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Translation as Defamiliarization: Translating Tawada Yōko's Wordplay

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Translating Stylistic Effects

In literary translation, it is not the transfer of information but of style that is crucial to the effects experienced by the target text reader. Jean Boase-Beier defines style as a “set of weak implicatures,” which are aspects of textual meaning which are suggested to a greater or lesser degree and are left fairly open to interpretation.¹ Through its style, a literary text gives rise to cognitive effects on the reader such as the immediate feelings one might experience and attribute to a character in the text, mental effects that arise from the search for meaning, and sometimes changes to knowledge or behavior.² According to Boase-Beier, “to translate style is to translate poetic effect, implicature, state of mind, attitude, and so on.”³ Thus, it is essential for the translator to perform a stylistic analysis of the source text (ST) and form an interpretation of the stylistic effects before attempting to recreate these in the other language.

This paper will explore the challenges and possibilities for the translator when faced with a text in which the defamiliarization of language has a major stylistic role, focusing in particular on strategies to translate a particular kind of wordplay. My case study explores the translation of an award-winning Japanese literary text *Yōgisha no yakōressha* (容疑者の夜行列車, Suspects on a night train) published in 2002 by bilingual Japanese-German writer Tawada Yōko 多和田葉子 (b. 1960).⁴ One of the chapters, “To Zagreb” (ザグレブへ) has been translated into English by Margaret Mitsutani and published in the literary journal *Granta* in 2015.⁵

The translation of stylistic effects does not rely on a fixed authorial intention that can be accessed by the reader/translator, since interpretation of style is always based on one's individual cognitive context.⁶ Lawrence Venuti's hermeneutic model of translation also enlightens us as to the



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nature of translation as interpretation.⁷ He overturns the commonly-held assumption that translation is about transferring an “invariant” from source to target, maintaining that any and all correspondences between source and target are shaped by the interpretation of the translator at every stage.⁸ Furthermore he says that “because translation performs an interpretation, it can never be literal, only figurative, or more precisely inscriptive of effects that work only in the translating language and culture.”⁹ Translation is therefore “imitative, yet transformative.”¹⁰

Importantly, the translator’s interpretation of form, meaning, and effect are influenced by the translator’s agency (whether visible or not) and the sociocultural context of translation and reception. Venuti proposes a set of “interpretants” applied by translators, often subconsciously, and divides these into “formal” and “thematic” categories.¹¹ Formal interpretants are structural and include the editing involved in choosing the particular version of a source text to translate, and creating paratexts for translation; the concept of equivalence adopted by the translator; and the style, which is dependent on the genre or discourse. Thematic interpretants are the codes that frame the translation approach, and may include an interpretation of the ST formulated through existing commentaries, an ideology, defined as “values, beliefs and representations that are affiliated with the interests of a specific social group,” and the function of the translation.¹² Interpretants derive from both source and target contexts, which may be cultural practices, patterns of usage, literary traditions, patterns of reception, or translation “norms,”¹³ and are housed in social institutions, affected by hierarchical power relations.¹⁴ Venuti argues forcefully that the global dominance of English language and culture means that translations into English frequently “domesticate” the text to fit within accepted norms of Anglophone discourse. This causes “fluent” translations that are received as familiar by the target culture (TC) and may sell well, but the translator and translation process are rendered invisible, as are the unfamiliar “minority” elements of the ST language and culture.

Venuti therefore advocates for an ideological position of resistance to dominant cultural hierarchies and canonical forms, encouraging translators to be as self-reflexive as possible when translating and apply “marginal interpretants,” signaling the foreignness of the ST, even though linguistic and cultural difference can only ever be rendered indirectly, through the target language.¹⁵ Nevertheless, strategies such as deviating from the standard dialect and predominant stylistic conventions introduce heterogeneity and “show respect for the ST by cultivating innovation in

the translating language and culture.”¹⁶ This is an argument not for abandoning readability, but for broadening the acceptability in the TC of non-standard forms through translation. It also enables translators to highlight their own role and take greater responsibility for achieving their particular purpose or “skopos.”¹⁷ As Boase-Beier argues, translation multiplies the “voices” within a text because it adds the translator’s voice to the original author’s, enhancing the possibilities for interpretation.¹⁸ Recognizing this, Chantal Wright, who published an experimental translation into English of a German prose text by Tawada Yōko, states in her introduction that “there is no guarantee that the range of effects I intend and the range of effects the reader finds in the translation will coincide, but I can nonetheless attempt to create a text in which a plurality of effects are in play.”¹⁹ Such an approach would encourage ST and target text (TT) readers to go through similar cognitive processes, such as exploring multiple meanings in response to an ambiguity, novel metaphor, or defamiliarized use of language.

Translating Tawada

Let us now turn to Tawada Yōko, whose writing exemplifies what Keijirō Suga has described as a kind of “translational poetics.”²⁰

Born in Japan in 1960, Tawada Yōko moved to Germany when she was twenty-two years old and has since published prolifically in both Japanese and German including novels, collections of short stories and poetry, plays, and essays. She has won multiple literary awards in both countries, including the Akutagawa Prize, Noma Prize, and Tanizaki Prize in Japan, and the Goethe Medal and Kleist Prize in Germany. In 2018, the English translation (by Margaret Mitsutani) of her novel *Kentōshi* (献灯使, *The Emissary*) won the U. S. National Book Award for Translated Literature.²¹

As a translingual or exophonic writer, that is, someone who writes in their non-native language, many of her works deal with language and identity. She writes about living in more than one language and in more than one cultural tradition, and resists essentialist notions of identity and the link between language and national identity. Her style is postmodern and experimental, with frequent use of surrealism, blurring the boundaries between dreams and reality, and space and time, which is another technique for expressing the rootlessness of her characters.²²

Tawada’s works contain strands of multiple languages, images, and intertextual references. In particular, she uses defamiliarizing techniques, such as wordplay that extends and deconstructs idioms and proverbs in

unique ways. She also plays with grammar and orthography, such as creating neologisms, or taking grammatical concepts, like German grammatical gender, literally. She finds ways to make the Roman script and Japanese scripts interact with each other and enjoys visual puns such as exploiting multiple meanings of kanji, as well as auditory puns. These stylistic devices function to make us question the “naturalness” of our native language and of the relation between word and referent.

For example, the following lines appear in her 2006 novel *Amerika: hidō no tairiku* (アメリカ非道の大陸, America: the continent of tyranny)²³ and are a humorous example of how Tawada draws the reader’s attention to differences between languages. Like *Yōgisha no yakōressha*, discussed below, the story is narrated in the second person. In this scene, the Japanese narrator who is traveling in America is asked by her companion to drive onto a freeway. The Japanese language contains many English loan words which have had their meaning distorted and transformed in the process of entering Japanese, which are referred to as *wasei eigo* (和製英語). One of these is the expression *pēpā doraibā* (literally “paper driver”), written in the original as ペーパードライバー, referring to someone who has obtained a licence but has very little driving experience.

The narrator of this story says:

“But, I’m not good at driving in big cities; to tell the truth, I’m actually a paper driver.”

The moment you said this, your body turned into an origami paper crane. Ah, so it seems there’s no such word in English as “paper driver.” That’s why it must have been taken literally and you were turned into paper.... (my translation).²⁴

This is an example of Tawada’s style whereby the transformation inherent in language is also taken literally, resulting in the bodily transformation of the main character. Tawada employs the body motif in many of her works, questioning the naturalness of language, identity and subjectivity. Another example is her 1991 novella “Kakato o nakushite” (かかとを失くして, Missing heels) in which a mail-order bride arrives in a nameless country and stumbles off the train, losing her heels. In Japanese, かかと can mean the heel of a shoe or foot.²⁵ She thus experiences a physical transformation that can be interpreted metaphorically as the feeling of instability or alienation felt by a migrant uprooted from their place of origin. However, at the same time, she experiences her “missing heels” as a source of power,

and she refuses a doctor's advice to get an operation to reconstruct her heels, resisting the pressure to assimilate.

Tawada says that she seeks to find the poetic ravine (詩的な峡谷, *shiteki na kyōkoku*) separating language A and language B and wishes to fall into it.²⁶ The poetic ravine can be thought of as an in-between space, or a “third space,” to use Homi Bhaba's term, that resounds with the echoes of both languages.²⁷ Tawada also talks about how no language is single, with fixed boundaries, and she often uses the metaphor of a porous web or net when discussing language and the position of the writer within it. She uses the example of Paul Celan's German poetry, showing how French and Russian are contained within his German, not as foreign language expressions but in the form of poetic insights.²⁸

As her main Japanese-English translator, Margaret Mitsutani maintains that such a “poetic ravine” is in fact an ideal space for translators, as well as writers to inhabit.²⁹ Much of Tawada's writing can be seen as a form of self-translation so that she can be regarded as writing “between” Japanese and German, rather than writing strictly “in” one language or the other. As discussed by another one of her translators, Susan Bernofsky, sometimes this self-translation is more explicit; for example, she wrote *The Naked Eye* in Japanese and German at the same time, sometimes writing a chapter in Japanese, then another in German, whichever took her fancy, and then translating between languages so she had two complete manuscripts at the end.³⁰ However, with *Memoirs of a Polar Bear*, the process was more sequential, since she wrote the novel in Japanese first and then self-translated it into German (*Etüden im Schnee*, 2014).³¹

Not surprisingly, Tawada has written a number of essays and literary works specifically on the theme of translation. She challenges the traditional distinction between translation and literary creation: if we consider that the existence of a true, authoritative and stable “original” is fundamentally an illusion, then translation, just like writing, is an interpretive and creative act. Her stance resonates with those of Venuti and Boase-Beier discussed above, and she similarly highlights the process of translation as transformation; as Tawada states:

Literatures written in small languages are not accessible to most people and so they get translated into major languages that may provide a larger audience. Then, by translation, the small language's endangered vocabulary, its rhythm of thinking, diction and narration, images and myths take refuge in a major language and bring about displacement, distortion, hesitation,

fluctuation, etc. Nothing is more stimulating than this for literature.
Literature in translation plays a role of transforming a major language.³²

Also implied in her statement is that no translation is final; any translation is simply one of any number of possible interpretations that gives a new life to the ST. Resonating with her polyphonic writing style, Tawada refers to the notion of multiple languages coming together through translation.³³ She draws upon Walter Benjamin's ideas about translation piecing fragments of languages together to provide the text with an "after-life."³⁴ She embodies this approach in her 1999 novella *Moji ishoku* (文字移植, translated by Mitsutani as "Saint George and the Translator") where the translator-narrator persists, despite criticism, in employing a fragmented, visible translation style.³⁵ Mitsutani discusses how this sort of experimental translation approach can give rise to new poetic insights and make readers question their assumptions about language and the text.³⁶

Tawada thus defies the conventional conceptualization of translation as bridging the gap between source and target (languages/texts/cultures) and encourages us to pay more attention to the "in-between space," or "poetic ravine," of translation. By inhabiting the border zone, translators can take advantage of multiple movements and influences, with "source" and "target" binaries becoming less meaningful.

In her essay entitled "Letter to a Translator," Tawada therefore calls for "offensive" rather than "defensive" translations. For example, she urges translators to experiment in the target language using techniques which may not be possible in the source language, and proactively put forward unique interpretations of the text.³⁷ A number of Tawada's translators have commented on this approach to translating her literature, for example her German-English translator Susan Bernofsky:

She will tell you as her translator: "Okay, I understand that this language play is not going to work in any other language—go make a language play of your own." She knows that her translators are continuing the writing of the book in the other language, and she enjoys that. She is always about the group project.³⁸

Bernard Banoun, Tawada's German-French translator has said in a similar vein that "it might sound quite arrogant but I think that my French translation is often a kind of completion of the German text, a realization of its potentiality. With Tawada's texts, I allow myself things that I wouldn't allow with other authors."³⁹ With regard to wordplay, Banoun describes his approach as follows:

There are two different levels: the level of the plot, or content, which you have to keep; and then the level of languages. Sometimes you have a play on words, and you have to keep some of that play, so that there's a confrontation with a foreign object for the French reader as well. It becomes a triangular constellation or relationship, which is obviously something else than the binary relationship between German and Japanese. Sometimes I keep some German words that I explain or translate only once, because if you translate all the German plays on words into French plays on words, the text could seem to be written in French, and the original text and context could be abolished.⁴⁰

Chantal Wright adopted an experimental format in translating Tawada's German text, *Porträt einer Zunge* (Portrait of a tongue) into English. This comprises a two-column layout, with Wright's English translation on the left and her multilayered commentary on the right. The commentary achieves a number of interrelated purposes: explaining linguistic and intertextual references, providing personal anecdotes and associations in a mimicry of the narrator's musings, and "thinking aloud" as a response to the act of reading.⁴¹

We will now look at a case study to explore how one of her Japanese-English translators, Margaret Mitsutani has rendered Tawada's unique style of wordplay.

Translating *Yōgisha no yakōressha*

Yōgisha no yakōressha (Suspects on a Night Train) was published in 2002, earning Tawada two Japanese literary awards (the Tanizaki Prize and Ito Prize). It has been translated into French and Russian, but only one chapter, ザグレブへ (Zagurebu e, To Zagreb), has been translated and published in English. Although described as a "novel" there is no chronological flow between the thirteen "chapters," which are largely self-contained. However, in each chapter the main protagonist is "you" (*anata*); that is, the whole novel is written in the second person. The only other area of consistency among the chapters is that "you" are characterised as some kind of performing artist and "you" are travelling somewhere, usually on a night train. The destination is given as the name of the chapter. Most of the episodes describe the incidents and unusual things that happen to "you" on the trains and at stations, and the various people "you" encounter. Travel plans are frequently interrupted, making "you" frustrated and bewildered. Where is the next destination? Will "you" ever reach it? And who are "you" anyway? This theme of shifting, uncertain identities is played out throughout the novel. There is an ongoing conflict between "your" existence "in the second person" without a fixed identity and the

systems and expectations that require “you” to belong somewhere. This conflict is brought to a climax in *ボンベイへ* (Bonbei e, To Bombay) when “you” realize, once already on the train, that the passport “you” are carrying is not “your” own. Through the surrogate experience of being “you,” travelling from place to place on a night train, the reader begins to feel unsure of their own identity, the “naturalness” of the language they commonly speak and their own norms and beliefs.

On many occasions in this work, Tawada uses Japanese idioms and proverbs in defamiliarizing ways to make readers think about the literal meaning behind the figurative expressions they use on a daily basis. She makes us realize that language is not something innate and stable but very much conditional and malleable. This stylistic use of wordplay is discussed by Raymond Van den Broeck as posing a very difficult challenge for translators.⁴² This is certainly the case, especially since proverbs and idioms have historical, intertextual and cultural origins which vary significantly between Japanese and English and the way double meanings and puns are achieved is inevitably different. Therefore, a translator needs to put the denotative “meaning” to one side and prioritize the function of the wordplay in terms of its defamiliarizing effect. A range of strategies may be required, sometimes allowing the Japanese expression to influence the English, introducing readers to new linguistic forms and making them notice the language that way, and other times exploiting the English language and proverbs or idioms applicable to the target readership. But because of the often intricate nature of Tawada’s double meanings and the way they are woven into her writing, sometimes it may be necessary to accept a translation loss and prioritise either the literal or figurative meaning. Compensatory strategies may be effective when this occurs, such as introducing wordplay elsewhere in the text.

Using a series of examples, I will now explore the translation strategies Margaret Mitsutani has employed in rendering Tawada’s defamiliarizing wordplay in “To Zagreb.” The key sentences for analysis are underlined. Below the Japanese, I will provide a close, literalizing translation followed by the actual translation by Mitsutani.

Example 1 (p. 38–39)

This first example occurs when the protagonist (“you”) is waiting for a train in Trieste to go to Zagreb. “You” is approached by two suspicious-looking men who offer to give “you” a lift by car.

ST: 一人が鋭い視線をあなたの腕時計に走らせた。ローマの街頭で買った安物である。しかし、彼の目には一瞬、飢えの閃光が走った。これは馬脚を現

したかな、とあなたは一瞬疑う。悪魔は馬のように蹄のある足をしているそう
だ。二人の男は靴を履いているので蹄があるかどうかは見えない。

Literal translation: One directed a sharp glance at your wristwatch. It was a cheap one you'd bought at a street stall in Rome. For a moment, hunger flashed in his eyes. Had he just shown his horses feet, you wondered for a moment. Apparently, the devil has hooves like a horse. But the two men were wearing shoes, so you couldn't see whether or not they had hooves.

TT: One shot a glance at your wristwatch. It was a cheap one you'd bought as a souvenir at a street stall in Rome. For a split second, desire flashed in his eyes. Maybe that's what he's after, you thought. If you could see hooves, you'd know who you were dealing with, but both these guys were wearing shoes.

The Japanese expression *bakyaku o arawasu* (馬脚を現す, *lit.* to show your horse's feet) is a common idiom meaning to expose a secret that you wished to keep hidden; in other words, "to show your true colors." It actually derives from traditional theatre where the actor responsible for the horse's legs was of course supposed to be hidden from the audience. However, Tawada makes a play with the literal meaning by bringing it into a non-Japanese context. That is, she makes readers imagine that the saying relates to the Devil's hooves, which is not a reference that most Japanese readers would be familiar with, so she explains it in a humorous way. In this case, Anglophone readers, if they have knowledge of Christian traditions, are more likely to be aware of the cultural intertext (that the Devil is believed to have hooves), so Mitsutani does not directly explain this reference.⁴³ Instead the translation hints at the allusion more subtly, so replicating Tawada's effect of drawing attention to language and metaphor in such a way that also forces readers to think about the situation literally, like the protagonist. Thus, the humour is effectively recreated, even though the strategy is somewhat different from the Japanese.

Example 2 (p. 38–39)

This example follows soon after the first, as the two men encourage "you" to go with them. It consists of a string of proverbs and idioms (underlined) in which several double meanings and wordplay are combined.

ST: 二人はあなたの腕にやさしく触れ、車で行こうと繰り返し誘った。あなたは自分の意志に反してうなずいて、一步を踏み出してしまった。まるで催眠術をかけられたかのようなようだった。そうだ、乗りかけた話から降りることはない、地獄に行っても友達はできる、こうなったら行くところまで行こう、

毒を食わば皿まで、犯罪人の寸劇を最後まで見極めてみよう、などと心にもない考えがあなたの心をよぎった。

Literal translation: The two touched you gently on the arm and repeatedly invited you to come with them by car. Contrary to your will, you nodded and took a step forward. It was as if you'd been hypnotized. Thoughts that were not your own crossed your mind: You can't get off a story you've started to get onto; You can make friends, even in hell; You might as well go as far as you can; If you're going to eat poison, eat the plate as well; See the criminals act out their skit until the end.

TT: Taking you gently by the arm, they urged you to come with them. Without meaning to, you nodded and took a step forward. As if you'd been hypnotized. A whole series of sayings you didn't really believe came to mind: You can't get off in the middle of a story; You can make friends even in hell; See what you've started through to the end; If you're going to take poison, eat the container as well; Always stay for the last act, even when the players are criminals.

The first clause, *norikaketa hanashi kara oriru koto wa nai* (乗りかけた話から降りることはない) derives from the expression *hanashi ni noru* (話に乗る) meaning “to go along with someone's story.” But the literal meaning of the verb 乗る is “get on/into” a vehicle and is followed by the opposite verb 降りる (get off). Therefore, in one sense it is hinting that once inside the car, “you” will not be able to get out. Even more importantly, if one replaces the word 話 (story) with 船 (boat), it becomes a form of the saying *norikakatta fune* (乗りかかった船); you can't get off a boat that you've already gotten into, in other words, you can't go back now. These double meanings in the language encourage readers to question the normalcy of their beliefs, mirroring the uncertainty and the contradictory impulses felt by “you,” the protagonist.

The second clause, “(you) can make friends, even in hell,” may be interpreted as a reference to the saying *jigoku ni mo shiru hito* (地獄にも知る人, *lit.* there are acquaintances, even in Hell) which means that wherever you go, you will meet someone you know, or alternatively that you will be able to make acquaintances wherever you live. An additional play on words is that the reference to “Hell” may be interpreted together with the mention of the “Devil” in the preceding example, in that by “hitching a ride” with the “Devil,” you will end up in “Hell.” This association would stand out particularly for readers from a Judeo-Christian background, more so than most Japanese readers. Mitsutani has decided

to translate the above two clauses literally, even though readers of the English are unlikely to make connections with well-known sayings. Literal translation nevertheless has a foreignizing effect of making the readers aware they are reading a translation, and the jarring nature of an expression such as “you can’t get off in the middle of a story” draws the reader’s attention to language, providing a similar estranging effect, albeit using translation rather than wordplay as the method.

The next clause *kō nattara iku tokoro made ikō* (こうなったら行くところまで行こう) is close in meaning to “go as far as you can,” and is substituted with the English expression here, “see what you’ve started through to the end.” Here a substitution strategy makes it clear that the protagonist is imagining a string of sayings. If a translator wished to add a pun into the TT as a creative way to compensate for other cases where double meanings cannot be achieved, an alternative translation may be “go for broke,” since this adds a touch of irony, in that “you” are likely to become broke if you follow the men, who evidently intend to steal your possessions. When substituting a saying in English for one in the ST, the translator would also need to be careful to recognize that sayings frequently differ in varieties of English, so that an American reader may react differently from a British reader, for example.

The following expression *doku o kuwaba sara made* (毒を食わば皿まで, lit. If you’re going to eat poison, eat the plate as well) is short and sharp in Japanese, and it would be possible to substitute it with an equivalent expression such as “go for the whole hog” in American English or “in for a penny, in for a pound” in British English. However, Mitsutani’s literal translation here provides a novel metaphor in English which has a stronger impact. It also serves Tawada’s purpose of drawing attention to language and the interaction between languages through translation. The final expression about watching the criminals act out their skit to the end is adapted somewhat by the translator, but again she retains the image from the Japanese. In the ST, it is the juxtaposition of so many idioms and sayings one after each other that creates the defamiliarization, together with the wordplay. In the TT this is combined with the defamiliarizing effect of exposing target readers to Japanese expressions they would not have encountered before. It is useful that Mitsutani adds the explanation “a whole series of sayings” beforehand to make it clear to the English reader that these are in fact idioms and proverbs rather than random thoughts of the protagonist.

Example 3 (p. 40)

ST: 素人にも見破られるようなことをなぜするのかと思ひ、見ていて前歯の裏が痒くなりそうだった。腹の中に刀を隠し持っていたら、それが目から突き出して見えてしまう。

Literal translation: You wondered why they would do something that even an amateur could see through and looking at them made you feel like the back of your front teeth would become itchy. If you hide a sword in your stomach, it will protrude through your eyes and everyone will see it.

TT: Why would they try something even an innocent could see through? It was enough to give you an itch, somewhere in back of your front teeth. Try hiding a dagger in your belt and everyone will see it, gleaming in your eyes.

In this example, the protagonist is ruminating on the actions of the two men and says *miteite maeba no ura ga kayuku narisō datta* (見ていて前歯の裏が痒くなりそうだった), which is translated relatively literally here. It may be regarded as a play on the expression *hagayui* (歯がゆい, *lit.* itchy teeth) which is an adjective meaning “irritating” or “exasperating.” It is therefore another case where the author is deliberately exploiting the literal meaning of the image contained in a commonly-used Japanese idiom to amuse the reader and make them reflect on the language itself, an effect which would be completely lost through paraphrasing with something like “it was exasperating to look at them.” Although the itchy teeth idiom does not exist in English, an “itch” is an irritating sensation physically, and it is not difficult to conceptualize this as a metaphor for the mental feeling of irritation. A literal transfer therefore has a similar effect to the Japanese of making the English language reader think about the physical sensation of what an itch behind the front teeth would feel like, even if they are not questioning a common idiom at the same time. This stylistic effect also alludes to the physicality of language, which is a common theme in much of Tawada’s writing, as discussed above.

The next sentence literally means that if you hide a sword in your stomach, everyone will be able to see it sticking out through your eyes. In Japanese, feelings and emotions are usually conceptualized metaphorically as residing in the stomach, rather than the heart as in English. There are sayings relating to a sword symbolizing evil intentions, such as *kuchi ni mitsu ari hara ni ken ari* (口に蜜あり腹に剣あり, *lit.* honey in the mouth, a sword in the stomach) which refers to someone who may be sweet-talking, but harbors evil thoughts; so this is yet another example of Tawada drawing attention to the language itself, extending the

metaphorical expression in a unique way. Mitsutani's translation is effective on two levels: it alludes to the English expression "shoot daggers at someone" such as "her eyes shot daggers at him," and the verb "gleaming" recalls the phrase from Macbeth "there's daggers in men's smiles," which has a similar meaning to the abovementioned Japanese saying. Consequently, the likely cognitive effects of the stylistic choices by author and translator are similar.⁴⁴

Example 4 (p. 41)

In this example, "you" are imagining what could happen if you perfected your skills at deceiving people. "You" could trick them into giving you money to put on a performance and then become famous.

ST: 猿が月を捕るような話でも、上手く話せば信用してもらえるのではない
か。信用されたら、身を粉にして働こう。粉になった身は麻薬の白い粉のよ
うにまわりの人を酔わせるかもしれない。一度成功してしまえば、あなたが
嘘から出発したことなどもう誰も思い出せないはずだ。骨を削ってできた白
い肥料は栄養たっぷり、石の上にも花を咲かせるだろう。

Literal translation: Even a story about a monkey who stole the moon might be believed if you told it well enough. Once trusted, you would work, grinding your body to powder. Your body, turned to powder, may make people high, like the white powder of a drug. Once you were successful, no one would remember that you'd started from a lie. The white fertilizer made from your ground bones would be full of nutrients and make flowers bloom, even on stone.

TT: Surely there'd be some sucker who would believe a story about a monkey who stole the moon if you told it well enough. Once you'd gained their trust, you would work yourself to the bone, then keep on working until your bones were pulverized, perhaps into a white powder, a drug that got people high. Once you were successful, no one would remember that your career had started with a lie. Your bones would eventually turn into fertilizer with enough nutrients to make flowers bloom on a stone.

The first expression, *saru ga tsuki o toru yō na hanashi demo* (猿が月を捕るような話でも) means "even a story about a monkey catching the moon" and is a reference to the proverb *enkō ga tsuki o toru* (猿猴が月を取る) which derives from the legend in Buddhist scriptures about a monkey who tried to grab the moon which was reflected in a well, but fell into the water and drowned. In other words, if you are greedy and hold impossible ambitions, by chasing after profit you will end up destroying yourself without achieving anything. Although the intertextual reference does not

exist in the target language (TL), keeping the same expression in the TT, as Mitsutani has done, still enables readers to understand and be amused by the idea that some people will believe anything, even something as improbable as a story of a monkey stealing the moon.

In the next part of the paragraph, a frequently used idiomatic expression, *mi o ko ni shite hataraku* (身を粉にして働く) is extended and the literal meaning is exploited for humorous effect. The expression, which literally means to work, turning one's body into powder, has the figurative meaning "to work very hard." Tawada then plays on the idea of your body turning into powder; it could become a drug to get people high, or fertilizer, to make flowers bloom. Mitsutani has decided to use the similar English idiom, "work yourself to the bone." She has skilfully linked this with bones being pulverized to become "a white powder" as in a drug or fertilizer. This retains the contrast in the Japanese between the common idiom and the novel way this is extended in the following sentences.

The final phrase, *ishi no ue ni mo hana o sakaseru darō* (石の上にも花を咲かせるだろう) literally means it would make flowers bloom, even on stone. This might also be interpreted as a subtle reference to the Japanese proverb that starts with the same five characters (石の上にも三年, *ishi no ue ni mo sannen*) which means "perseverance prevails" and derives from the idea that if you sit on it for three years, even a stone will become warm. Since the image of persevering is already conveyed by the preceding metaphorical expressions, the fact that the translation is unable to incorporate a reference to a proverb in this instance is not too significant, as the literal rendition provides an interesting image for readers.

Example 5 (p. 45)

In this example, "you" are regretting your desire to be useful by helping the other passengers when they asked you to store packets of coffee in your luggage (they were trying to smuggle them into Yugoslavia, and luggage inspectors have just entered your compartment).

ST: 天狗になれば、必ず鼻を折られる。

Literal translation: If you become a *tengu*, your nose will definitely be broken off

TT: If you stuck your nose in the air it was bound to get broken.

A *tengu* is a Japanese mythological creature resembling a goblin with a long nose, and the expression *tengu ni naru* (天狗になる, become a *tengu*)

means become bigheaded or conceited. This idiom is extended playfully in the ST to imply that becoming bigheaded (in this case feeling pleased with yourself for trying to help others) will not get you anywhere. Fortunately, a similar English idiom exists (“to stick your nose in the air”), and although it does not involve goblins, Mitsutani could easily extend the idiom to replicate the humorous effect.

Concluding remarks

This case study has shown the importance of the translator forming an interpretation of the stylistic effects of a literary text and prioritising creative strategies that attempt to replicate these effects (rather than the words themselves) in the target language. In the examples looked at, we see the defamiliarizing effects of wordplay in Tawada’s prose, exploiting literal and figurative layers of signification to draw attention to language itself; its plurality, fluidity, and sometimes absurdity. Margaret Mitsutani’s translation responds to Tawada’s call for experimental translation in response to experimental writing. In some instances, she introduces English language readers to Japanese idioms and proverbs, making them think about differences and similarities between languages, while in other cases she substitutes common English idioms that can then be creatively extended and manipulated to engender similar effects. Discussion of these examples has also shown that where a translation “loss” is inevitable, “compensation” later in the text may be possible.

Recognizing that the translator’s interpretation of a text is only one interpretation, and as much as possible keeping the door open to alternative perspectives, the translator must nevertheless render one’s interpretation in the TL, in the knowledge that different linguistic, cultural, and conceptual contexts never allow for effects to be truly “equivalent.”

As Boase-Beier remarks, the resulting translation can be seen as a blend, with the effects created by the translation “added” to the source text.⁴⁵ This may be seen as something positive; in the “poetic ravine” between source and target, a translation can be a site of hybridity and rejuvenation, combining voices from both sides.

NOTES

¹ Jean Boase-Beier, *A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies* (London: Continuum, 2011), 9.

² Ibid., 108.

³ Ibid., 81.

⁴ Tawada Yōko 多和田葉子, *Yōgisha no yakōressha* 容疑者の夜行列車 (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2002). Since Tawada has works published in multiple languages and is a global citizen, the order in which her name appears can vary. For the purposes of this article, I will adopt the Japanese literary convention and refer to her by her last name first, since the work I am discussing was originally written in Japanese.

⁵ Tawada Yōko, “To Zagreb,” trans. Margaret Mitsutani, *Granta*, Fiction—The Online Edition, June 10, 2015. <https://granta.com/to-zagreb/>. Accessed June 26, 2020.

⁶ Jean Boase-Beier, *Stylistic Approaches to Translation* (Manchester, U. K.: St. Jerome, 2006), 63.

⁷ Lawrence Venuti, *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (Abingdon Oxon, U. K.: Routledge, 2013).

⁸ Ibid., 179.

⁹ Ibid., 179–180.

¹⁰ Lawrence Venuti, “Theses on Translation: An Organon for the Current Moment,” <https://flugschriftencom.files.wordpress.com/2019/09/flugschriften-5-lawrence-venuti-theses-on-translation.pdf>. Accessed November 28, 2019, 8.

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995).

¹⁴ Venuti, “Theses on Translation: An organon for the current moment,” 6–7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷ Hans J. Vermeer, “Skopos and Commission in Translation Theory,” trans. Andrew Chesterman, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (Abingdon Oxon, U. K.: Routledge, 2012), 191–202.

¹⁸ Boase-Beier, *A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies*, 169.

¹⁹ Chantal Wright, “Translating ‘Portrait of a Tongue,’” in Yoko Tawada, *Portrait of a Tongue*, trans. Chantal Wright (Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 2013), 29.

²⁰ Suga, “Translation, Exophony, Omniphony,” 21.

- ²¹ Yoko Tawada, *The Emissary*, trans. Margaret Mitsutani (New York: New Directions, 2018).
- ²² Bettina Brandt, “The Unknown Character: Traces of the Surreal in Yoko Tawada’s Writings,” in *Yoko Tawada: Voices from Everywhere*, ed. by Douglas Slaymaker (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), 111–124.
- ²³ Tawada Yōko, *Amerika: hidō no tairiku* アメリカ—非道の大陸 (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2006).
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 181. 「でも、私はこういう大きな街で運転するのは苦手ですし、正直言うとペーパー・ドライバーなんです。」そう言ったとたんに、あなたの身体は折り紙で折った鶴になってしまった。そうかペーパー・ドライバーなんていう英語はきつとないんだ、だから文字通り受け取られて、紙にされてしまったんだ。
- ²⁵ Tawada Yōko, “Kakato o nakushite” かかとを失くして, *Gunzō* (June 1991): 6–35.
- ²⁶ Tawada Yōko, *Ekusofonii: bogo no soto e deru tabi* エクソフォニー—母語の外へ出る旅 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 32.
- ²⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 53–56.
- ²⁸ Tawada Yōko, *Ekusofonī: bogo no soto e deru tabi*, 38.
- ²⁹ Margaret Mitsutani, “Translator’s Afterword,” in Yoko Tawada, *Facing the Bridge*, trans. Margaret Mitsutani (New York: New Directions, 2007), 176–186.
- ³⁰ Stefani Sobelle, “Susan Bernofsky Walks the Tightrope: An Interview about Translating Yoko Tawada’s ‘Memoirs of a Polar Bear,’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, November 9, 2016. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/susan-bernofsky-walks-the-tightrope-an-interview-about-translating-yoko-tawadas-memoirs-of-a-polar-bear/>. Accessed December 2, 2019. The Japanese title of *The Naked Eye* is *Tabi o suru hadaka no me* 旅をする裸の目 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004) and the German title is *Das nackte Auge* (Tubingen: Konkursbuch Verlag, 2004).
- ³¹ The Japanese novel is titled *Yuki no renshūsei* 雪の練習生 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2011) and Tawada published it in German as *Etüden im Schnee* (Tubingen: Konkursbuch-Verlag, 2014).
- ³² Suga Keijiro, “Translation, Exophony, Omniphony,” 30 (translation of Tawada Yōko, *Ekusofonii: bogo no soto e deru tabi*, 89).
- ³³ Tawada Yōko, *Katakoto no uwagoto* カタコトのうわごと (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1999).

- ³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 81.
- ³⁵ Yoko Tawada, “Saint George and the Translator” in *Facing the Bridge*, 107–175.
- ³⁶ Margaret Mitsutani, “Missing Heels, Missing Texts, Wounds in the Alphabet,” in *Yoko Tawada: Voices from Everywhere*, ed. by Douglas Slaymaker (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), 35–38.
- ³⁷ Tawada Yōko, “Aru hon’yakusha e no tegami,” ある翻訳者への手紙 *Tosho*, 652 (August 2003): 40–42.
- ³⁸ Stefani Sobelle, “Susan Bernofsky Walks the Tightrope: An Interview about Translating Yoko Tawada’s ‘Memoirs of a Polar Bear’,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, November 9, 2016 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/susan-bernofsky-walks-the-tightrope-an-interview-about-translating-yoko-tawadas-memoirs-of-a-polar-bear/>. Accessed December 2, 2019.
- ³⁹ Bernard Banoun et al., “A Conversation with Bernard Banoun,” *TRANSIT* 6.1 (2010): 3. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/05g4f64m>.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁴¹ Wright, “Translating ‘Portrait of a Tongue’,” 31–32.
- ⁴² Raymond Van den Broeck, “The Limits of Translatability as exemplified by Metaphor Translation,” *Poetics Today* 2.4 (1981): 73–87.
- ⁴³ It must be recognized that the term “Anglophone readers” encompasses a diverse audience, with different varieties of English spoken in the United States, U. K., and the former British colonies, and readers of an English translation may also be L2 users of English. This means that readers’ interpretation of an English text, especially one involving subtle references to idioms and proverbs, will vary according to cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- ⁴⁴ “Where we are, there’s daggers in men’s smiles. The near in blood, the nearer bloody.” William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act II, Sc. III, L131–134.
- ⁴⁵ Boase-Beier, *A Critical Introduction to Translation Studies*, 169.