

**Decision-making and Disambiguation in Japanese-to-English Literary  
Translation: An Application of Game Theory**

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**Abstract**

Jiří Levý's 1966 paper 'Translation as a Decision Process' applied game theory to translation studies in an attempt to characterise and explain the decision-making processes of the translator and the linguistic and socio-cultural forces that inform these processes. The current paper employs some of his conclusions in the context of Japanese-to-English literary translation, addressing in particular the vexed issue of disambiguation. It draws upon examples from Kawabata Yasunari's novella *Izu no odoriko*, and its published English translations *The Izu Dancer* by Edward G. Seidensticker and *The Dancing Girl of Izu* by J. Martin Holman.

## Introduction

Deciding among possible renderings is at the heart of the act of translating, deeply embedded as each choice is in the paradigm–syntagm relationship of selection and combination of lexical elements. Disambiguation is a special subset of the decision-making process in translation, and becomes critically important when translating out of a language that discourages explicit grammatical subjects and objects (such as Japanese) into one that positively demands them (English). Game theory has a helpful role to play in situating the issue of disambiguation in Japanese-to-English literary translation (hereafter ‘JE translation’) in a normative sociolinguistic context by tracing the ramifications of differences in conventions and rules between the two languages.

An image from Kawabata Yasunari’s novella *Izu no odoriko* may help to set the scene for this context. Halfway through the story, the student narrator is spending the evening at an inn playing the Japanese board game *go* with an elderly merchant. At one point, the troupe of travelling entertainers comes into the room, and immediately he begins to lose concentration on his game, and soon loses the game itself. (Most likely this is on purpose, so that he can turn his attention to the visitors, in particular the dancing girl who is at this point in the story the object of his amorous intentions.) Eventually the merchant retires for the night, and the student ends up using the *go* board to play a simpler game, *gomokunarabe*, or five-in-a-row, with the entertainers.

Within this scene we can discern an analogy relevant to translation studies. There is the transition from one *game* to another, with a corresponding change of rules, but the *board* remains the same—a nineteen-by-nineteen matrix of lines

with 361 points of intersection at which pieces, or stones, can be placed. This immutable board provides the context for and regulates the moves of both games.

We can view the student narrator as a translator of sorts, a mediator between the two cultures of the well-off merchant and the impoverished entertainers, represented by the games *go* and *gomokunarabe* respectively. And we can equally use the image of the uniting element, the *go* board, to stand for a sociolinguistic aspect of translation studies: what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to as a *textual grid*. Gentzler sums up this notion as “the collection of acceptable literary forms and genres in which texts can be expressed” (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998: *xiii*).<sup>11</sup> This grid thus represents the overall system of interdependent structures that constitute what is commonly accepted as ‘literature’. No matter what game—in other words, culturo-linguistic duality—may be played out on the grid, a similar set of universal human expectations about literary norms applies. Thus whatever language it may appear in, *Izu no odoriko* can be uncontroversially described as a first-person coming-of-age novella, divided into seven sections.

While the board-as-textual-grid analogy begins to break down when pressed further—after all, the way the second game is played bears little resemblance to that of the first, whereas it is expected that any translation will bear some resemblance to the original story—it is a useful opening gambit, as it were, for considering game theory itself in the analysis of the translating process.

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<sup>11</sup> Gentzler goes on: “For example, Chinese novels have their own set of rules, rules which differ from the ways in which novels in Europe tend to be constructed. These ‘grids’ cause patterns of expectations in the respective audiences, and both practising translators and in particular literary historians need to take into consideration such grids in order to better produce and/or analyse translations.” (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998: *xiii*.)

### Translation and Game Theory

In his 1966 paper ‘Translation as a Decision Process’, the Czech theoretician Jiří Levý drew upon the branch of applied mathematics called game theory to elucidate the decision-making process that translators enact at the moment they choose within the possible set of word choices relevant at a particular point in the translation. It is worth quoting Levý directly on his rationale for this approach:

From the point of view of the working situation of the translator at any moment of his work [...], translating is a DECISION PROCESS: a series of a certain number of consecutive situations—moves, as in a game—situations imposing on the translator the necessity of choosing among a certain (and very often exactly definable) number of alternatives.  
(Levý 1966: 1171; original emphasis)

The possible alternatives delimited by the textual grid are what he calls “definitional instructions”. The criteria the translator employs to make a choice from within this set he calls “selective instructions” (1966: 1173). These criteria may be linguistic, cultural or in some cases personal. Reinvoking the central image, one can state that the definitional instructions indicate all *possible* moves at a given moment in the game, while the selective instructions suggest the *optimal* moves based on the context.

Another way to define definitional and selective instructions is as linguistic *rules* and *conventions* respectively. Merton talks of the “four modalities of normative force”: “prescriptions, proscriptions, preferences and permissions” (Hermans 1999: 83)—in other words, what you must do/say; what you must not do/say; what you can or are recommended to do/say; and what you may or are

tolerated to do/say. Prescriptions and proscriptions define the rules of a language (for example, set grammatical structures that cannot be altered), while preferences and permissions form a loose set of conventions, which *may* be ignored, but probably should not be, depending on one's audience. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic examples from Japanese and English serve to illustrate the distinction:

Table 1: Rules of the 'games'

Japanese	English
Paradigmatic	
No explicit grammatical subject required. Example: 昨日鹿を見た。 <i>Kinō shika o mita.</i> *'Yesterday [...] saw [...] deer.'	Explicit grammatical subject required. Example: Yesterday I saw a deer. (The ambiguity must be resolved in English.)
Syntagmatic	
In hypotactic (subordinate) sentences or clause sequences, the subordinate clause must precede the main clause. Example: 昨日鹿を見たから嬉しかった。 <i>Kinō shika o mita kara ureshikatta.</i> 'Yesterday I saw a deer so I was glad.' *嬉しかったから昨日鹿を見た。 * <i>Ureshikatta kara kinō shika o mita.</i> *'I was glad so yesterday I saw a deer.'	In hypotactic (subordinate) sentences or clauses, subordinate and main clauses may appear in either order. Example:  Yesterday I saw a deer so I was glad.  I was glad because I saw a deer yesterday.

Table 2: Conventions of the ‘games’

Japanese	English
<b>Paradigmatic</b>	
<p><i>Keigo</i> polite language (such as nominal prefixes <i>go-</i> and <i>o-</i> and verbal suffix <i>-masu</i>) is used to indicate level of civility and social distance.</p> <p>Example: これはお風呂でございます。 <i>Kore wa ofuro de gozaimasu.</i> ‘This is the bath.’ (But it would not be <i>grammatically incorrect</i> to say これは風呂だ。 <i>Kore wa furo da.</i> ‘This is the bath’, only rude in certain circumstances.)</p>	<p>No verb suffixes or nominal prefixes indicate politeness level. (However, the modal verb ‘would’ can sometimes be used to indicate politeness.)</p> <p>Example: This is the bath. (‘This would be the bath.’ would have another meaning entirely.)</p>
<b>Syntagmatic</b>	
<p>Paratactic (coordinate) syntax acceptable in expressing causal relations.</p> <p>Example: 昨日鹿を見て嬉しかった。 <i>Kinō shika o mite ureshikatta.</i> ‘Yesterday [I] saw a deer and was glad.’ (But one could also say 昨日鹿を見たから嬉しかった <i>Kinō shika o mita kara ureshikatta</i>, as above.)</p>	<p>Paratactic (coordinate) syntax not always desirable in expressing causal relations</p> <p>Example: ?Yesterday I saw a deer and (I) was glad. (But it would be more acceptable to say the following: ‘Yesterday I was late for work and I had to run.’)</p>

When one recreates an utterance in the act of translating, and moves from one set of rules and conventions to another, the evaluation process must be re-enacted, under a new set of prescriptions, proscriptions, preferences and permissions. The treatment of the novella title 『伊豆の踊子』 *Izu no odoriko* is an example. I shall ignore the possibility of replacing the original title with something entirely different—a type of cultural-conversion strategy common enough in itself<sup>12</sup>—and imagine that we are attempting to recreate the original in some form. 伊豆/*Izu*, being a place name, is invariant, and thus the corresponding English translation paradigm set is practically limited to its transliteration, or its omission

<sup>12</sup> For example, Seidensticker’s translation of Tanizaki’s novel’s title 『細雪』 *Sasameyuki* ‘light snow’ as *The Makioka Sisters* (1995).

(Ø).<sup>13</sup> の *no* is a possessive marker, and hence the translation paradigm set contains ‘s’ (apostrophe-s), ‘of’ and Ø. 踊子 *odoriko*’s translational paradigm set contains, as its most obvious members, ‘dancer’ and ‘dancing girl’. On top of this, English’s set of definitional instructions includes the probable necessity of an article, an irrelevance in the original Japanese language, which does not use articles. The paradigm for articles is (at least) ‘the’ (the most likely choice in the title of a work), ‘a’, and Ø (unlikely with a singular countable noun such as ‘girl’ or ‘dancer’, although titling conventions sometimes allow a zero article for brevity’s sake).<sup>14</sup> Finally, another English selective instruction is the convention of capitalisation of the first and main words in titles. These paradigms combined with the relevant selective instructions hence present us with a finite set of combinations, namely:

- Dancer, A Dancer, The Dancer
- Dancing Girl, A Dancing Girl, The Dancing Girl
- Izu Dancer, An Izu Dancer, The Izu Dancer
- Izu’s Dancer
- Dancer of Izu, A Dancer of Izu, The Dancer of Izu
- Izu Dancing Girl, An Izu Dancing Girl, The Izu Dancing Girl
- Izu’s Dancing Girl
- Dancing Girl of Izu, A Dancing Girl of Izu, The Dancing Girl of Izu

<sup>13</sup> Occasionally one might observe the substitution of a better-known place-name that is either more specific (hyponymic) or general (superordinate) to the area.

<sup>14</sup> Of course, we could widen this set, with a good enough reason, to include ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘those’, ‘a certain’, ‘some’, and so on, but such deictics are more likely to mark the title in a distracting way, and without good reason in this case.

Our set of syntagmatic permutations of possible lexical concatenations has generated a paradigm set for the title, governed by the definitional instructions listed above. Now the translator employs his or her set of selective instructions, consciously and unconsciously, to make a final choice from within this. Most possibilities will be immediately rejected for their awkwardness or inapplicability to the context of the work as a whole. For example, the selective instruction that is the convention of using “The” in eponymous titles immediately culls the possibilities down to just eight: *The Dancer*, *The Dancing Girl*, *The Izu Dancer*, *Izu’s Dancer*, *The Dancer of Izu*, *The Izu Dancing Girl*, *Izu’s Dancing Girl* and *The Dancing Girl of Izu*.

One can infer two distinct sets of selective instructions in play from the characteristics of the titles the two professional translators of *Izu no odoriko* have chosen in this case. Edward G. Seidensticker’s title *The Izu Dancer* requires more of the TL (target-language) reader, likely unfamiliar with the place name, than *Izu no odoriko* did of the SL (source-language) reader: the simple nominal modifier offers nothing to indicate it is a place name. Similarly, the ungendered ‘dancer’ is more ambiguous than *odoriko*, whose *-ko* diminutive marks it out as probably female. J. Martin Holman’s *The Dancing Girl of Izu*, by contrast, is longer, more expansive and more explanatory than Seidensticker’s. The end result is that Seidensticker’s rendition is closer to the original in terms of length and syntax, while being more semantically obscure. Whatever their differing sets of selective instructions, the translators therewith allow certain interpretations and preclude others.

The main reason for this ongoing process of exclusion that is the corollary of



translating decisions is the simultaneously multilayered and linear way in which language works: the paradigmatic and syntagmatic process of selection and combination discussed above. Without a paradigm, one would have nothing to articulate, and without a syntagm, one would have no way to articulate.

Crucially, such a decision-making process not only affects that discrete point in the translation, but also consequent decisions, creating a decision chain in much the same way that a move one makes in many board games influences all subsequent moves. In other words, one particular translation decision shuts out all other potential alternatives at that point, and further eliminates myriad subsequent choices that could have flowed from the alternatives.

For example, Seidensticker and Holman tend to preserve the diction of their chosen titles in representing the eponymous dancing girl throughout the translated narrative. Seidensticker, having titled the work *The Izu Dancer*, refers to her as the “dancer” on 32 occasions and the “dancing girl” only twice, while Holman, having chosen *The Dancing Girl of Izu* as his title, favours the epithet the “dancing girl” on 63 occasions, and only invokes the “dancers” (plural) twice.

One implication of such an application of game theory, which Levý sidesteps in his paper by confining the concept of the game to a one-player decision process, is that a game often implies competition: winners and losers. The classic example is the zero-sum game, with a polar combination of win (value +1) and loss (-1) in which the sum always comes out to zero. However, should one, in fact, view translation in this way? Can there be said to be winners and losers?

Well, if one is to retain conventions and standards—in other words to view

translation from a normative point of view—then the answer is yes. If ‘anything goes’, and all that counts is participating (here, creating a text for consumption), how can one judge whether or not a translation is a fair representation of the original?

A set of consequential questions follows. If translation is a competitive game, who is the translator playing against? The original author, who is competing with the translator for recognition of authenticity? Other translators of the same text into the same language, who are competing in the same marketplace?<sup>15</sup> The original text itself (Levy’s ‘prototext’), which competes with the translation (the ‘metatext’)?<sup>16</sup> The language and culture in which the text appears, which may resist the ‘intrusion’ of a text that has extra-linguistic and extra-cultural origins? Literary critics, who may take a translation to task for inadequately representing the original? Perhaps members of the target-language readership, who are ready to reject the translation if it does not appeal to them? Or are translators in fact playing against themselves, fighting the unconscious tendencies and tendentiousness that could colour or even distort the style and content of the original to an unacceptable degree?<sup>17</sup> The answers to most of these questions

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<sup>15</sup> It can hardly be regarded as a coincidence that Seidensticker chose to publish his retranslation of *Izu no odoriko* the year before Holman’s version (1997 versus 1998).

<sup>16</sup> See Hatim (2001: 57ff.) for a description of metatexts in translation.

<sup>17</sup> While such normative issues are significant in shaping both translators’ metatexts and readers’ reactions to them, another productive perspective is to view translation as a so-called coordination game rather than a zero-sum game. In a coordination game, the players work together to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. If we consider that authors are usually not in an antagonistic position regarding someone who wishes to interpret their work in good faith, then it makes sense to see the translator and original author as collaborators in the creation of a pan-linguistic, pan-cultural work in re-presenting it to a new, otherwise inaccessible audience, where the goal of their coordination game is simply to complete the decision-making process in a way that observers—bilingual and monolingual readers, critics, and so on—consider acceptable.

depend on the norms within which translators operate. To return to the above example, the selective instructions on which Seidensticker and Holman have based their differing decisions about the novella title constitute equally valid rationalisations for their decisions.

### **Disambiguation and Game Theory**

Among the moves that the translator must make in the translating process, the act of disambiguation is a crucial one. The varying degrees of “lexical segmentation” (Levý’s (1966: 1175) term for range and demarcation of shades of meaning) in the two languages ensure that at certain points in the translating process translators must choose among several lexical choices in their target vocabulary,<sup>18</sup> or, even more likely, among several *strings* of lexical elements. This means they must reduce the TT (target-text) readers’ range of possible interpretations in a way that was unnecessary for the original ST (source-text) readers.

Ambiguity complicates Levý’s assertion that the translating decision process can be defined as a “GAME WITH COMPLETE INFORMATION” (1966: 1172).<sup>19</sup> As we shall see with the below excerpt from *Izu no odoriko*, translating is not in fact a game with complete information. The reason is that, although the original text is invariant, and thus in a sense all the ‘moves’ have already been made and are there for anyone who can read Japanese to see, the original text presents

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<sup>18</sup> When the lexical segmentation of a SL term is narrower than that of the equivalent TL paradigm set, then the translator will need to select among more elements than were available to the original author, which has the potential for mischaracterising the ST.

<sup>19</sup> I retain here Levý’s original emphasis: “[T]he process of translating has the form of a GAME WITH COMPLETE INFORMATION—a game in which every succeeding move is influenced by the knowledge of previous decisions and by the situation which resulted from them [...].”

instances of lexical and sequential ambiguity that make it impossible to ascertain the purpose of the move (i.e., authorial intent) that the original player (the author) made.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, translation differs from a game like chess, where the purpose of certain moves may be ambiguous at a *particular moment* of play, but subsequent moves resolve this ambiguity. Some textual ambiguities are never resolved, remaining what one might term ‘opaque fossilised nodes’ in the text.

Another reason why translation is not a game with complete information is that some of the information on both the ST and TL sides changes with time. The original text comes to be viewed differently even in its own cultural context as time passes, and equally the expectations of the target domain change periodically: thus too do the rules and conventions on both sides.

Hence we need to revisit Levý’s characterisation of the translator’s decision-making process in the light of the literary text’s sociolinguistic and temporal contexts, issues that were not as prominent in the 1960s when he wrote. Several points must be considered here that extend the definition of the game from that of the activity simply of translating the words on a page to the players (translators in their context) engaging in the ‘game’ of translating a text (with both the act of translating and the text itself embedded in their own cultural contexts). Hermans notes that Holmes expands Levý’s conception of the decision-making process to include wider issues:

In considering the relation between a translation and its source Holmes elaborates Levý’s idea of translating as decision-making into a two-plane model. His argument is

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<sup>20</sup> Here one should distinguish between constructive ambiguity (polysemy) and destructive ambiguity (indeterminacy). The former is likely intended (though of course not all semantic or formal patterning may be conscious on the part of the author), the latter unintended.

that translators proceed not only serially, making one decision after another as they work through a source text, but also structurally, on the basis of a mental map of the prospective target text. Discussions of translation issues should therefore take into account the interplay between a whole set of factors comprising language, literary tradition or 'literary intertext' (the term is Julia Kristeva's), and socio-cultural situation [...]. (1999: 25)

The moment a translator fixes a translation in place actually only marks the mid-point of a decision-making chain that began when s/he agreed to take on the translation project, and continued with the translator's research into and cultural contextualisation of the text, including reading and re-reading of the text prior to rewriting it.<sup>21</sup> The translating process itself is still in the middle of the chain, because conscientious translators are likely to revisit their versions multiple times to ensure that the translation both closely corresponds to the ST and is readable in the TL. Next of course the text passes to the editor and/or publisher, who are likely to revise it again based on their perception of target-culture expectations.

The decision-making in the first rewriting is informed by a number of factors—Chesterman's "[e]xpectancy norms", which are

established by the expectations of readers of a translation (of a given type) concerning what a translation (of this type) should be like. These expectations are partly governed by the prevalent translation tradition in the target culture, and partly by the form of the parallel texts (of a similar text-type) in the target language [...]. They can also be influenced by economic or ideological factors [...]. (1997: 64)

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<sup>21</sup> On rewriting, see Lefevere (1992), e.g.: "Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way." (1992: vii.)

Expectancy norms, then, are the socio-cultural aspect of Levý's selective instructions. First, through the process of reading the original and possibly perusing biographical information about the writer and his or her national and cultural context, the translator has probably decided the genre of writing that is involved. The editor/publisher may also have characterised the writing, and encouraged the translator to view it within this framework. The simple classification of the writing as literature binds the translator to a higher level of 'respect' for the original form of the writing than might be expected if the work were of some other kind (say, a formulaic page-turner or, more distantly, a computer manual), and constrains his or her diction choices accordingly (Munday 2009: 34). Further, in reading the original text, the translator will have picked up on certain formal cues that might be seen to characterise the original author's prose ('idiolect'). S/he will have come to certain conclusions about the feasibility of conveying these characteristics in the rewriting. If any features are deemed untranslatable *in toto*, a number of choice pathways will have already been occluded before the first phrase is rewritten in the target language. The translator will have assessed the best way to render the remaining 'translatable' features, and will attempt to achieve this in his or her first rewriting act. At the same time, however, the translator will be conscious of the expectations of the new audience: that the text 'read' well; that it come across as as worthy of consideration as the genre 'literature in translation' implies.

In the first translating 'pass', translators are likely to focus on choices that nail down the superstructure of the whole, constructing a solid base that can be more finely sculpted in subsequent passes. Less attention to formal details, or, at least,

their *consistency*, will be paid at the early stages, unless the style of the original is overtly unorthodox, and hence crucial to conveying the prose. One can posit that as translators lock in the form, they close off alternatives at the microlevel that can contradict the macrolevel (though this may not be fully achieved).

This section has considered how the ‘moves’ the original writer and the translator make are circumscribed, and to some extent constrained, by the “interplay” (Hermans 1999: 25) of rules (‘definitional instructions’) and conventions (‘selective instructions’) of the literary ‘game’ peculiar to each language and culture within which the (re)writer operates (Levý 1966:1173). Now it is time to observe the implications for such differing rules and conventions in disambiguation in the JE literary context.

### **Disambiguation in JE Translation**

Kawabata Yasunari was Japan’s first Nobel laureate for literature, partly owing to the popularity of *Izu no odoriko* in Seidensticker’s first English translation, and his 1968 acceptance speech was famously titled (again through Seidensticker’s translation) ‘Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself’. When Ōe Kenzaburo became the next Japanese literary laureate a generation later in 1994, he pointedly titled his speech ‘Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself’.<sup>22</sup> The Japanese language is often described as ambiguous or vague,<sup>23</sup> and just as often experts will counter that it is not ambiguous to its native speakers, because context and linguistic cues

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<sup>22</sup> Both speeches are available in full on the Nobel Prize website ([www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org)).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, a critique primarily of Ōe Kenzaburo’s, but indirectly also of Kawabata’s, ambiguity, arising from the inherent subjectivity of the Japanese language, in Kumakura (1995). See also Donald Keene and Ivan Morris quoted in Miller (1986: 98).

elucidate meaning.<sup>24</sup> I agree in general (exceptions will present themselves shortly), and point to a parallel tendency in the use of irony in English, something that native speakers are apparently more adept at identifying (although not infallibly so) from context and tone than non-native speakers, often with embarrassing consequences for those who fail to do so. However, a strong case can be made for the contention that Japanese is grammatically more ambiguous than English in certain respects, and this ‘semantic gap’ is the source of a variety of potential translation issues.

A particularly salient feature of the SL (source language, Japanese) is the lack of necessity in many cases for a sentence to have an explicit grammatical subject marker. Speakers imply subjects (and sometimes human objects) through certain grammatical elements such as verb endings (though the co-text—surrounding utterances—is also important). Thus, 本を買ってあげた *hon o katte ageta* can, in one context, clearly mean ‘I bought the book for him’, and 本を買ってくれた *hon o katte kureta* ‘he bought the book for me’, even though the clauses contain no subject (the buyer of the book), nor any indirect object (for whom the book was bought). One can make these determinations with confidence in a given context, because (a) the preceding sentences often provide nominal antecedents for the ‘absent’ pronouns and (b) the underlined donatory verbs (Martin 1975: 352-354, 598) are selected depending on whether the implied subjects and objects are members of the in-group (within the

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<sup>24</sup> Miller, for example, severely criticises Western translators and theorists for characterising Japanese as vague and lacking in clarity, claiming in Ivan Morris’s case that he “has not considered that the grammar—or the grammatical and syntactic inter-relationship—of the language plays any significant role in the ‘literal meaning’ of the text” (1986: 98ff.). Thus Miller argues that the grammar of Japanese plays an important role in disambiguating its lexical elements, something one can readily observe in the use, for example, of ‘donative’ verb forms such as *ageru/kureru*, as outlined in this section.



speaker's own family, work or social domain: *ageta* 'I/we gave) or out-group (outside the speaker's domain: *kureta* 'he/she/they gave').

However, when contextual and grammatical cues become contradictory or insufficient, we enter more tortuous territory, where even native speakers may become disorientated. Such ambiguities may be less problematic when native readers or listeners of Japanese are left to determine (or leave undetermined) in their own mind the provenance of the subject; but translators into English do not have that luxury. English demands an explicit grammatical subject. To extend the earlier metaphor, when playing the English 'game', one must make an unambiguous move with one's piece when it is time to make a 'subject' move. Once one has committed to the move, not only can it not be retaken (except in a retranslation), it directly affects subsequent moves—in other words, the concatenation of lexical choices from then on—until some clear point of separation is reached and the cascade is brought to a halt.<sup>25</sup>

One sustained excerpt from the ST<sup>26</sup> will serve to elucidate the problematic aspects of ambiguity for JE translation. In this scene, the entertainers call on the narrator in his inn room. The key point of ambiguity is who the speaker of the words is in §314 and 315:

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<sup>25</sup> The immediate cascade effect may be localised, often petering out within a few sentences or paragraphs, and does not necessarily spread throughout the entire text—but then again, it may have an insidious global effect, particularly when a given word choice is consistently repeated.

<sup>26</sup> The Japanese text comes from the Horupu Shuppan edition (Kawabata 1985); sentence (§) numbers refer to this text.

ST	Seidensticker	Holman
309. ¶間もなく栄吉が私の宿へ来た。	¶A short time later Eikichi appeared.	¶Before long Eikichi came to my room.
310. ¶「みなは？」	¶'Where are the others?'	¶"Where is everyone?" I asked.
311. ¶「女どもはおふくろがやかましいので。」	¶'They couldn't get away from Mother.'	¶"The old lady is so strict with the girls."
312. ¶しかし、二人が暫く五目並べをやっていると、女たちが橋を渡ってどんどん二階へ上って来た。	¶But the three of them came clattering across the bridge and up the stairs while we were at the Go board, playing the simpler game.	¶However, we had been playing "five-in-a-row" only a short while when the girls came across the bridge and upstairs.
313. いつものように丁寧なお辞儀をして降下に座ったままためらっていたが、一番に千代子が立上がった。	After elaborate bows they waited hesitantly in the hall. ¶Chiyoko came in first.	They bowed politely as always and hesitated, kneeling in the hallway. First, Chiyoko, the oldest, stood up.
314. ¶「これは私の部屋よ。」	"Please, please," she called gaily to the others.	¶"This is my room.
315. さあどうぞ御遠慮なしにお通り下さい。」	"You needn't stand on formality in my room!"	Don't be so formal. Come on in," I said.
316. ¶一時間程遊んで芸人達はこの宿の内湯へ行った。	¶An hour or so later they all went down for a bath.	¶The entertainers stayed about an hour, then went down to the inn bath.

Seidensticker decides the speaker is Eikichi's young wife Chiyoko, while Holman opts for the narrator. The evidence supporting Seidensticker's decision partly lies in the propinquity of Chiyoko's action at the end of the preceding §313. He interprets 立上がった *tachiagatta* 'stood up' as "came in", which is not a direct translation (while Holman's is), but rather an apparent conflation of "stood up" and "entered", based on the context and on the echo of the socially formal base verb 上がる *agaru* 'enter someone else's place of residence'. In Seidensticker's interpretation, Chiyoko enters the room ahead of the others, and this initiative is immediately followed by her monologue.

Further, absence of the copula *だ* *da* before the particle *yo* at the end of §314 suggests a female speaker in Japanese sociolinguistic convention (Shibatani 1990: 373). Moreover, the mere fact that the speaker feels the need to indicate

whose room it is supports the notion that the girl is speaking. There would be little need for the narrator himself to point out such a thing, as the entertainers have called on him where he is staying, and thus are quite aware whose room it is. If Chiyoko wished to make a joke, pretending to take possession of it, which Seidensticker suggests with his archly italicised “*my room*”, she could have done so in just such a fashion. Seidensticker is so sure of his attribution that he injects the entirely fabricated phrase “she called gaily to the others”, not only providing an explicit subject but furthermore indicating to whom the subject is talking, and in what tone of voice.

Holman, on the other hand, chooses as his subject the narrator rather than the girl. There is no indication in the story as a whole that Chiyoko is the playful sort; indeed, she is largely portrayed as subdued, weighed down by the burden of the death of her baby during the journey. However, the narrator treats the entertainers well throughout their acquaintance, thus it would be in character for him to ask them to abandon formality and enter his room. He is aware that many people have a low opinion of such itinerant performers, but he is charmed by them, and no matter what other guests at the inn may think of his inviting them in, it is, after all, his room, and he can welcome them unreservedly. But none of this entirely explains why the narrator would feel the need to mention that it was his room.

Other linguistic elements are unhelpful for disambiguation. The 私 *watashi* ‘I’ subject in §314, while formal, is appropriate for either a male or female speaker in this situation. 御遠慮なしに *go-enryo nashi ni* ‘without reserve’ is perhaps suggestive of Chiyoko in the sense that 御遠慮なく *go-enryo naku* is the more

common, educated form, but this characterisation is by no means definitive.

Both translators thus have valid arguments to support the conflicting disambiguation moves they make here. However, it is questionable whether there is any need to disambiguate in the first place. Although the source text does not attach a subject to the monologue, in this case there is no requirement in English to do so either, as stand-alone quotations with no quotative verb or subject are acceptable in (modern) English prose. The translators are perhaps so used to inferring subjects from context and adding them to subject-demanding English that even in a case where it is not necessary they have done so, consequently creating a new problem for themselves. Here, then, TL expectancy norms are undermining the potential of resolving the issue of disambiguation in a felicitous manner.

### **Implications for JE Translation**

One can see from the above example that the selection/combination process of translating involves the translators' making decisions based on both the immediate linguistic and wider cultural context. Where the Japanese rulebook and English rulebook—what Levý calls the definitional instructions—differ, translators must make use of the personal playbook, or set of selective instructions, that they have assembled over the years, to find a way to harmonise the two. But when English requires a subject that is absent in the original, the translators' first impulse (prompted by expectancy norms) is to make an unambiguous move. That has more immediate implications than the original move, and exposes the translator to the danger of creating a succession of

further moves that carry the translation too far away from the original. Venuti references such a hazard in his comments on the imposition of TL norms on the ST, condemning “the violence that resides in the very purpose and activity of translation: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language” (1995: 18).

At the same time, disambiguation is an unavoidable part of the JE translation process, and the translator should not be afraid to resolve ambiguity where it helps to preserve the overall integrity of the original by presenting it in a form more acceptable to the target language. Occasionally translators may need to resolve an ambiguity in a way that cannot be justified solely by linguistic and contextual cues in the source text, for the greater goal of textual cohesion in the target text.

Venuti resists such fluency strategies as cohesion, instead calling for translators to employ a strategy of “resistancy”, using foreignisation to highlight formal and cultural aspects of the foreign text rather than erase them (1995: 20, 41-42, 305ff.), but in practice this seems to amount to little more than suggesting that “contemporary translators of literary texts can introduce discursive variations, experimenting with archaism, slang, literary allusion and convention to call attention to the secondary status of the translation and signal the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” (1995: 310-311).

Resistancy may indeed have its place in the translator’s repertoire of responses to the challenges of Japanese literature, but it seems largely irrelevant to the issue of disambiguation, since while one can perhaps occasionally bend TL conventions to reflect SL conventions, TL grammatical

rules, such as the requirement for an explicit subject, are rarely so negotiable. On the other hand, by viewing disambiguation through the lens of game theory, and seeing how oversensitivity to selective instructions, or TL expectancy norms, may distort the translator's response to specific issues, even unnecessarily closing off potentially navigable avenues of approach, the translator may become better at processing the definitional instructions into a translation that not only respects the Japanese source, but also well serves the English-language reader.

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