

Ambiguity in Japanese-to-English Literary Translation as Manifested in Kawabata's *Izu no odoriko*¹⁾

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Ambiguity in literature can be placed into two major and conflicting categories: indeterminacy and polysemy.²⁾ Indeterminacy often entails destructive, entropic, and/or inadvertent ambiguity, wherein something undetermined in the writing, be it in form or content, works to obscure meaning. Polysemous ambiguity, on the other hand, enriches writing by offering multiple possibilities for interpretation, alternate levels on which to read the work. This polysemy may not always be consciously determined, but the key difference to the first term is that it adds to the cohesion and cogency of the work rather than detracting or distracting from it.

The potential for destructive ambiguity is rife in translation: not only can it mislead the translator him/herself, who is a proxy source-language (SL) reader, but even once it has been correctly understood, if its transition is handled inadequately it can go on to mislead the target-language (TL) reader as much as, if not more so, than it may have misled the SL reader. Furthermore, the Japanese language's tendency to suppress explicit subjects/objects and their corresponding pronouns, against English's opposite leanings,³⁾ increases not only the possibilities for misinterpretation but also the potential need for 'forcible' disambiguation. Thus sometimes what is 'benign', elegant ambiguity in the ST, inviting the reader to determine meaning, becomes problematic when it must be resolved in the ST.⁴⁾

Polysemy is too complex a topic to be dealt with here at length, although

the issue of how to preserve constructive ambiguity is of course central to literary translation. It is possible that by addressing its negative counterpart here, some light may be shed on how to deal with polysemy as well, but such discussion could form the basis of an entire monograph in its own right.

Indeterminacy can be further divided into the sub-categories of *lexical* (word-rank) and *structural* (clause-rank-or-higher) ambiguity (Catford 1965: 24–25). In this paper I shall examine some of the key manifestations of ambiguity as they appear in Kawabata Yasunari's (1925/1985) novella *Izu no Odoriko* (hereafter the ST) and how they are translated in Edward Seidensticker's two English versions (Kawabata 1954, 1974: hereafter Seidensticker 1 (S1); 1997: hereafter Seidensticker 2 (S2)), and J Martin Holman's translation (Kawabata 1998 (H1)). Making use of the below sub-categories and the Translation Studies (TS) issues they present (in terms of presenting a significant challenge for the translator), I shall draw some general conclusions about both the tendencies of the Japanese language and contrasting translation approaches into English. In order to demonstrate the transformations that have occurred in the TTs (target texts: translations), I make use of so-called 'direct translation'—the term I use to designate a translation of the ST that is as close as possible to the original while remaining grammatical in English.

The ST is cited by sentence number in the original (indicated by §); paragraph indents are indicated by the pilcrow (¶). In the tables, compared features are signalled with underlines, while significant additions to the TT are indicated in **bold**. Finally, throughout this paper I use single quotation marks to quote hypothetical renderings such as direct translations, and for emphasis or the introduction of a piece of terminology, while double quotation marks are reserved for quotations from published works.

a. Spatio-temporal Ambiguity

i. issue: ambiguity of temporal locus

Example: 頃 *koro* ‘about the time / as’

This is a common expression in general use. I shall juxtapose the two instances in the ST. In the former I shall juxtapose the entire text of the ST and TTs in a table; in the latter I shall present only the ST and direct translation in full and then quote the relevant excerpts of the professional translations.

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
1. 峠がつづら折りになって、いよいよ天城峠に近づいたと思う頃、雨脚が杉の密林を白く染めながら、すさまじい早さで麓から私を追って来た。	Dir. ‘ <u>Around the time</u> the road became twisting, and I thought at last I approached Amagi Pass, the shower, dyeing the dense cedar forest white, with terrible speed pursued me from the foot of the mountain.’	With alarming speed, a shower swept toward me from the foot of the mountain, touching the cedar forests white <u>as</u> the road began to wind up into the pass.	<u>About the time</u> the road began to wind and I realized that I was finally near Amagi Pass, a curtain of rain swept up after me at a terrific speed from the foot of the mountain, painting the dense cedar forests white.

121. 萩乗や梨本なぞの小さい村里を過ぎて、湯ヶ野の藁屋根が麓に見えるようになった頃、私は下田まで一緒に旅をしたいと思切って云った。

Dir. ‘Passing small villages like Oginori and Nashimoto, around the time the thatched roofs of Yugano came into view at the foot of the mountain I wholeheartedly said that I wanted to travel together as far as Shimoda.’⁵⁾

In both these cases, 頃 *koro* means ‘(about) the time’ or ‘during the period’, in contrast to the more specific 時 *toki* ‘(point in) time’. English does not tolerate this kind of imprecision without a good reason. In § 1, Seidensticker does well

to substitute the conjunction “as”, since it is concise yet retains the temporal expansiveness of the original without sounding overly vague. Holman’s “[a]bout the time”, while semantically accurate as the direct translation suggests, launches the story on an uncertain footing, placed as it is at the head of the sentence with ‘about’ immediately attenuating the clause it begins. Interestingly, these choices are replicated exactly in their translations of § 121: again, Seidensticker uses “as”, and Holman “[a]bout the time”.

ii. issue: ambiguity of spatial locus

Example: 傍へ *soba e* ‘near’

In § 11, ambiguity arises more from the author’s choice of words, but nevertheless it only exists because Japanese allows such an adverbial phrase to be used without an indirect object:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
11. ¶ 突立っている私を見た踊子が直ぐに自分の座布団を外して裏返しに傍へ置いた。	Dir. ‘The dancing girl, seeing me standing there, immediately pulled out her own <i>zabuton</i> , turned it over and placed it <u>nearby</u> .’	¶ The girl turned over the cushion she had been sitting on and pushed it politely <u>toward me</u> .	[4] ¶ As soon as the dancing girl noticed me standing there, she pulled out the cushion she had been kneeling on, turned it over, and placed it <u>near her</u> .

English does not allow *‘The dancing girl put the cushion next to’ as a completed utterance, but Japanese can say something to this effect: 踊子が座布団を傍へ置いた *odoriko ga zabuton o soba e oita*. Native readers would expect the object to be specified in such cases (e.g., 踊子が座布団を彼女の傍へ置いた *odoriko ga zabuton o kanojo no soba e oita* ‘The dancing girl placed the cushion next to her’; or 踊子が座布団を私の傍へ置いた *odoriko ga zabuton o watashi no soba e oita* ‘The dancing girl placed the cushion next to me’), but as

it is not grammatically necessary, Kawabata has omitted the indirect object. Once again, the translators opt for different interpretations, Seidensticker choosing “me” and Holman “her”. The direct translation offers a possible compromise that preserves the ambiguity, though it is perhaps a little detached: the adverb ‘nearby’.

b. Lexical Segmentation and Multiple Meanings

Ambiguities arise where the assignment of denotative and/or connotative value(s) to a dictionary-equivalent term differs between the SL and TL. This relates to ‘lexical segmentation’, or the dividing up of semantic value across a range of related expressions. When such lexical segmentation differs significantly between language pairs (or, as in the first case below, intralingually due to changes in language usage), translation issues arise.

i. issue: highest-frequency meaning overshadows base meaning

Example: やはり, やっぱり *yahari, yappari* ‘always/again/still/as expected’⁶⁾

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
16. やっぱり私は黙っていた。	Dir. ‘ <u>Still</u> I was silent.’	<u>Still</u> I said nothing.	<u>Naturally</u> , I did not speak.

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
416. 踊子が話しかけた時に、追いつかせるつもりで待っている。彼女はやはり足を停めてしまつて、私が歩き出すまで歩かない。	Dir. ‘At the time the dancing girl started speaking, when I waited with the intention of letting her catch up, she <u>always</u> came to a halt and did not walk until I started walking.’	When she spoke I would pause, hoping that she would come up even with me, but <u>always</u> she waited until I had started off again and followed those same two yards behind.	When she spoke to me, I waited, to give her a chance to catch up. But <u>I should have known that</u> she would stop short and refuse to take a step until I did.

In this case we are dealing with a question of diachronic lexical segmentation within the Japanese language: the historical meaning of *yappari/yahari* differs significantly from its present-day sense. It is clear from these two examples that *yahari* thus presents a considerable translation problem. Seidensticker apparently appreciates the historical, though now rare, meaning ‘still’, as he translates it as “still” and “always” in the two cases above, while Holman seems fixated on its derivative, but now dominant, meaning, the sentential adverbial ‘as expected’ (see Hasegawa 2012), and tries to force the text to conform to this, hence his injection of “I should have known that”, which has no direct antecedent in the ST.

ii. issue: consecutive uses of the same term with different meanings

Example: 湯 *yu* ‘hot water/bath’

Below are two contrasting meanings for *yu* in consecutive sentences in the ST:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
193. また湯には入った。	Dir. ‘[I] again got into the bath.’	I went down to the <u>bath</u> again and splashed about violently.	I went down again for a <u>bath</u> .
194. 湯を荒々しく掻回した。	Dir. ‘[I] violently churned the hot water.’		I thrashed the <u>water</u> .

While the Japanese term 湯 *yu* remains the same, § 193 likely refers to the act of getting into the inn “bath”, but § 194 focuses on the narrator’s treatment of the “(hot) water” within it, which Holman’s distinctions reflect. Seidensticker combines the sentences, allowing him to use the one reference “bath” to cover the two notions. Both translators feel the need to explain the context (going down for a bath), indicating they consider the original Japanese (また湯には入った Lit. ‘(I) again got into the hot water’) too elliptical, particularly in

combination with the ambiguous term.

iii. issue: SL lexical segmentation of a term covers a wider span than that of the TL equivalents

Example: 女 *onna* ‘woman/female’

Though 女 *onna* is often translated as ‘woman’, it actually covers the gamut of ‘female’ and thus may be an ambiguous term to translate, especially in the plural form 女たち *onna-tachi*, which appears throughout *Izu no odoriko*. The translators translate it variously as “woman”, “girl”, “female” and “she” (as well as the respective plural equivalents), with Seidensticker favouring “woman/women” and Holman “girl/girls”. For Seidensticker, the lexical yardstick appears to be the oldest female in the group, while for Holman it appears to be the youngest (the dancing girl herself). See Donovan 2021 for a detailed investigation.

iv. issue: a set expression used in a non-standard context

Example: 今晚は *konban wa* ‘good evening / ?‘good night’

235. 私がそわそわしているうちに芸人達はもう帰り路らしく、男が庭から、
¶「今晚は。」と声を掛けた。

Dir. ‘While I was feeling restless, the entertainers appeared to be about to leave, and the man said from the garden, “Good evening”.

今晚は *konban wa* is a basic set greeting in Japanese, and it would seem that it need only be translated as ‘good evening’; however, in this case the English translation conflicts with the context of departure rather than arrival, although one can easily argue that the greeting is appropriate as the narrator and

entertainers have not had contact since the entertainers' arrival at the inn. Seidensticker retains “good evening”, but Holman prefers “good night”. This is an interesting example of interpreting the ‘illocutionary force’ (Austin 1975) or authorial intention in the ST: here, uncharacteristically for both translators, Seidensticker privileges the pragmatic, formal level, while Holman privileges the functional level of the utterance.

v. issue: coexisting meanings of a SL term are equally valid

Example: 笑う *warau* ‘laugh/smile’

Shibatani notes that, compared to English, “many Japanese verbs have very general meanings. [...] This lack of specificness [*sic*] of the verb meaning is compensated by the presence of onomatopoeic words” (1990: 155). *Warau*, for example, means both ‘laugh’ and ‘smile’, but supplemented by an adverbial mimetic a finer distinction can be drawn (e.g., *nikoniko (to) warau* ‘smile’; *geragera warau* ‘guffaw, giggle’). Context may also make the clarification. However, there are several instances in *Izu no odoriko* where either interpretation seems plausible. Here is one example, again consisting of consecutive sentences:

ST/Direct Translation	Seidensticker 1	Seidensticker 2	Holman
359. それから彼女は花のように笑うのだった。 Dir. ‘Then she <u>laughed/smiled</u> like a flower.’	And her <u>laugh</u> was like a flower’s <u>laugh</u> .	And her <u>laugh</u> was a flower’s <u>laugh</u> —the expression does not seem strained when I think of her.	Next was her flowerlike <u>smile</u> .
360. 花のように笑うと云う言葉が彼女にだけほんとうだった。 Dir. ‘The words “ <u>laugh/smile</u> like a flower” were true only for her.’	A flower’s <u>laugh</u> —the expression does not seem strained when I think of her.		In her case, the word “flowerlike” was absolutely accurate.

The translators diverge on laugh/smile, suggesting there are no textual cues as to which the author intends.

I conclude this section with an example of the rare occasion on which ambiguities of lexical segmentation appear to coincide in the source and target languages:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
485. 暫く低い声が続いてから踊子の云うのが聞えた。	Dir. 'After low voices had continued for a time, I heard the dancing girl speak.'	The <u>conversation</u> was subdued for a time. ¶ 'He's nice, isn't he,' the girl's voice came again.	They continued their <u>conversation</u> for a time. Then I caught the dancing girl's voice again.
486. ¶「いい人ね。」	Dir. "He's a good person, isn't he."		¶ "He's a nice person."

低い声 *hikui koe* means 'low voice', and 低い *hikui* means 'low' both in the sense of deepness and softness of sound.⁷⁾ Hence this would seem a perfect opportunity to preserve the ambiguity and use the semantically analogous 'low'—and yet neither translator does. Seidensticker substitutes "subdued", while Holman omits the reference. Both are justifiably confident that their interpretation of *hikui* as 'soft' rather than 'deep' is appropriate in this context, since the preceding text makes it clear that two of the girls are talking. Perhaps, in fact, the coincidence of lexical segmentation is not as close as it may initially appear, with a rendering such as 'they continued to speak in low tones' sounding lifeless in English.

c. Set Polite Expressions

The first example is a multipurpose word, どうも *dōmo*, with a base meaning of 'quite' or 'really', which is usually used as a polite intensifier in conjunction with set expressions such as *arigatō*, but can be used on its own in various

senses.

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
146. ¶「へえ。尋常五年とは <u>どうも</u> ——。」	Dir. “Oh. Normal fifth grade: really....”	¶ ‘Oh?’	“Oh, you have a fifth grader?...”

The long dash in the ST indicates speech that trails off, similar to the English ellipsis dots we see in Holman’s translation, leaving it to the reader to complete the speaker’s sentiment, although if one interprets *dōmo* in the way the direct translation above does, it may be sufficient as it is, as a kind of phatic communion. Indeed, neither translator considers that an equivalent is needed in his translation, with Seidensticker excising the repetition of the reference to the grade in § 145 (not shown above) with a brief utterance—“Oh?”—and Holman petering out to ellipsis dots.

The second representative example is a set phrase that is as commonly heard in Japanese as it is vague (the convenience of this vagueness likely contributing to its ubiquity):

299. [「] 妹にだけはこんなことをさせたくないと思いつめていますが、そこにはまたいろいろな事情がありましてね。」

Dir. [‘]I’ve thought constantly that I didn’t want my younger sister of all people to have to do something like this, but again there are various reasons for that, you see.’

The brother agonises over making his sister work as a dancing girl but does not reveal any of the ‘reasons’ for this necessity. 事情, *jijō*, which can be translated as ‘circumstances/conditions/considerations/the situation’ and so on, can be summoned on any occasion to excuse or at least mitigate the

speaker's action, or lack thereof. If an English speaker were similarly to say "There're reasons for that", s/he would forthwith be requested to explain; the Japanese version is practically its own explanation, as, given the in-group/out-group dichotomy, it may be impolite to enquire further.⁸⁾ Compounding this nebulosity is the incomplete verb form that the man employs at the end of the sentence: *ありまして arimashite* '[there] are [various reasons] and ...', followed by the clause-terminal particle *ね ne* 'aren't there / right? / you see', which invites the agreement of the interlocutor, hence absolving the speaker of the need for further explanation, despite the fact that he has signalled that something is to follow with the *-te* 'and' verb form.

It is interesting to observe the translators' approaches. Seidensticker substitutes one Japanese set phrase for another: the stoical "it couldn't be helped" is a standard translation of *仕方なかった shikata nakatta*, which is another, even more common, set phrase (particularly in the non-past form *shikata nai*) used as a summary explanation and which in this case fails to foreshadow the man's emotion, which manifests itself in near-tears in § 302. Holman in contrast uses the English idiom "it's a long story", which perhaps better represents the essence of *iron na jijō ga arimashite*, suggesting a set of circumstances that is too complex to go into, rather than emphasising the necessity of the current situation.

d. Inclusive Nominal Sets

When it comes to nominal sets, Japanese places greater value on inclusion than on delimiting, evidenced by the frequent use of conjunctive particles that do not limit the members of the set they create: *～や～ (など) ... ya ... (nado)* 'such as ... and', *～とか ... toka* '... and so on', *～でも ... demo* 'even ...', etc. In speech in particular, it sometimes seems to be almost rude to one's interlocutor

to limit the members of a particular lexical set that one mentions in certain situations.⁹⁾ But even in written prose, nominal sets are often left open-ended, as in this example:

ST/Direct Translation	Seidensticker 1	Seidensticker 2	Holman
<p>119. 峠を越えてからは、山や空の色までが南国らしく感じられた。 Dir. 'After going over the pass, even the colour of things like <u>the mountains and sky</u> felt like something from a southern land.'</p>	<p><u>The mountains had taken on the look of the South</u> from the moment we descended the pass.</p>	<p><u>The mountains and even the sky had taken on the look of the south</u> as we came down over the pass.</p>	<p>On this side of the pass, even <u>the mountains and</u> the color of <u>the sky</u> began to look more southern.</p>
<p>120. 私と男とは絶えず話し続けて、すっかり親しくなった。 Dir. 'The man and I continued talking ceaselessly, and became very close.'</p>	<p><u>The man and I</u> became firm friends, and as the thatched roofs of Yugano came in sight below us I announced that I would like to go on to Shimoda with them.</p>	<p><u>The man and I</u> were now friends.</p>	<p>As <u>the man and I</u> continued our conversation, we took a liking to each other.</p>
<p>121. 萩乗や梨本などの小さい村里を過ぎて、湯ヶ野の藁屋根が麓に見えるようになった頃、私は下田まで一緒に旅をしたいと思切って云った。 Dir. '(We) passed through such small villages as Oginori and Nashimoto, and when the thatched roofs of Yugano came into view at the foot of the mountain, I said with conviction that I wanted to travel together as far as Shimoda.'</p>	<p><u>The man and I</u> became firm friends, and as the thatched roofs of Yugano came in sight below us I announced that I would like to go on to Shimoda with them.</p>	<p>We skirted a village or two, and as the thatched roofs of Yugano came in sight below, I summoned my courage to announce that I would like to go on to Shimoda with them.</p>	<p>We passed <u>tiny villages with names like Oginori and Nashimoto</u>. About the time the thatched roofs of Yugano came into view at the foot of the mountain, I ventured to tell the man that I wanted to travel with them to Shimoda.</p>

In § 119, with the expression 山や空 *yama ya sora* 'things like the mountains and sky', the particle *ya* marks the items *yama* and *sora* as members of a set of which they are the explicit representatives but which they do not in themselves exhaust. Similarly, in § 121, Oginori and Nashimoto are at once linked and appointed representatives of the 'villages' noun set by the double construction *ya ... nado* 'both ... and ..., for example', the full structure of which the first *ya* is an abbreviated form. One can conveniently contrast these non-exhaustive sets with the exhaustive set of 私と男と *watashi to otoko to* 'both I and the man' in § 120. In this case no other members of the set are assumed by the reader to exist (thus, for example, the narrator's friendship with the other members of the troupe is not at issue).

There is a corresponding contrast in how both translators treat these sets. In § 119, S1 even omits 'sky', leaving only "mountains", although Seidensticker restores and emphasises it in S2 ("The mountains and even the sky"). Holman chooses to use "even" as a deftly analogous way to indicate the open-endedness of the set, implying that other things might also be starting to look "more southern".¹⁰⁾ Additionally, in § 121, S1 removes the entire reference to passing through villages, while S2 gives them only a summary mention: "We skirted a village or two". Holman again preserves the open set with "tiny villages with names like Oginori and Nashimoto" (though "with names like" is an interpolated explanation). Moreover, he separates them off from the town of Yugano, which he gives its own sentence. However, when it comes to the closed set in § 120, the translators are in agreement: "The man and I" is the only option, it seems.

e. Structural Ambiguity

i. issue: attribution with no preceding antecedent

Example: *こんなになった konna ni natta* ‘have become like this’

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
55. ♯「そうかねえ。この前連れていた子がもう <u>こんな</u> になったのかい。	Dir. ‘Really? This child you had with you last time has already <u>become like this</u> , has she?’	‘Well now. So this is the little girl you had with you before, <u>so big</u> already.’	‘So this is the little girl you had with you before.’
56. いい ^{あんこ} 娘になって、お前さんも結構 ^{もん} 者だよ。	Dir. ‘She’s become a good girl, and you’re a lucky person too!’	Why she’s practically a grown woman . Isn’t that nice.	She’s turned out to be such a nice girl. That’s good for you.

The deictics of §55 and §56 are very vague. Particularly bamboozling is *konna ni natta* dir. ‘have become like this’. Both translators feel that the attribution cannot be left as undetermined as it is. Seidensticker assumes the antecedent is “(so) big”, while Holman employs Seidensticker’s common technique of omitting the reference entirely, relying on the similar expression in §56 to carry the sentiment (“such a nice girl”).

ii. issue: referenced verb is omitted

Example: *女の子は早い onna no ko wa hayai* ‘girls are fast/early’

A common pattern in Japanese prose is subject + complement (+ copula), where in English one would prefer subject + verb + adverbial.¹¹⁾ This noun-centred phraseology effectively introduces an ambiguity, leaving it to the SL reader to infer the sense (‘Girls are fast or early when they do what?’):

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ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
58. 「『 女の子は早い もんだよ。』	Dir. 「『Girls are fast/early, aren't they.』	「『Girls do grow up in a hurry, don't they.』	「『Girls grow up so fast.』

Here this inference is slightly complicated by the ambiguity of the adjectival complement *hayai* itself. Generally 早い means 'early' and its homophone 速い means 'fast', but Kawabata prefers to use 早い even where the meaning seems closer to 'fast' than 'early'.¹²⁾ The context of the preceding § 55–56 makes it clear what kind of verb is missing, which is why both translators have no hesitation in supplying it (“grow up”).

Would the translation have been compromised if it had retained the original parts of speech, simply using the copula as in the Japanese (cf. the direct translation above)? ‘Girls are fast’ would of course insert a new ambiguity, containing, among others, the unfortunate connotation of sexual eagerness. On the other hand, ‘girls are early’ is a near-meaningless phrase that would need to be extended to ‘early bloomers’ or something similarly explicative to make any sense. Thus one can appreciate the translators’ rationale for resolving the ambiguity as they do, injecting dynamism with a verb other than the copula.

iii. issue: non sequitur

Dialogue in Japanese sometimes produces what to Western ears sounds like a non sequitur when it is rendered faithfully out of Japanese. This may partly be due to the reliance on what is *not* said to convey information, with a mutual expectation that it is up to the listener to make the link (cf. Hinds in Ikegami (2000: 261) on Japanese as a ‘reader/listener-responsibility language’). It may also have something to do with the pragmatics of the actual words: a

locutionary act may convey an illocutionary force that is present in the Japanese for cultural reasons but absent in the English (much as irony may in the reverse situation). In either case, the result in the TT is an ambiguity that results from this apparent disjuncture.

In the following sequence there appears to be a mismatch between the question in § 144 and the answer in § 145:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
144. ¶「 <u>どこの学校</u> です。」	Dir. “Which (*where’s) school.”	¶ ‘Where is he in school?’	¶ “What kind of school?”
145. ¶「尋常五年なんです。」	Dir. “It’s normal fifth grade.”	¶ ‘The fifth grade.’	¶ “Elementary school, fifth grade.”
146. ¶「へえ。尋常五年とはどうも——。」	Dir. “Oh. Normal fifth grade is, well—”	¶ ‘Oh?’	“Oh, you have a fifth grader?...”

The question seems to concern the geographical location of the school, while the answer appears to reference the school grade. A first glance would indicate that Seidensticker makes the better rendering, retaining the “where” of the original but by sleight of hand transferring it to an intramural setting, so that the narrator ends up asking a question about the child’s academic level (“Where is he in school?”). Holman abandons any pretence of an imitation of the original question, unpacking¹³⁾ what he sees as being the question’s intention (“What kind of school?”). As a consequence he has to make explicit the school level—elementary—which 尋常五年 *jinjō gonen* ‘normal fifth grade’ merely implies, as an historical artefact of an outmoded education system. Neither translator makes any attempt to convey the ‘normal’ of *jinjō*, as it would make no sense outside of its historical and cultural context.

Conclusion

Japanese, as a 'reader-responsibility language' (Ikegami 2000: 261), leaves a considerable amount of (inferable) information unexpressed at times, and does not require pronouns or subjects for sentence-level cohesion. English, however, as a 'writer-responsibility language' (ibid), and one requiring subject and object markers, at least pronominally, demands considerable disambiguation, or at least explicitation, in its translations of such Japanese. The different disambiguation 'moves' of translators on occasion reveal that multiple readings are possible. Taking a cue from Lawrence Venuti (1995), it may sometimes be salutary to consider leaving ambiguities as they are where grammatically possible, rather than feeling the need to disambiguate whatever the consequences.

Notes

- 1) This paper is based on part of my unpublished PhD thesis (Donovan 2012). I revised the content while on sabbatical in New Zealand during the 2022 academic year. This research was financially supported by the Kansai University Fund for Domestic and Overseas Research, 2022.
- 2) My binary division.
- 3) Suppression as seen from the perspective of users of the language into which it is to be translated. Martin: "In English we avoid repeating a noun once it has been mentioned, substituting an anaphoric pronoun after the first mention. In Japanese there is no stricture against repeating the noun any number of times; on the other hand, obvious elements are freely omitted from a sentence" (1975: 1075).
- 4) See Donovan 2020 for an in-depth analysis of disambiguation in Japanese-to-English literary translation.
- 5) While most parallel-text examples are presented in columns in this paper, I have juxtaposed some longer sentences horizontally to make them easier to compare.
- 6) Instances in the ST: *yahari*: three cases (§ 115, 416, 597); *yappari*: 16 cases.
- 7) Compare the antonym 高い *takai* 'high/loud' in § 334: 歌う声が少し高くなる度に dir.

- 'Whenever (her) voice got a little high'; S2: "When her voice rose even a little"; H: "Whenever the girl's voice rose as she was singing". Again, both the Japanese and English are ambiguous, but here the ambiguity in the English arises from the conversion from ST adjective to the verb "rose" (either in volume or in pitch).
- 8) See, for example, Hendry (1998: 244) for a discussion of 建前 *tatemaie* 'polite façade' and 本音 *honne* 'one's real feelings' and how these modes of speech relate to the in-group/out-group divide in Japanese society.
 - 9) For example, お茶でもいかがですか *o-cha demo ikaga desu ka* 'How about some green tea (or something)?' Martin calls the *ya* (... *nado*) (and (verb-equivalent) *~tari*) forms "representative" forms (1975: 153, 566).
 - 10) This echoes the other meaning of *demo* in the expression *o-cha demo*: lit. "even" [how about] a cup of [humble] green tea'.
 - 11) See, for example, Nakajima (1987: 13) on the static nature of noun-dominant Japanese sentences versus the dynamism of verb-dominant arrangements in English.
 - 12) Cf. also § 94 (早い); adverbials: § 84, § 434, § 556, § 628 (早く). In fact, Kawabata never uses 速い (速く) in *Izu no odoriko*.
 - 13) In other words, 'extracting the implied meaning of. Cf. Kussmaul (1995: 89) and Nida (2001: 56) for TS-centric explanations of the term 'unpacking'.

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