly have even omitted or reworked the reference.

Another phrase which required quite lengthy debate between the three of us was *ヌンチャク* のよう. In a martial arts context, it would be usual to refer to “like a pair of nunchaku”, yet few readers of this book were likely to be Bugei aficionados, and indeed, in a modern context it is quite likely that younger readers would take nunchaku or nunchuk to mean a Wii controller device (an issue that would not have arisen when the book was first written!), while many more would have no idea what nunchaku are – and even those that did might be unaware that in general it is an example of plurale tantum (like scissors, pants, etc.), and might therefore interpret “a pair” as referring to two implements. Translating in a historical/cultural way as “rice flails” would be liable merely to confuse the audience, and in fact there was no true need to retain this specific image within the simile. We therefore considered a whole raft of options, even literally incorrect renderings (意識) such as “like a Ninja weapon”, and finally agreed on a compromise. I heartily recommend the writings of renowned translator Anthea Bell to anyone interested in creative solutions to such conundrums.

The word “pants” cited above serves to illustrate a further problem: I had to decide whether the wordings and spellings adopted in the book should reflect American or British usage (or some other form such as Australian). From a purely business perspective, the U.S. market is much larger – yet British readers do have issues with Americanisms, and some words (e.g. “first floor”) have quite different meanings on opposite sides of the ‘pond’. Eventually, to avoid having to print two separate versions, we plumped for a compromise ‘mid-Atlantic’ style, as many publishers are now doing. In case you think this is primarily an issue for literary texts, affecting only the ‘touch and feel’ of the document, beware: even technical translators need to ascertain where and by whom their translation is going to be read, as nuances and terminology vary greatly, and are almost never explained in Japanese <-> English dictionaries, only in specialist American <-> British usage guides. My clients generally tell me which is required, and have also sometimes asked me to translate documents between American and British English.

At the same time, languages change constantly. Although original literary texts are seldom altered for this reason (ignoring for now 現代語訳 of ancient works or conversion to modern 仮名遣い), it is not unheard of – in particular, the rise of political correctness and 放送禁止用語 has meant that some works from earlier times are now changed when reprinted. The story of *いちげんさん* concerns a blind character and a “foreigner”, so we did have to be aware of modern sensibilities on this issue, whilst retaining dialogue that sounded realistic (including some rough words). Conversely, I recently revisited *向日葵*, a play by Murai Shimako I first translated over twenty years ago, and found that my wording now sounded so dated that a retranslation was in order. That is one advantage that literary translators enjoy over authors, and indeed over technical translators. As with many great works of literature, I suspect that *いちげんさん* too will come to be retranslated in time.

Nothing is set in stone, not even the title. The cult classic “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” was first translated into Japanese as *息子と私とオートバイ* (omitting all reference to Zen – perhaps on the basis that it was an attractive, exotic concept for Western readers but a word which conjured up entirely different images for those in Japan), but later it became *禅とオートバイ修理技術* (a far more literal translation, which nevertheless absolutely misses the implications of “Art” in the original). How then to translate *いちげんさん* ? The idea of *一見さんお断り* is so deeply rooted in Kyōto culture, surely any attempt to translate it must fall between the two stools of a long-winded explanation and a pithy yet inadequate rendering. This taxed us greatly, and

we each consulted numerous friends for suggestions, coming up with several dozen alternative English titles. Which one did we choose in the end? That, as they say, is left as an exercise for the reader...

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#### <プロフィール>

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