

# Study of linguistic expression and comparative culture – based on Yasunari Kawabata’s work in French –

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## Introduction

Qu’est-ce que le langage? “Words” provide us with a necessary support and tool to use when communicating throughout our lives; they are absolutely essential in everyday life. Humans think in words, feel emotions, and express them in words again. They create a different message through their facial expressions, eye contact, and tone of voice. In this way, much information is offered and exchanged. We can assume that “words” have a magical and diversified strategy that is part of human existence.

Literature reveals the various characteristics and aspects of human beings and society through words, thus pushing them into truth in original ways. However, foreign literature entails the need to understand different languages and interpret distinct cultural and social backgrounds, which can be difficult. As such, most readers look for works that have been translated into their own native languages.

This study aims to explore how to translate an original document into linguistically and culturally different target languages based on a French translation of Japanese literature. Considering translation as intercultural communication, a translation analysis was conducted from the perspective of linguistic expression and comparative culture. The ideal translation creates a naturally sounding expression and conveys the message to the reader. However, the conceptual differences between languages stem from the social structure and culture related to their establishment. Further, there is no true equivalence between the source and target language in this case, as they are linguistically and culturally different. As cultures and customs differ significantly, conceptualizations tend to vary between societies, even those pertaining to the same subjects, such as animals. For example, such as Japanese expressions “Neko moshakushimo”, “Neko notemokaritai”, “Karitekita Neko”, and “Neko wokaburu” are different from the French concept of cat(chat). In the French, it is replaced “husky voice (syagare goe)”, “devil (oni)” and “snake (hebi)” as shown below.

Japanese: **Oni** no inumani sentaku

French: Le **chat** parti, les souris dansent. [**Neko** ga satte nezumitachi ga odoru. ]

In other words, language itself is a culture. It is, therefore, necessary to read and understand the world as it is known through Japanese, from a different perspective. In particular, literature strongly reflects culture, society, history, spiritual features, and customs. Thus, literary translation may be the most difficult genre. For example, even though the character Meursault in *The Stranger* (written by Albert Camus) says, “I shot and killed the Arabs because of the sun,” the glare sun of the Mediterranean Sea cannot be imagined from the Japanese Sun. Therefore, the Japanese translation may not convey the true meaning of the sentence. Further, each language is typographically different, which makes it necessary to change the format to protect the content. For example, the French translation *La danseuse d’Izu* expresses Japanese verbs with adverbs and adjectives.

Japanese: amarini kitaiga migotoni **tekicyushita** karadearu

French: et **merveilleusement comble** dans mon attente

In this regard, a French translation containing the same parts of speech as the Japanese version will sound unnatural in French. The change in the expression format in content retention varies depending on the linguistic and cultural distance between the two languages. The French and Japanese are clearly from completely different linguistic families and cultural backgrounds, which results in complex translation problems.

A French translation of two works by Yasunari Kawabata was proposed for analysis in this study. Seidensticker pointed out that it is difficult for translation to translate because the features of Kawabata literature involve elaborate Japanese. They are characterized by a phrasing which is typical of the beautiful poetic Japanese, with rhetorical devices and extremely meticulous depictions.

## 1. Kawabata literature in the world

The structure of the thesis has five chapters. In Chapter 1 explored Kawabata’s literature. Literature concretely expresses the unique ethnic cultures, tradition, and lifestyles from various countries

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around the world. World-class literary works are also ethnic; those with strong ethnic connotations entail more unique view of the world. Kawabata's work draws on various cultural elements, including classical Japanese works of literature such as *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*) and *The Pillow Book* (*Makurano Soshi*), thus absorbing the literary essence of the Japanese people and their ethnic personality. Kawabata built a new world by mixing the concrete and abstract, using traditional and modern Western novels as inspiration. In other words, he elaborated on the craftsmanship of Western culture while mixing the style and temperament of Eastern culture into the tradition of Japanese culture.

Antiques and paintings were also important factors in his work. Kawabata's various collections, along with classic Japanese works, had led his work to sublime. *Romance and Nouvelle* were used in the analysis of this study, and the cover of this book uses a portrait of Kawabata. A heart-shaped female haniwa, one of his collections, is also shown with him. It was taken by Yousuf Karsh (1908-2002), a photographer in Canada. Yousuf was a well-known portrait photographer who worked on portraits of many government officials and celebrities (such as Einstein, Camus, Hemingway, John F. Kennedy, and Elizabeth II, etc.). Yousuf visited Kawabata's house in Kamakura in 1970 and photographed Yasunari. At that time, he commented as follows.

The winner of the 1968 Nobel Prize in Literature and recipient of the Order of Culture, he had an extensive collection of ancient Japanese earthen haniwa. I arranged one of them and took a picture. Kawabata lived in a house on the seaside near Kamakura and planned to devote a section of his library to Western literature. He gave me some English versions of his own work. Upon reading them, I realized that the delicate power of his concise literary images gives sudden glimpse of deep insight into the souls of the characters in the works.

(Quoted from the Japanese translation by Oyama. 1985: p.77)

The aesthetics of Kawabata's work pursue the spirit of culture and aesthetic culmination. This study focuses on two works, including the short story titled *The Izu Dancer* and feature-length novel titled *The Old Capital*, both of which convey cultural elements, climates, and worldviews that are unique to the Japanese people. Moreover, they provide readers around the world with an artistic appeal that transcends time space.

Regarding the acceptance of Kawabata's literature in France, the first published French translations were *Snow Country* (1960, Albin Michel) and *Thousand Cranes* (1960, Plon). Characteristically, both works are translated by two expert rewrites, Bunkichi Fujimori (Professeur de l'Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales) and Armel Guerne (poètes), who produced faithful literal translation. Following this, Philippe Pons translated *The Old Capital* into French by in January 1971. In response to this, the French

newspaper *Les Echos* commented, "It takes some patience to read as a work, but every time you read it, it deeply permeates your heart." (Translated by Ohkawa from the Japanese version of the Asahi Shimbun dated February 16, 1971).

In recent years, France has expanded the scale of its comprehensive convention known as "Japan Expo," which focuses on Japanese pop culture and boasts of more than 200,000 visitors each year. In this context, the "Neo Japonique" wave is clearly prominent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; meanwhile, the continued popularity of Kawabata literature overlaps with this trend.

## 2. Previous Studies

Chapter 2 detailed previous studies. Many Western translation theories proposed from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the 20<sup>th</sup> century AD have repeatedly debated between the alternative of literal and semantic translation. A systematic translation analysis was conducted from the 1950s to 1960s, and Vinay and Dalbelnet from France advocated for equivalence as a "translation method". However, both Jakobson's meaning, and equivalence and Nida's formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence influenced German translators. Germany's Vermeer regarded translation as cross-cultural communication and advocated "Skopos theory".

Research on Kawabata literature in France began during the 1980s. The first theoretical work was *The Old Capital* (*Comment lire un Roman japonais? Le kyôto de Kawabata*), by René Eiemble (Professeur en Littérature comparée., Université de la Sorbonne). To capture the characteristics of the novel, it was analyzed from various angles in addition to the criticism of translation in 1971. Only one of them is shown below. Eiemble commented on the Kyoto dialect as follows.

*Narabattandosû* is a characteristic language spoken by the women of Kyoto. (...) In *dosu*, while the normal form is *desu*, the vocalism *o* represents an alternation, also specific to the women of Kyoto. Thus, in a phrase, two elements are inserted to note that Chieko speaks as a woman of the ancient capital. However, this is not apparent in the French translation. In the absence of a translation-transposition, Mr. Pons should have provided us with a note here because, after all, it is a fact of language, a tone and an intention, of which we are frustrated.

(Translated from the French into English by Ohkawa)

*Narabattandosû* est une forme caractéristique du langage des femmes de Kyôto. (...) dans *dosu*, le vocalisme *o*, alors que la forme normale est *desu*, représente une alternance, propre elle aussi, aux femmes de Kyôto. Ainsi, dans un syntagme, deux éléments s'insèrent pour marquer que Chieko parle en femme de l'ancienne capitale. Rien n'en transparaît en français. À défaut d'une traduction-transposition, M. Pons aurait dû ici nous fournir une note ; car enfin, c'est un fait de langue, un ton et une

intention, dont nous sommes frustrés.

(*Comment lire un Roman japonais?* p.104)

### 3. Data and method

Chapter 3 described the data collection and analysis methods. The data were collected from expressions of vocabulary related to cultural elements as well as sentences related to the subject of each work.

#### < *The Izu Dancer* >

The vocabulary conveys element of clothing, food, and places of dwelling in Japanese culture that do not exist in France (such as zabutons, hakama, and torinabe, etc.). The text was extracted with a focus on content related to discrimination and travel entertainers.

#### < *The Old Capital* >

Vocabulary conveys elements of clothing, food, and places of dwelling in Japanese culture that do not exist in France (such as Christian-toro, and maru-nabe, etc.). The text was extracted by focusing on passages related to Paul Klee and Kitayama Sugi.

The analysis was based on both Skopos theory and Vinay and Darbelnet's theory.

#### < Skopos theory >

Skopos means "goal, purpose". In Skopos theory, translation is not a process of code conversion, but a form of human action determined by purpose. Before beginning the translation process, one must first decide on a skopos (purpose). Vermeer outlined Skopos theory as a summary of six items. Among these, rule no. 5 contains the following three subrules.

- 5(1). Skopos rule.....Communication act of translation is determined by the purpose.
- 5(2). Coherence rule.....The Target Text (TT) must have sufficient coherence to be understood by the assumed recipient, with some background knowledge and circumstances.
- 5(3). Fidelity rule.....This concerns consistency between the TT and Source Text (ST), which is the result of the translation act; if the highest priority Skopos principle and coherence rule within the text is satisfied, then the two texts are considered to share a good relationship.

#### < Vinay and Darbelnet's theory >

Vinay and Darbelnet comparatively analyzed French and English, thus citing differences between the two languages. In turn, they clarified the translation method and procedure, specifically classifying translation methods into seven categories across the concepts of direct translation (1. Borrowing, 2. Direct translation borrowing, 3. Direct translation) and indirect translation (4. Dislocation, 5. Adjustment, 6. Equivalence, 7. Adaptation). Here, 7. Adaptation holds that cross-cultural elements are changed, omitted, or new expressions are added when translating the original.

The two theories mentioned above are described in detail in Chapter 2 of the master's thesis.

## 4. Discussion

Chapter 4 examined concrete elements through example of translated texts. Due to the number of characters, not all cases are presented; thus, only one example is given from *The Old Capital*, as follows:

[Vocabulary 2-9] "*The two sisters in the late of autumn:*

*Les deux sœurs au cœur de l'automne*"

(jan) By Ryūsuke's car, the three of them went to Daiichi, **Suppon ya**, a restaurant in the Rokubanchô area in Kitano. Daiichi Restaurant is a very old house which has maintained its old-world charm and is well known even to travelers. The room is also old-fashioned, with a low ceiling. They first had the famous **Marunabe**, which is boiled turtle, and then had soup of rice mixed with vegetables.

(Original: p.203, Translated from Japanese by Ohkawa)

(fre) Avec la voiture du magasin de Ryūsuke, ils se rendirent tous les trois chez O-ichi, **un restaurant de soupe de tortue**, dans le quartier de Rokubanchô, à Kitano. Le restaurant O-ichi est une très ancienne maison qui a conservé la manière d'autrefois et **est bien connu même des gens de passage**. La salle aussi est à l'ancienne mode, basse de plafond. Ils eurent d'abord la fameuse **«marmite ronde» où avait bouilli la tortue**, puis ce fut une soup de riz mélangée à des légumes.

(French translation : p.1377)

(Discussion)

**Suppon-ya** is translated as **un restaurant de soupe de tortue**, and **Marunabe** is translated as **«marmite ronde» où avait bouilli la tortue**. These translations are consistent with the fidelity rule of Skopos theory. **est bien connu même des gens de passage** (Familiar to people passing by) does not convey the name of soft-shelled turtle dishes to recipients with different food cultures. "Marunabe" is a local dish of Kyoto. Ryusuke who likes Chieko, involves his younger brother Shinichi, and invites Chieko to her meal ("Suppon-ya, Daiichi"). Eiemble commented on "soft-shelled turtle soup" as follows.

(...) for dinner when Chieko is invited by Shinichi and Ryusuke to eat turtle soup at a restaurant in Kitano. In Paris, this soup is a staple of vulgar exoticism, so readers do not understand the importance of this feast. Chieko hopes that it is a treatment. (...) It's too expensive for a boy to pay alone, but it's easy for two brothers to handle. To appreciate the allusion in France, it would therefore be necessary to be able to transpose: Chieko would be invited to taste the duck with blood from the Tour d'Argent, or the caviar in a restaurant with three stars and four forks. (Translated from the French into English by Ohkawa)

(...) le dîner où Chieko est invitée par Shinichi et Ryūsuke à

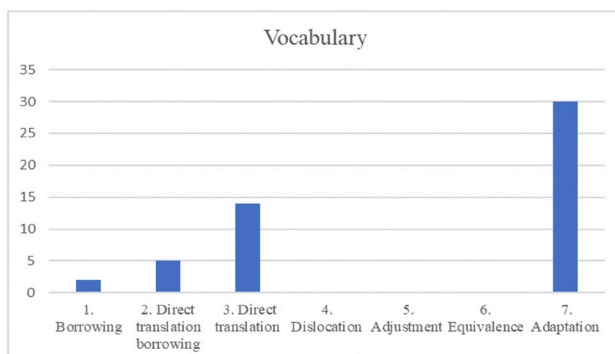
manger dans un restaurant de Kitano la soupe à la tortue. Etant donné que *turtle soup* devient aujourd'hui, dans certains restaurants parisiens, une tarte à la crème de l'exotisme vulgaire, le lecteur ne comprendra pas la signification sociologique de ce festin.(...) Il s'agit là d'un mets fort dispendieux qu'un garçon peut offrir, s'il est aisé, ce qui est le cas des deux frères, à une fille qu'il veut traiter somptueusement. Pour apprécier en France l'allusion, il faudrait donc pouvoir transposer : Chieko serait invitée à déguster le canard au sang de la Tour d'argent, ou le caviar dans un restaurant à trois étoiles et quatre fourchettes.

(*Comment lire un Roman japonais?* pp.70-71)

Totally, they were collected and analyzed examples of Japanese cultural elements, Vocabulary (51) and phrase expressions (36). As a result of this analysis, adaptation methods were frequently used for Japanese cultural elements (51 elements). This method applies to cases in which the concept invoked by the message does not exist in the source language and has to be created by the additional of another concept, which is deemed to be equivalent. For phrase expressions (36 elements), a modulation method was often selected. Modulation is a variation in the message, obtained by changing the viewpoint of the focus. The results are shown below in tables and graphs.

### Vocabulary

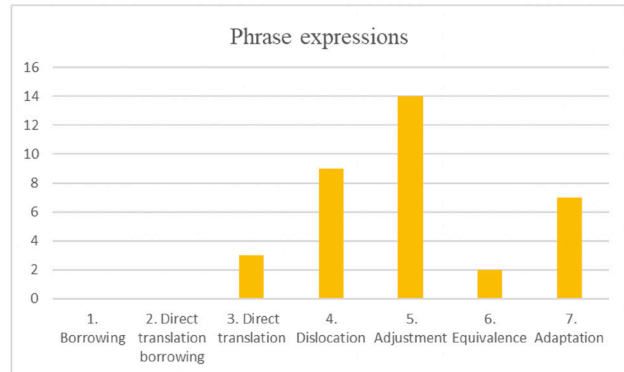
	Skopos theory		Vinay and Darbelnet's theory							Total
	Coherence rule	Fidelity rule	1. Borrowing	2. Direct translation borrowing	3. Direct translation	4. Dislocation	5. Adjustment	6. Equivalence	7. Adaptation	
<i>The Izu Dancer</i>	8	6	2	1	4	0	0	0	7	
<i>The Old Capital</i>	31	5	0	4	10	0	0	0	23	
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>51</b>



### Phrase expressions

	Skopos theory		Vinay and Darbelnet's theory							Total
	Coherence rule	Fidelity rule	1. Borrowing	2. Direct translation borrowing	3. Direct translation	4. Dislocation	5. Adjustment	6. Equivalence	7. Adaptation	
<i>The Izu Dancer</i>	11	1	0	0	1	4	6	0	2	
<i>The Old Capital</i>	20	2	0	0	2	5	8	2	5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>

(one phrase expression: French translation omitted)



## 5. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that translators attempted to create expressions that convey the same atmosphere as the original material to foreign readers through various translation methods. The act of translation constitutes cross-cultural communication. Hence, it can be said that excellent translated texts provide numerous concrete examples of how to communicate to identify language and cultural difference. Through this study, we clarified the significance of Kawabata literature translations as pioneering efforts in disseminating Japanese literature in France, thus deepening our understanding of Japanese cultural acceptance and social conditions. It was therefore possible to review oneself from a different perspective and relativize our culture. Furthermore, it is able to contribute to illuminating difference in the interpretation in cross-cultural communication.

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