

Designing a Translation Course for Japanese Majors

Yoko Hasegawa
University of California, Berkeley

1. Introduction

For centuries, translation was the primary methodology in foreign language teaching. People acquired a reading ability of a foreign language by studying its grammar and applying that knowledge to the interpretation of texts. By the end of the 18th century, this common practice developed into the *grammar-translation method* that became popular in the early 19th century (Richards & Rodgers 1986). However, during the early 20th century, the inadequacy and inefficiency of the grammar-translation method led to resistance to its use. Grammar-translation was judged defective because it ignores the spoken language, creates false notions of equivalence, and deals with isolated sentences rather than coherent texts (Howatt 1984). Consequently, in the 1940s, the grammar-translation method no longer dominated the foreign-language classroom and was replaced by the *direct method*, i.e. teaching a foreign language by using only the target language as a means of instruction (Richards & Rodgers 1986). The concept underlying the direct method is that second-language (L2) learning should be similar to first-language (L1) learning. Thus, grammar is not overtly taught. Rather, students are encouraged to deduce rules from the language they are exposed to. Incorporation of translation is clearly impossible in the direct method curriculum.

Furthermore, the idea of *communicative competence* (first discussed by Hymes 1971) shifted the goal of foreign language instruction from focusing on abstract grammatical rules and memorization of vocabulary to the ability to use the target language appropriately to accomplish communication goals. As the communicative approach has become prevalent, the use of L1 has virtually been banned from the foreign language classroom. “This antipathy toward translation is manifest at every level of the academy from the beginning language class, where instructor competence is judged by the ability to avoid the L1, to the graduate student program where translation exams are disguised as “reading” exams, to the tenure review committee for whom translations are not acceptable as tenure books” (Brown 2005). The University of California, Berkeley’s Japanese Language Program, which I coordinate, reflects this overwhelming trend. The L1 and, in turn, translation are totally excluded from it.

Several years ago, I began to question whether lack of a translation course is justifiable. In the past decade, we graduated several students who became professional translators or interpreters. However, as liberal arts majors, vis-a-vis such utilitarian majors as business or engineering,

most of our students move into employment that has no obvious connection with the Japanese language or literature. Nevertheless, chances are high that they will occasionally be asked in their work places to translate such documents as manuals and emails. Our assumption was that if our students acquired sufficient proficiency in Japanese, they would be able to apply that knowledge and perform translation tasks adequately as non-professionals. Nevertheless, I concluded that instruction on such a practical skill should be part of a comprehensive language program. I decided to offer a translation course.

Using the Internet, I researched how translation is taught at other colleges and universities. To my surprise, however, no translation courses were found in undergraduate Japanese language programs in the United States. It has been reported that there is “a growing awareness of the formal inaccuracy which can result from an exclusive focus on communication, and a realization that translation can ... develop accuracy,” and that there is also a sign of reappraisal of the role of translation in the foreign language classroom (Cook 1998:119). Despite these reported changes in the intellectual climate, incorporation of translation into a Japanese language curriculum seems yet to be ahead. Even so, I predict that translation will eventually gain popularity as a part of Japanese pedagogy. Therefore, this paper will discuss several essential issues requiring consideration when designing a translation course as a component of a Japanese language program.

2. Enrollments

I began to offer my translation course in the fall of academic year 2001-02. Translation is considered an end in itself, not a means of teaching the Japanese language. The prerequisite to this course is three years (450 hours) of college Japanese (between Level 3 and 2 in the *Nihongo Nooryoku Shiken* ‘Japanese Proficiency Test’). Students are expected to be able to read Japanese texts independently with the help of a dictionary.

The following table summarizes the enrollments:

Year	Native Language			Total
	English	Japanese	Other	
2001	6	12	1	19
2003	5	3	2	10
2004	5	8	3	16

This mixture of native speakers of English and of Japanese was unexpected. I am not sure if this phenomenon is an idiosyncrasy of UC Berkeley, which is located on the

Pacific Rim. (It is interesting to note that, according to Anna Livia Brawn, native speakers of French rarely enroll in her UC Berkeley French translation course.) In any case, this is a significant factor that makes the course design extremely challenging. Because my aim is to teach translation proper, all exercises are into students' L1, avoiding translation into L2. By now it has become very clear that unless making native speakers of Japanese ineligible for the course, a unidirectional translation course from Japanese into English is impossible in this setting.

In order to resolve this problem, a native English speaker and a native Japanese speaker are paired and produce a translation jointly. They have different partners for each exercise. For examinations, where pair work is inappropriate, both Japanese and English source texts on similar topics are prepared.

3. Course Design

The course was designed to raise translator awareness of the considerations that one must take into account when approaching a text. Special attention is paid to the structural differences between Japanese and English, cross-cultural differences in stylistics, writing with clarity, reference work, etc. Texts for translation are drawn from both expository and literary writings in Japanese. By means of reading the selected articles and translating assigned texts into English, students acquire abilities to recognize common translation problems, apply methods for finding solutions, and evaluate the accuracy and communicative effectiveness of their translations.

Textbooks currently used in the course are:

Baker, Mona. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*.

Seidensticker, Edward and Tetsuo Anzai. *Translating Japanese Literature*.

Selected chapters from the following books supplement the textbooks:

Larson, Mildred. 1984. *Meaning-based Translation: A Guide to Cross-language Equivalence*.

Munday, Jeremy. 2001. *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*.

Kondo, Masaomi and Judy Wakabayashi. 'Japanese Tradition', *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*.

Baker's *In Other Words* is a structurally oriented textbook, providing a solid foundation for understanding the notion of *translational equivalence*. It starts at word level equivalence and then expands its scope to phrases (collocations and idioms), sentences (e.g. word order), and paragraphs (e.g. information structure, cohesion). It provides an appropriate amount of information in a very readable style.

Seidensticker and Anzai's *Translating Japanese Literature* focuses on stylistic differences between Japanese and English, providing abundant examples from

Seidensticker's own translations of Japanese literature. The topics include:

- Japanese preference for inchoative (intransitive) constructions vs. English preference for agentive (transitive) constructions;
- Japanese preference for verbal constructions vs. English preference for nominal constructions;
- different distribution patterns of direct, indirect, and free indirect speech;
- differences in the tense-aspect systems;
- variations in the use of passive voice.

From Larson's *Meaning-based Translation*, chapters on discourse genre, communication situations, information load, and testing the translation are selected. Three chapters from Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies* provide input on history and theory of translation in general, whereas Kondo and Wakabayashi's article, "Japanese Tradition," concisely narrates 2000 years of translation history in Japan. History and theory are briefly included in the course because "any programme of education with an applied element should provide some understanding of the concepts and concerns that have entertained thinkers who are interested in the phenomenon and which underlie its practice, and of the history of the development of both the practice and the theory that informs it" (Malmkjar 2004:3).

4. Activities

Because none of the above readings includes adequate exercises of Japanese-English translation, a sufficient number of text materials are prepared for practice. They are taken from narrative, procedural, expository, and descriptive discourse genres. This section will present some of the course activities.

Recognition Exercises

At the beginning of the course, students are assigned reading of a Japanese text and its English translation and then to identify various translation techniques discussed by Baker, e.g.

- (1) translation by a more general, superordinate term: うどん屋 'noodle shop', 静かな四畳半 'a very small, quiet room'
- (2) translation by cultural substitution: 二枚目 'handsome guy', 三枚目 'comical guy'
- (3) translation by using a loan word plus explanation: 畳 'tatami mats', 羊羹 'yokan jelly'
- (4) culture-specific collocations: 口数も多く なった 'I became more talkative', 知恵を絞って 'racking our brains'
- (5) idioms: 横槍を入れた 'I objected', 朝めし前 'it's a snap for her'

Communication Situations

A quality translation cannot be achieved without the consideration of the target readership, their potential

background knowledge, and the communicative goal of the source text. A pamphlet prepared by a local government in Japan to instruct residents how to separate home waste for collection is used for this purpose. As a pre-translation task, students discuss and determine that the target readership in this case is foreign residents who do not possess fluency in reading Japanese. Students then translate the pamphlet and evaluate the results. They conclude, for example, the translation of 燃えるゴミ as ‘burnable garbage’ is judged more appropriate than ‘combustible garbage for incinerators’ because such vital-but-everyday information should be written in simple language.

Importance of Background Knowledge (1)

At first glance, the following translation looks fine.

予備校に通い始めて四日目に最初の実力試験があり、その二日後に結果が掲示板に張り出された。ぼくの名前は、ちょうど真ん中あたりであった。(宮本輝『星々の悲しみ』)

On the fourth day after school started, we had the first evaluative test, and two days later the results were posted on the bulletin board. My name was right in the middle.

However, closer examination reveals that it does not convey the same information as the original. Implicit here is that the order in which the names are posted reflects the test scores (the highest first). This custom does not apply in the United States, and thus the meaning that the narrator’s grade was merely average is lost in translation. One way to remedy this problem is to make this information explicit, e.g.

Looking at the results, which are listed in order of achievement, I found my name right in the middle.

However, this translation inadvertently highlights the way of posting grades; “I found I was ranked just in the middle” may be more appropriate here.

Importance of Background Knowledge (2)

また、現状では裁判所の通訳人が国選弁護人の接見にも同行し、弁護人の通訳をも務めることになっている。この場面は、黒服、金バッジに身を包んだ強面の面会人のごった返していることもある拘置所、ないし暗い警察の留置場内の小部屋で、ガラスを挟んで外国人の被告人と対峙しつつ、想像可能なありとあらゆる修羅場が体験できる。(國安真奈「頭が痛い法廷通訳の現場」)

Because many learners of Japanese do not know the fact that 黒服、金バッジに身を包んだ強面 is a common description of *yakuza*, they readily mistranslate it as ‘lawyers in black suits with gold badges’.

Parallel Texts

Students are encouraged to employ all available resources, including dictionaries, thesauri, the Internet, and

“language consultants.” Translation software is mentioned in passing, but its use is not introduced in the course. The need for parallel texts is illustrated by the following commercial advertisement copied directly from the Internet.

Amazing Online Shopping	すばらしいオンラインショッピング
The full range of beauty care products	美の心配プロダクトの完全な範囲
Body Lift	ボディ上昇
Breast Enhancement Cream	胸の強化のクリーム
Dry Skin Repair: Repair Skin Barrier	乾燥した皮修理: 修理皮の障壁
Feminine Hygiene : Manjakani Wash	女らしい衛生学: Manjakani の洗浄
Stretch Mark Prevention : Phytolastil Gel	伸張の印の防止: Phytolastil のゲル
Weight Loss : Herbal Lite Tea	重量の損失: Lite の草の茶

These translations, apparently created by translation software, are ludicrous but not easy to correct. Discussing the nature and causes of the problem, students realize that the optimal way to tackle a translation of this kind of text is to find a similar text in the target language, i.e. a parallel text. The web pages of the Port of Oakland and the Port of Kobe are also used for practicing parallel-text based translation.

Metaphrase, Paraphrase, and Imitation

Munday’s book introduces and explains the three styles of translation: metaphrase, paraphrase, and imitation (p.25). Here is an example, translating the opening passage of *Kusamakura*.

山路を登りながら、こう考えた。智に働けば角が立つ。情に棹させば流される。意地を通せば窮屈だ。とかくに人の世は住みにくい。住みにくさが高じると、安い所へ引き越したくなる。どこへ越しても住みにくいと悟った時、詩が生まれて、画が出来る。(夏目漱石『草枕』)

Metaphrase

As I climbed the mountain path, I thought this.
If one works with knowledge, corners stand up.
If one rows with emotions, one is swept away. If one carries through with one’s will, one will be constrained. Whichever way, the world of people is difficult to live in. As the difficulty of living elevates, one begins to desire to move to an easier place. When one understands that wherever one moves, it is difficult to live, then poetry is born, and art is created.

Paraphrase

As I was walking up a mountain road, this thought

came to mind. If logic is used, conflict will arise. If one's passion is followed, the tide of emotion will take the person away. Following one's own convictions will lead to confinement. Basically, life is hard. When life gets harder, it is natural to want to find an easier place to live. When one finally realizes that life is hard no matter where one is, poetry and art emerges.

Imitation

My grandpa told me this: "If you're a smartass, people will hate you, and if you're emotional, they'll think you're a wimp. And being a stubborn mule will get you nowhere. Now you must be thinking that the grass is greener on the other side, but it ain't. You'll see that art is your only true escape."

Because students can be creative and playful, imitation is a popular exercise.

Guest Speakers

Not intended as translator training, study of the translation market is not included in the course syllabus. However, students are generally enthusiastic about knowing about the translator's job. Therefore, guest speakers from the translation industry are always appreciated. Additionally, Gotaro Yamazaki's essay on film subtitling, which explains that subtitle translators are allowed to use only 4 characters per one second of movie, is informative as well as interesting to translate.

Evaluations

Translation evaluation is strongly emphasized throughout this course because if one cannot distinguish good translations from mediocre translations, one can hardly improve his/her competence. To this end, translated texts are divided into small blocks (usually 1-3 sentences), and students evaluate and rank each translation within each block. At the beginning of the semester, students are not well equipped to accomplish this task, and, therefore, their commentaries are scant and impressionistic (e.g. *smooth*, *natural*, *elegant*, etc.). Furthermore, they frequently express diffident feelings of uncertainty (e.g. "I don't know how to evaluate translations"). As the semester progresses, however, they become more aware of subtleties that distinguish qualities of translation, and many display commendable translator awareness. For example, comparing the translations of the following passage, one student remarked on a profound difference in information packaging between Japanese and English:

その年、ぼくは百六十二篇の小説を読んだ。
十八歳だったから、一九六五年のことだ。(宮本輝『星々の悲しみ』)

I really dislike the translation "I was 18, so it must have been 1965." I don't feel that it is a natural sounding statement for English. It doesn't seem natural to use your age as the referent for

determining the year of an event.

For another example, a student translated the opening sentence of *Rashomon* as:

ある日の暮方の事である。一人の下人が、羅生門の下で雨やみを待っていた。(芥川龍之介『羅生門』)

Twilight descended on a stormy evening. A man stood under the Rashomon, waiting for the rain to break.

Employing the notion of information load discussed in class, she commented that:

This sentence, if translated literally, the target text would be, "it happened during dusk one day," which builds up the event too much. I decided to take the focus away from the 事 by replacing the subject with another subject, "twilight," because I feel that the intent of the author was to establish the setting.

Students' rankings of each evaluation exercise are tabulated and distributed in class for discussion. (The author of each translation as well as the reviewer of each ranking are kept anonymous.) Naturally, rankings vary; however, it becomes apparent that

- (i) highest-ranked and lowest-ranked translations normally have more consistent scores among reviewers,
- (ii) innovative (vis-a-vis "faithful") translations tend to receive mixed ratings (i.e., some praise them, while others do not).

Through these translation evaluation exercises, students experience that there is no "correct" or "best." I am unsure of the impact of these evaluation exercises on students' confidence and self-esteem. So far, there have been no apparent negative effects, perhaps because students work in pairs with a different partner each time, the impact of negative evaluations on their translations can be dispersed.

5. Concluding Remarks

The translation course described above is rigorous and labor intensive on the parts of both students and the instructor. Students are exposed to a wide range of considerations necessary when they approach a text for translation. When completing the course, they are well prepared to enter professional training, if they wish.

However, this course design has its shortcomings. Most significantly, because it takes a text-based rather than process-based approach, if a student's linguistic competence is high in both L1 and L2, s/he can benefit considerably from it. For this reason, two groups of students normally exhibit significant progress: (i) graduate students who have already had some experience in translation for their research purposes, and (ii) native speakers of Japanese studying various subjects at UC Berkeley. On the other hand, if one is not so competent in one language, i.e. weak in L2 or in L1,

some assigned tasks become overwhelming. This deficiency will be remedied in the future by incorporating more process-oriented tasks and/or providing guidance tutorials through translation processes.

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