



University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

# Translation and the challenge of orthography

Kendall, J

<b>Title</b>	Translation and the challenge of orthography
<b>Authors</b>	Kendall, J
<b>Type</b>	Book Section
<b>URL</b>	This version is available at: <a href="http://usir.salford.ac.uk/1331/">http://usir.salford.ac.uk/1331/</a>
<b>Published Date</b>	2006

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: [usir@salford.ac.uk](mailto:usir@salford.ac.uk).

## Translation and The Challenge of Orthography

Judy Kendall

### Introduction

The orthography in which a work of art is written plays an essential role in the aesthetic effect of the whole. The orthography chosen can directly affect such considerations as rhythm, puns, sub-text, atmosphere, emotion, the speed at which the reader assimilates the work of art and the order in which it is assimilated. This is particularly evident when translating into English from Japanese, because Japanese, orthographically speaking, has extremely rich resources to draw on.

Japanese orthography consists of two very regular syllabaries, hiragana and katakana, and one highly irregular morpheme-based script, kanji. A key consideration for a translator is the fact that each script has a different aesthetic effect. The morpheme-based script is derived from characters or ideographs used in China, the Japanese versions of which are known as kanji<sup>i</sup>. However, it is difficult to write a text in Japanese in kanji alone. This is due to the fact that However, the grammatical syntax of Chinese is considerably different from Japanese and Chinese is an isolating language in which each sign represents a morpheme whereas Japanese is inflected and requires appending suffixes and particles to words and clauses in a sentence. As a result, it is difficult to write a Japanese text with kanji alone. They can form the bulk of a Japanese text, denoting nouns, verb stems and

other words expressing ideas, but to complete this text it is necessary to use one of two phonographic scripts (hiragana or katakana). Like kanji, these scripts are also based on versions of Chinese characters but these versions denote specific syllables of sound and have different aesthetic qualities. Indeed, there are cases where writers have chosen to write a whole text in a single phonographic script in order to achieve a specific effect.

Adults tend to use hiragana in conjunction with kanji, employing hiragana for almost all functional words – prefixes, suffixes, inflectional endings, words expressing grammatical relationship and so on. The hiragana script is cursive, flowing and soft: ちよつと.<sup>ii</sup> As well as acting as a bridge between different kanji in a sentence, and completing the sentence of which the kanji form the base, hiragana also carry connotations of femininity and childhood. Today, they comprise the first set of letters children learn, and books for young children are written totally in this script. In the Heian period (794 – 1192),<sup>iii</sup> before the scripts combined, hiragana was perceived as the proper way of writing for women. Men of the period wrote exclusively in Chinese using Chinese characters. They only wrote in Japanese, in hiragana, if they wanted to write something immediate, personal or sensual, often in that case posing as women.

The katakana script is harder and more angular than hiragana: ココア.<sup>iv</sup> It is derived from notations written by Japanese Buddhist monks on obscure characters in Chinese texts. Today it still carries the sense of ‘alien’, although it is now used for ‘loan’ words from foreign languages other than Chinese - English, French or German, for example.

Katakana is also used for emphasis (an equivalent to our italics), for slang, for certain onomatopoeic words, and for naming plants and animals.

### **The Orthographic Challenge**

The first encounter of a reader with a written text is with its orthography. This encounter remains primarily a visual experience when the orthography is unknown, and sometimes, as in the case of Japanese orthography, even when the orthography is known. Japanese orthography is so complex and the characters and readings of them so many that the average Japanese literature readers are likely to encounter many instances of obscurity, at which times they tend to resort to deciphering and dissecting the visual components of unknown characters in an attempt to arrive at their meaning. In addition, the few simple but commonly recurring kanji in which the original pictograph is still easily recognisable, ensure that the visual experience remains to the fore. Two examples of such kanji are ‘tree’:

[Figure 1]

and ‘person’:

[Figure 2]

To invert Barthes' argument (1977: 38) which claims that a linguistic message is present in every image, it is possible to say, in the case of kanji, that the image is present in every linguistic message. Traces of the development of such pictorial symbols into signs can be found in the repertoire of kanji in use today. Although many no longer have a close relation to pictographs, a considerable number inhabit a middle ground, combining pictographs and symbols to express more complex ideas than that of the purely visual image of a tree. Two examples are the kanji for 'below', 下, and 'above', 上.

In addition, these kanji are often present as elements of more complex characters. The materiality of the orthography is foregrounded in much the same way as the materiality of modernist and postmodernist texts is sometimes foregrounded by the employment of imagistic skill. Indeed, the parallels are so close that the linguistic experiments of some Modernist writers, notably Ezra Pound, include the deliberate use of orthography presumed to be unfamiliar to the reader. For the non-Japanese reader approaching what appear to be impenetrable shapes in Japanese orthography, the materiality of such orthography is predominant and exclusive. The script is perceived solely as means of signification. Such a reader, the referent of a Chinese character in Pound's Cantos is the character itself. The signifier has become the signified and is the text. Such an example, in which the referents of these characters remain permanently deferred, constitutes an extreme demonstration of Derrida's différance (1981:8-9): 'movement that consists of deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving.' The visual impression of an unknown or little known orthography becomes both an impenetrable barrier and a final viewing point.

When using unfamiliar orthography alongside a more familiar rendering, other barriers are created for the reader who does not know that orthography, as explained by J. H. Prynne in an afterword to *Original: Chinese Language-Poetry Group* (1944: 123):

At one stage we thought to include some of the Chinese text, maybe even brush-written, but the Originals themselves have countered this idea, because it would suggest exoticism or extraneous willow-pattern ornament; to them, *we* are the exotics, with our credit-card view of the speech act (how crude, to set the choice as text *or* graphics).

The unfamiliarity of the foreign orthography transforms the orthography into the signified text, and this in turn has an effect on the English orthography that surrounds the Chinese so that it too, although still acting as signifier, is seen also to some degree as signified text. This ambiguity is close to that which occurs continually in Japanese script, in which text can always be read in two ways, stopping at the graphics and going beyond them to their referents

Readers who are able to read beyond the graphic 'extraneous willow-pattern' as described by Prynne above, to perceive the referents of that 'willow-pattern', in addition to perceiving it as graphics, are also influenced by orthographic differences that relate to shifts in the emphasis, direction and order that occur as

one orthography is followed by another. Thus, the physical characteristics of a particular orthography predetermine the shape and effect of the work inscribed in it. If a given orthography participates in the meaning of a text then the conventional approach to translation, of separating the meaning from the form, is no longer possible. The orthography is not an invisible container of the work but influences it and helps form it. The connection between the two is so close that the use of a different orthography results in a different text. Derrida's notion of différance is a useful formulation here. The orthography is different from and deferring the referent it denotes and its différance is also that referent. The signifier and signified thus become equivalents.

To investigate this point further, it is appropriate to examine an English translation of a source text written in what is considered from an English perspective to be the most alien of orthographies: Japanese.<sup>v</sup> Miyaji's Japanese-English translation project, Suiko/ The Water Jar (1996)<sup>vi</sup> takes as its source text a contemporary collection of haiku.<sup>vii</sup> The haiku is one of the most subtle and ambiguous of Japanese literary genre, and it generously exploits the rich complexities inherent in orthography.

### **Translating Japanese orthography - haiku**

The translation of Suiko was undertaken by a multicultural translation team composed of native Japanese, English and Hebrew speakers (Miyaji, Kendall and Elgrichi). Initial

explanations by Miyaji of each haiku, its meaning, context, associations and the specific character-readings intended, were followed by word-for-word English translations by Elgrichi. These were refashioned into haiku by Kendall, reviewed by Miyaji; and rewritten further by Kendall where necessary. Once a number of trial versions of haiku had been produced, the team arrived at decisions relating to structure, metrics and translation of proper names through a process of collaborative discussion.

The English haiku in Suiko were originally intended by Miyaji to act as footnotes for educated (therefore fluent English-reading) Japanese haiku readers, since a number of the kanji used by Miyaji carried specific, obscure and sometimes obsolete readings, a feature not uncommon in contemporary haiku written in the traditional manner. This purpose of Suiko is reflected in the production of the book: clearly numbered source and target haiku are placed on facing pages. However, the different cultural and linguistic perspectives of the translators inevitably had an effect on the translation. The combination of three languages, cultures and five orthographies (three Japanese, one Hebrew and one English) in a team working to produce a bilateral translation exposed at a magnified level the discontinuities always present in an act of translation. This was particularly the case with regard to the different orthographies. Furthermore, each member's perception of the languages and cultures not native to them also affected the process.



In Suiko 174, the idea of a bare tree is held in the Japanese orthography. It is not referred to in words but is contained in the kanji for ‘withered’, which is partly made up of the pictographic radical for ‘tree’, also often used as a radical in the names of different trees:

[Figure 3]

[ wither ] [ leaving gaps + and ] [ ya gi  
kanji . h’gana . kanji . h’gana . h’gana . kanji . kanji .

ju kichi ’s ] [poetry ’s ] [spare white]  
kanji . kanji . h’gana . kanji . h’gana . kanji . kanji

In addition, the name 'Yagi Jukichi' holds within it the sound of the Japanese word for ‘tree’, ‘ki’ or ‘gi’, and, when written, includes, as part of a compound kanji, the single kanji for ‘tree’. For a Japanese reader, therefore, there exists in the orthography of this haiku a strong, if partially hidden, reminder of trees.

If focus is placed on finding an equivalent in English orthography for the visual effect of the ‘tree’ kanji, with the aim of transforming the kanji into an English alphabetical sequence, then such a haiku appears untranslatable, and the act of translation itself defective. But if translation is a privileged creative activity, the effect created by the visual presence of a tree in the source text can be transferred to the different shape and

context of the target text. In the English translation of Suiko 174 this occurs by transferring the visual allusion present in the kanji into a semantic allusion in English.

‘Branches’ is a word that is not present in the Japanese.

bare winter branches

lines of Yagi Jukichi

the whiteness between

Suiko 174

In this English translation, ‘wither’, which in the Japanese haiku carries the connotations of a tree in autumn, is rendered by ‘bare branches’. ‘[S]pare white’, which implies both snow seen through the bare branches of a tree and the whiteness of the lines of Yagi Jukichi’s spare verse, is included in the English in the words ‘winter’ and ‘whiteness between’, and in the spaces between the lines.

Thus, the focus of the Suiko team remained on finding the most appropriate way of recreating the visual sense that the original poem evokes, and this includes replacing iconic clues in the source text with verbal clues in the target text, rather than searching for equivalents. When Miyaji (1996: 132) refers in her epilogue to how the English haiku ‘changed shape again and again’, she is talking in terms both of physical shape and of the metaphorical and semantic allusions present in the poem. Such experience demonstrates the transformational and multiple nature of readings, as Derrida (1981: 63) has argued in

his warning against reading ‘according to a hermeneutical or exegetical method which would seek out a finished signified beneath a textual surface’. Furthermore, as Miyaji herself was aware in her concern to remedy limits she found in the knowledge of her Japanese readers, such a multiplicity of readings necessarily includes some that may obscure others. It could be argued that by removing the visual effect created by the graphic tree present in the Japanese, replacing it with ‘bare winter branches’, the poem has become more explanatory and less present as an image of the poetry of Yagi Jukichi. However, the three spaced lines of the English haiku introduce a different sense of space, one that shifts the emphasis slightly to a focus on the aesthetic sparseness of the haiku form.

However, an awareness of the transformational possibilities of reading in the multi-dimensional space of a text also allows for the creation of new interpretations by the empirical reader. As Barthes (1977: 148) remarks: ‘The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’. Focus on this destination gives further impetus to the translators to expend their own efforts in creative input. It also resulted, for the Suiko team, in a process of negotiation, since the main concern of the two non-Japanese members of the team was to produce not footnotes for Japanese readers but independent English haiku for non-Japanese readers. For Miyaji’s purposes, for example, the inclusion of ‘branches’ was not necessary, but Elgrichi and Kendall successfully argued for its inclusion for the benefit of non-Japanese readers. Thus, the collaborative element in this project, and in particular, the representation of three

different cultures, languages and orthographies, resulted in a heightened awareness of the needs of different empirical readers, whether native or non-native English or Japanese, and, consequently, as Miyaji (1996: 132) observes, a ‘great creativity, which with every meeting widened the [English] haiku’s original borders’.

The result of this process is therefore a text that has widened its boundaries in terms both of authorship and readership. Its original author, language and readership have all changed. Although Miyaji hopes to carry her readers with her into English, the collaborative nature of the translation process means that the target text is influenced by the differing cultures, varying knowledge of the source and target text and different subjective viewpoints of each member of the translation team. A series of complex negotiations between the translators results in a text that crosses cultural boundaries, open to Japanese readers familiar with English, English readers familiar with Japanese, and English readers unfamiliar with Japanese. It has become an ‘intertext’.

Such shifting of the borders of the haiku was also influenced by differences in aesthetics, again highlighted by discontinuities in the physical layout of the orthographies. ‘The whiteness between’ in Suiko 174 is, for example, a reference to the Japanese aesthetic of ma, ‘space’ or ‘interval’.<sup>viii</sup> For a Japanese reader, the space on the page remains as important as the ink that fills it. Space is clearly a large element in the composition of the tiny haiku, which drops in one vertical line only part of the way down an empty page, and which is composed of strings of characters spaced equally apart. This space remains unaffected by semantic considerations since Japanese orthography does not recognize

word boundaries and rarely uses punctuation. The similarly miniscule English haiku also creates a sense of space. However, a reader unacquainted with Japanese aesthetics and ignorant of ma can only have a limited appreciation of this space, the effect of which is diluted in English orthography by its pragmatic use as a marker of word boundaries. One creative option for a translator is to work with concrete poetry techniques,<sup>ix</sup> such as those developed by Apollinaire (1945) in the second decade of the twentieth century,<sup>x</sup> by reshaping the haiku so that the unusual layout foregrounds the white spaces of the page. Again, such an approach demonstrates the importance of focus on shape rather than equivalents, widening the focus from an emphasis solely on semantic equivalence to include that of shape:

[Figure 4]

Miyaji's haiku are written in a traditional style so it might seem an anomaly to translate her work into the shape of a concrete poem. However, the existence of seventeenth century emblem poems, such as George Herbert's Easter Wings (1867: 34-35), provides a more traditional source.

The orthography of the Japanese text of Suiko 199 contains an aesthetic use of katakana:

merci on Heisen  
temple's snowy stairs as we  
give way to the French

Suiko 199

In the Japanese, the katakana, 'furansu', meaning 'France', is combined with the kanji 'go' to refer to 'language' or 'French word(s)'; it implies an instance of spoken French.

[Figure 5]

[ f      ra      n      ce      language + in ]  
k'kana . k'kana . k'kana . k'kana . kanji . h'gana .

[snowy road][      yield      ] [hei      sei      temple]  
kanji . kanji . kanji . h'gana . kanji . kanji . kanji

The choice of katakana, used conventionally to represent non-Japanese words, suggests the presence of the French visitors at the temple. In the English version, this sense is created by use of the French word 'merci'. 'Merci' is easily recognized by both Japanese and English readers as a French word. It also happens to resemble visually, though not aurally if correctly pronounced, the English 'mercy', thus acting as an echo of the 'giving way' of the last line of the haiku – just as hiragana and kanji (more usual scripts for a traditional haiku writer) give way in the original to the katakana, 'furansu'.

If the translators had wished to emphasize another aspect of the haiku and one unique to Japanese orthography, that of a combination of scripts within the confines of a single phrase, they could have emulated concrete poetry's use of graphic devices, in the choice of font for 'merci', rendering it, for example, as merci or **merci**. Such exploitation of font would signal to the English reader a change that the Japanese reader understands from the use of katakana. However, whereas in Japan variance in orthographic script has been part of a centuries-old tradition, combining hiragana and kanji in every text, the use of such a combination of fonts in the West gives the text a distinctly modern feel. Once again, such an effect might not be appropriate for Miyaji's very traditional haiku. In addition, for the English reader with little knowledge of Japan, such graphic devices may not be interpreted in the way the translators intend. Thus, such a target text involves the reader also in a new and creative act, reading the text by taking it not only beyond the boundaries set by the author, but beyond those set by the translators as well.

Similar considerations affected the translation team's decisions about the form of the English haiku. In English, although one-line haiku do exist, the more traditional English form is composed of three lines. Equally, the 5-7-5 syllable count of traditional Japanese haiku, although frowned on by current English haiku circles, is still the most common and easily recognizable English haiku form. It also provides the advantage of extra syllable space since English words are generally shorter than Japanese words.<sup>xi</sup> This extra space is much needed since, in the English haiku, the complexity present in the kanji of the source text is simplified by translation into the less opaque English script. This means that when interpreting haiku in English, there is no longer the obvious visible

hurdle to overcome that is often present in the difficult kanji used by haiku writers in Japanese. The syllables gained by keeping the 5-7-5 count allow for the translators to introduce in words the intricate visual and aural complexities of the kanji.

The fact that Japanese orthography does not denote word boundaries creates additional flexibility when attributing semantic meaning. A similar flexibility is attained in modernist, postmodernist and recent experimental poetry due to a disregard of rules of grammar, syntax and punctuation and an exploration of the possibilities of linguistic playfulness of the English language, as in Caryl Churchill's post-modernist play, The Skriker (1994: 3): 'When did they do what they're told tolled a bell a knell, well ding dong pussy's in.' This disregard could be emulated in an English translation of Suiko 199 as:

mercionheisen

templessnowstairsaswe

givewaytothefrench

or

mercionheisentemplessnowstairsaswegivewaytothefrench

As in the case of a multiplicity of fonts, the effect of removing the English word boundaries, capital letters and punctuation is a clear departure from traditional practice,



and it foregrounds the materiality of the letters to an extent that surpasses that of Japanese orthography. The reader is likely to give up reading in favour of looking. The unfamiliarity of the layout of these English letters draws attention to them as letters. The lack of word boundaries results in a self-reflexive orthography: the letters, not the words or their referents, become the text. In contrast, the crucial characteristic of the lack of word boundaries in Japanese, a regular feature of orthography, found as much in newspapers as in literature, is ordinariness, and this ordinariness results in invisibility.

An additional flexibility in Japanese writing has been added in recent years as Western literary and educational influences have affected the direction in which the scripts are read. Now it is possible to find contemporary Japanese texts written in one of three directions: all three ways start from the top of the page but one moves horizontally from left to right as in the English writing system; the second, horizontally from right to left (rarer these days, but still used, for example, on goods vehicles); and the third, vertically from right to left. As is the case with the choice of script, each direction has an influence on the aesthetic impression of the whole, ensuring that a Japanese reader is likely to be more aware than a reader accustomed to a Latin script, not only of how a text is organized, but of how it is not organized; of the alternatives not selected.

Employment of unusual directions in the reading of the first line of an English version, thus:

m

e

r  
c  
i  
o  
n  
h  
e  
i  
s  
e  
i

or, thus:

iesiehnoicrem

poses the same problem of excess of unfamiliarity as encountered in experimentation with fonts and word boundaries.

Such multi-directional reading is reflected in the complex ambiguities of kanji themselves. Most kanji are phonetic-ideographs, combining elements of semantic meaning and elements of phonetic meaning, which may or may not bear a direct relation

to the whole. In addition, one kanji may carry multiple semantic and phonetic readings, up to two hundred phonetic readings in some cases.

The range of these phonetic readings in written Japanese is matched by the number of homonyms in spoken Japanese. The two interrelate in a curious way. It is not uncommon for people conversing in Japanese to resort to tracing out certain kanji on their palms for purposes of clarification. Similarly, frequently, a written kanji only takes on a specific meaning for a reader after its phonetic reading has been determined. The large number of Japanese homonyms also ensures that once the phonetic reading of a written kanji has been ascertained, the ambiguity still continues, since that phonetic reading may have, hovering above it, a cluster of homonyms.

The lack of boundaries between words, the multi-directional possibilities of script-flow and the complex ambiguities of many kanji demand constant movement from readers, back and forth, or up and down, as they ascertain the meaning of a text. It is more difficult to read texts by swiftly skirting along the surface of letters in the manner customary for readers of linear and non-symbolic scripts such as the Latin script, although reading strategies allow Japanese reader to ascertain a particular meaning, despite the ambiguities.

***Translating Japanese Orthography – Noh***

In traditional Japanese literary forms, multi-directional possibilities of reading are reflected not only in the physical direction of the written text but the directions in which semantic interpretation flows. The poetry of Noh,<sup>xii</sup> for example, is a multi-layered texture of grammatical shortcuts, incomplete sentences and homonyms in a patchwork of allusions and quotations.

After the completion of Suiko, two of the Suiko team undertook a translation of Zeami's Noh play, Kinuta, (1960). The translation process followed similar lines to those of the Suiko project, with Elgrichi, as a classical Japanese scholar undertaking the role of introducing the historical and literary context of the play. Previous English translations of the play exist, namely Fenollosa/Pound's (1916), and Royall Tyler's (1992), but neither of these focus on the poetry of the Noh, so the main purpose of this Kinuta translation (1998) was to introduce the subtle beauty and complex ambiguities of this highly organized poetry to English readers.

An instance of the poetic ambiguity contained in a traditional Noh text can be traced in the various recastings in Kinuta of the name of the maidservant. She is referred to as Yugiri, which, semantically and phonetically, means 'evening mist'. The idea of mist or rain is also present visually, since this compound word includes the pictograph for 'rain' as a radical (that is a root element) in the kanji for 'mist'. 'Yugiri' or 'Evening Mist' is a fitting name for one who is in the play a messenger between two worlds, a carrier of bad news, a witness of endings (the husband's delayed return, the woman's death), and so is a living reminder of the transitory nature of life - a constant theme in Noh. Kinuta, like

other of Zeami's plays, presents a gradual accumulation of key images, such as rain, mist, clouds and the day drawing to a close. Each time such images are used, their meanings and overt associations are subtly altered, both from, and by, their previous appearances, as they pile up to form a pyramid of meaning. In the translated text of Kinuta (Zeami, 1998), the translators, very aware of these ambiguities, used [colour-coded shapes](#) on the original text to highlight the repetition or near-repetition of key words, characters and concepts, so that they could rework them into the English translation.

[Figure 6]

The word-play on the maid's name in Kinuta demonstrates this process at work. In her first full speech (Zeami, 1960: 333 / 1998: part 2), Yugiri echoes her own name when she says 'yugure', which means 'evenings end', so, in the target text 'yugure' is translated as 'missed [mist] evenings end at/ inn after inn', thus punning on the near homonym of 'yugure' / 'Yugiri', and, in order to keep at least some of the associations of the name that Zeami draws out here and elsewhere in the text, the translators chose to refer to the maid as 'Evening Mist', rather than 'Yugiri'.

The linguistic playfulness that the peculiar properties of the Japanese writing system encourages has also moulded the development of Japanese literary devices. Perhaps the most typical symbol of ambiguity in Japanese is the device kakekotoba or 'pivot word'. This device holds at one and the same time meanings that can be read with previous or with following words, echoing the flexibility in Japanese reading directions. The small

shifts of the kakekotoba contribute to the whole textual movement of a Noh play, in which words build up through repeated and varying use to crescendo in a final meaning more rich and complex than any individual appearance allows.

The kakekotoba is also still much used today. Although it has apparent similarities to the English pun, it crucially does not complete a sentence. No meaning is dominant, and none alone constitutes a full translation. The readers must constantly shift their attention between meanings. In such a way, kakekotoba also reflects the manifold associations held within an individual kanji.<sup>xiii</sup>

In this example from Kinuta (1960: 339 / 1998: part 7), kakekotoba and ambiguous Japanese syntax produce multiple changes in direction of the flow of sense:

[Figure 7]

[voice] [ too ] [wither/exhausted] [field/'s] ['s/field]

kanji . h'gana . kanji . h'gana . kanji . h'gana .

[cricket] ['s/field] [call/voice] ['s/field]

kanji . h'gana . kanji . h'gana .

[ scattered/confused ] [grass] [ 's ]

kanji . h'gana . h'gana . kanji . h'gana .

[flower][heart]

kanji . kanji .

Voices fade from crickets in  
fields wither with the  
grass is singing scatterbrains  
are turning the heart's  
blossom

In the first line of the Japanese the word placed between 'voice' and 'field' refers both to the fading of the voice and withered state of the field, creating a stuttering but inexorable onward movement.

These multiple shifts in sense resonate, once again, with Derrida's concept of différance (1973: 88): 'the operation of differing which at one and the same time both fissures and retards presence.' It is no coincidence that Derrida (1992: 305) conducts an extensive analysis of the 'differential vibration' resulting from the different uses of 'yes' in the work of James Joyce, and that the major inspiration for the Kinuta team's creative translation came from Joyce's Finnegans Wake (1939: 3):

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had  
passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side  
the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his  
penisolate war:<sup>xiv</sup>

and Caryl Churchill's The Skriker (1994: 1):

Heard her boast beast a roast beef eater, daughter could  
spin span spick and spun the lowest form of wheat straw  
into gold

Once again, such an English Kinuta appears indisputably modern.

Barthes (1977: 170 - 178) recognized such parallels in his own observations of a similar 'discontinuity of codes' in 'Lesson on Writing', a discussion of Japanese Bunraku.<sup>xv</sup> He observes (1977: 178) the disregard of linear codes in Bunraku, and compares this to modern Western literary texts: 'As in the modern text, the tressing of codes, references, discontinuous observations ... multiplies the written line'. Such non-linear techniques allow the translator to create a text that is not limited by the conventional boundaries of grammar and syntax, and so can refer back to the effects present in the source text, but also move beyond them.



Kristeva (1982: 141) also questions the linearity of a text when discontinuity occurs: ‘its [the text’s] makeup changes; its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts, incompleteness, tangles, and cuts’. Such a description could be applied to the kakekotoba, except that for Kristeva this discontinuity occurs at a particular point: ‘when the narrated identity becomes unbearable’. The kakekotoba, however, while it is essentially a technique of discontinuity, is part of a continuous Japanese literary tradition, integral both to Japanese aesthetics and Japanese orthography. Kristeva’s notion however does apply to the reader’s experience of a translation, which both referring back to its source text and moves on beyond it to a created new text.

In a second example from Kinuta (1960 :339 / 1998: part 6), continuity within an apparently discontinuous syntax is expressed through subtle shifts in direction, achieved by subversion of rhythm and punctuation:

[Figure 8]

[ beautiful ] [ ’s ]

kanji . kanji . h’gana .

[moment][ what a ! ]

kanji . h’gana . h’gana . h’gana .

[time]

[autumn][ ’s ]

[at that time, precisely ]

kanji . h'gana . h'gana . kanji . h'gana .

[evening ] [ towards/direction ]

kanji . h'gana . kanji .

Moment of beauty

full stopped in its track

down the exact time is now

an autumn evening

A speaker of these lines tends to give emphasis to 'moment of beauty' and 'stopped in its track'. However, at the end of both the first and second lines, after the faint pause that is demanded by the physical ending of the line, a turn in the language produces other meanings: 'beaut[i]ful' and 'track down'. The lack of an expected 's' on 'track' announces the imminent switch to a further reading, and helps the speaker to give both readings of 'track' equal emphasis, as if the line is stopping at mid-point, turning on a wheel of meaning – a fitting experience for a moment of 'exact time'. Furthermore, the reading of 'full' as the punctuation mark of a 'full stop', present within the phrase 'full stopped in its track', is strongly suggestive of a pause, which, if observed, seems entirely appropriate to the sense of being present in the 'now' ('the exact time is now'). This example of akekotoba in Kinuta, with its focus on a rhythmic continuity that counters the

discontinuity of the syntax, is less disjointed, giving the impression of a smooth linear flow. It also enacts that point of rupture and repetition when, as Derrida writes of Mallarmé (1992: 113-4), 'simple decision is no longer possible, where the choice between opposing paths is suspended. [...] the meaning remains undecidable; from then on the signifier no longer lets itself be traversed, it remains, resists, exists and draws attention to itself. The labor of writing is no longer a transparent ether.' From then on, too, the labour of translation is not transparent either.

## **Conclusion**

Discontinuity is featured in almost any example of Japanese script, resulting from the combination of up to three writing systems, multiple possibilities of aural and semantic readings and directional script-flow, as well as complex kanji composition. Such discontinuity is also reflected in the style and content of Japanese literature. Latinate scripts do not share these characteristics, and it is significant that the translations of the effects discussed in this chapter took inspiration from modernist and postmodernist Western texts that commonly focus on text as text. Clearly there are strong parallels between the postmodernist investigations of the intertextuality of texts and the crossing of boundaries that occurs in the act of translation. In both spheres, creativity plays an important role in the re-contextualisation of source works and the development in the target work of a new mode of writing.

Acts of collaborative translation heighten the creative element as translators and author negotiate with each other and with their differing perceptions of the text and its readers in order to arrive at a new creative solution. The nature of translation as a creative act is made even clearer when it occurs not only from one language to another but from one orthography to another or, in the cases cited in this chapter, three orthographies to another. It is not possible to find equivalents when dealing with such diverse orthographies. There are none. The translators have to create in new spaces and forms a text that is suitable for them.

5844 words

END

#### Bibliography

Apollinaire, G. (1945), Calligrammes 12<sup>th</sup> edn. Paris: Gallimard.

Barthes, R. (1977), Image Music Text. trans. By Stephen Heath, London: Fontana Press.

- Chinese Language-Poetry Group (1994), Original. trans. by Jeff Twitchell, Brighton: Parataxis Editions.
- Churchill, C. (1994), The Skriker. London: Nick Hern Books.
- Culler, J. (1981), The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction. London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (1973), Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs. trans. by David Allison (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1981), Positions. trans. by Alan Bass, London: Athlone Press.
- Derrida, J. (1992), Mallarmé, trans. by Christine Roulston. Ulysses Gramophone : Hear Say Yes in Joyce, trans. by Tina Kendall and Shari Benstock. In: Derek Attridge, ed. Acts of Literature. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 110-126 and 256-309.
- Derrida, J. (1995), Dialanguages, trans. by Peggy Kamuf. In: Elisabeth Weber, ed. Points ... Interviews, 1974-94. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 132-55.
- Deschênes, B. (2003). Experience Asia. Website [www.thingsasian.com/goto\\_article/article.2121.html](http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article/article.2121.html) 11 August 2004.
- Fenollosa, E. and Pound, E. (1916), 'Kinuta' in 'Noh' or Accomplishment: a study of Japan. London: Macmillan, pp. 151 – 164.
- Harris, S. (2004), JFL Website <http://www.asij.ac.jp/middle/ac/ml/jflsh> 12 August 2004.
- Herbert, G. (1876), The Temple. facs. ed. of 1633, London: W. Wells Gardner.
- Joyce, J. (1939), Finnegans Wake. New York: Viking Press.
- Keene, D. (1953), Japanese Literature. London: John Murray.
- Kristeva, J. (1982), The Powers of Horror. trans. by Leon S Roudiez New York: Columbia University Press.

Miyaji, E. (1996), Suiko / The Water Jar. trans. by Iris Elgrichi and Judy Kendall, Kanazawa, Japan: Miyaji.

Saussure, F. de (1966), Course in General Linguistics. trans. by Wade Baskin, New York and London: McGraw –Hill Book Company.

Tyler, R. (1992), trans. Japanese Noh Dramas London: Penguin, pp. 160-170.

Zeami, M. (1960), 'Kinuta' in Yōkyokushū. ed. by Mario Yokomachi and Akira Omote, Tokyo, Japan: Iwanami Shōten, pp. 332-339,

Zeami, M (1998), Kinuta, trans. by Iris Elgrichi and Judy Kendall, (unpublished translation; also performed in Kanazawa and Graz, 1999 / 2000 and awarded Uchimura Prize, Tokyo, 2000),

## Figures

1 Tree (page 3)

2 Person (page 3)

3 Suiko 174 (page 8)

4 Reshaped Suiko 174 (page 11)

5 Suiko 199 (page 12)

6 Kinuta [colour-coded shapes](#) (page 19)

7 Kinuta 'Voices fade' (page 21)

8 Kinuta 'Moment of beauty' (page 24)

Judy Kendall

Lecturer in creative writing (also doctoral student) at the University of Gloucestershire,  
(previously, lecturer in English language / literature at Kanazawa University, Japan, 1995  
- 2002)

[jkendall@glos.ac.uk](mailto:jkendall@glos.ac.uk) / [saiwaicho@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:saiwaicho@yahoo.co.uk)

4 Lansdown Castle Drive, Cheltenham GL51 7AF UK

---

NOTES<sup>i</sup> Much of Japanese culture has its origins in China and was improved, adapted  
and developed to

suit the new environment. In orthography, periods of influence are intermittent  
throughout

Japanese history, and in many cases the same characters, borrowed more  
than once at different

times, have developed multiple meanings and associations.

<sup>ii</sup> 'chotto', hiragana for 'a bit'

<sup>iii</sup> The powerful rule of the Heian dynasty from 794 to 1192 ensured an  
unprecedented period of peace and security, during which Japanese culture  
flourished. The great novel, 'The Tale of the Genji', the masterpiece of Japanese  
literature, was written at this time (probably in the first decade of the eleventh  
century) in hiragana by the female writer known as Murasaki Shikibu.

---

<sup>iv</sup> 'koko-a', *katakana* for 'cocoa'

<sup>v</sup> Japanese orthography holds the dubious distinction of being considered the most difficult writing system in the world, its complexities also having a direct effect on the augmented degree of textual ambiguity in its literature.

<sup>vi</sup> Miyaji Eiko is a contemporary haikuist and haiku journalist.

<sup>vii</sup> Haiku is a short form of verse composed of seventeen syllables, broken into a pattern of 5, 7, and then 5 syllables. It is traditionally written in one line in Japanese.

<sup>viii</sup> In classical Japanese aesthetics, the presence of ma, translated as 'space' or 'time', is regarded as crucial in a work of art. Ma refers to the perceptual space between events, not an abstractly calculated space but a sensory space, even a sensually perceived space. Absence, silence, incompleteness and/or an essential lack of finality are highly prized in Japanese art. See [www.thingsasian.com/goto\\_article/article.2121.html](http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article/article.2121.html)

<sup>ix</sup> Concrete poetry emphasizes the visual presence of the poem on the page

<sup>x</sup> See Apollinaire (1945). Apollinaire's work considerably extended visual techniques in poetry

<sup>xi</sup> The relative brevity of English words is in fact one of the arguments put by many English haiku circles against a strict adherence to the 5-7-5 format in English. The other main argument is that English poetry is metrically based and not syllabic.

<sup>xii</sup> In Noh theatre (or Nō), gesture, dance, mask-work, music and song are fused in a precise stage art. Much of the repertoire was created by Kanami (1333-84)



---

and his son Zeami (1361 – 1443). Zeami is considered the master of Noh. The text of a Noh play is traditionally composed of a combination of flat prose and highly poetic passages.

<sup>xiii</sup> See Keene (1953) p.6

<sup>xiv</sup> Joyce began writing this work in March 1923

<sup>xv</sup> Classical Japanese puppet theatre