"Don't Worry no Kuni" : Problems in Translation and their Solutions

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Abstract

    The act of translating a text into another language is bound to be problematic, and when languages are as distinct both culturally and graphologically as English and Japanese, the number of obstacles increases. Translation theory (Nord, 1997, 2005) indicates that the target audience should act as a guide throughout this process. One type of problem is that of pragmatic differences between source text and target text. This article looks at pragmatic problems which occurred in the translation of an article which detailed a trip to Thailand, by a Japanese journalist, to enjoy local dishes. An evaluation of the translation is followed by possible solutions for a more successful translation.

Introduction

    Soon after I moved to Japan and enrolled in classes in elementary Japanese, it became apparent that the differences with the English language were vast. For one thing, having to learn a whole new set of writing characters was a fresh challenge. Determined to communicate with local people, perseverance showed me that it was quite possible to overcome the huge differences in the languages. For those who cannot understand a particular language, translations allow for texts to partially cross linguistic barriers, but there are problematic areas for translators to deal with.

However, a text can be made to overcome these just as a learner can.

　　Using an analysis of a report of a trip to Thailand published in a Japanese magazine and with reference to key authors, notably Nord (1997, 2005), this paper will focus on one common type of problem which exists for translators.　This will be followed by a discussion of some solutions to the problem and how translators might approach such issues.

Key research and concepts

　　This section will initially look at some key terminology, specifically defining "translation problems," before focussing on one type of these, namely pragmatic problems.

Defining a text

　　Text types are innumerable and the act of classifying a text within one particular genre can be misleading as discourse tends to be the product of the interaction of several genre types (Fairclough, 2003:38).　However, general principles of text type are helpful as a guide to translators in how they might approach a particular work.　There are no obvious boundaries which distinguish one type from another, so theorists have not been able to produce a complete taxonomy.　As long ago as 1934, Bühler created a list of genres, which proved to influence others such as Reiss (1968/9) and, in turn, Nord (1997: 37-38), who wrote of three very general text types: informative, expressive and operative.　Related to these types of text are text functions, which can also be traced back to Bühler (1934).　Nord's version (1997: 40) lists referential, expressive, appellative and phatic texts (the last being Nord's own addition).　Although the terminology is slightly different, text type

and text function, at least from the perspective of Nord, are drawn along quite similar lines. The text type is largely a reflection of its function. For translators, this means that an understanding of the function of the text is of benefit in deciding the approach which needs to be taken to the work. For example, function is more important than form in an informative text (Nord, 1997: 37-38). Where expressive elements come in, representing the source writer's opinions is more appropriate, but skopos suggests that the target audience is still more important.

Defining a problem

Methods of translation have been discussed widely for centuries (Nord, 1997:4). A functional position is taken by works including Nord (1997, 2005) and Reiss and Vermeer (1984), the latter of whom introduced the concept of skopostheorie (skopos), which refers to the purpose, aim or intention of the translation, suggesting that the translator should be guided primarily by these principles. This is in contrast with equivalence-based theories which see translation as a kind of code-switching (Catford, 1965: 20; Nida and Taber, 1969: 12). Functional writing maintains that a translator should take a top-down approach to the translation, first of all considering the text type, rather than a bottom-up approach which works from the phrase (Nord, 1997: 68). Whichever principle is followed, failures of translation are not unusual but in analysing the reasons behind these it is necessary to make a distinction between mistakes, which are subjective, caused by translator error or lack of awareness, and problems, which are more objective and tied to inherent differences between the target and source language (and culture) as well as the contents, rather than the form of the target text itself (Nord, 2005: 166-7). This paper is chiefly concerned with problems, and

four broad kinds of these have been identified. The first type is pragmatic problems which concern the difference in situation of source and target text. Convention related problems refer to differences such as those of currency or local approaches to text construction. Linguistic problems are those which always exist between the two languages, due to universal differences. The final category is text-specific problems, a catch-all category which can cover textual features such as rhymes or jokes (Nord, 2005: 166-7). This paper will focus in particular on problems of pragmatics.

Pragmatic problems

A number of features of both source texts and their targets have been identified. Nord (2005: 160) divides these into extratextual and intratextual features. Pragmatic problems can be identified through an analysis of extratextual factors (in other words, those not related to the text itself but to external factors, namely sender, intention, audience, medium, place, time, motive and function). The translator will need to consider each carefully, although not all may be relevant (however, at least the factor of audience must be significant at all times). For instance, if the publishers of a Japanese newspaper decide to publish an English language version, it will likely be aimed at a more international audience than that of its source. Although there will be plenty of exceptions, a native Japanese audience might not need as much explanation of certain individuals, organisations or places as the intended audience of the target text. If it is distributed overseas, the factor of place (and potentially time, since the distribution can take a while) also alters. Therefore, a translator needs to consider how best to reflect these changes. If it is made available online, readers may be anywhere in the world, so a phenomenon such as a heat wave in Japan, which might

have been experienced by the majority of the domestic audience, would require much greater explanation.　A consideration of pragmatic problems as defined by Nord will be used to guide the analysis in this paper.

Method

　I was formerly employed as the translator of a magazine, 'Spice Journal' (SJ), which was created by a Japanese restaurant owner with a passion for spicy food, such as Indian cuisine.　Restaurants serving such dishes are comparatively few in Japan (I am originally from the UK) and the publisher's intention was to spread knowledge of restaurants, recipes, ingredients and traditions of cooking with spices among the relatively inexperienced Japanese population, but it was also expected that foreigners living in Japan would be interested, and there was even discussion of selling the publication overseas.　It was thought that a bilingual magazine with English alongside the Japanese text might boost readership and perceived authenticity.　I translated the entire contents of the quarterly publication into English.　No translation brief was provided, I was simply told that it would not matter if the translation was slightly different to the Japanese source.　Table 1, based on Nord, details the extratextual properties of SJ.

　The article to be discussed is entitled "Don't worry の国" (Don't Worry Country) in Japanese or "Hakuna Matata Country Part Two," (hereafter "HMC") in English.　It was chosen for analysis here for a few reasons.　First of all, it is an account of a visit, or in the words of Nord an informative text with both referential and expressive functions.　This offers greater variety for analysis than a purely referential piece such as a recipe.　Secondly, having translated this for publication, I faced a genuine need to satisfy a real

audience. The article itself, written by Takuo Kawamiya, describes a trip to Bangkok, loosely but not exclusively tied to culinary encounters in the Thai city. Part one was published in the previous edition and contained similar episodes.

The analysis section will look at the text from the point of view of a (novice) translator approaching the text. It would be possible to identify any number of potential problems. This paper will analyse some significant ones, followed by their suggested solutions.

Analysis of the text

In order to discuss pragmatic problems, it is important to consider the methods by which SJ is distributed. Although the editor hoped that international sales could be achieved, the only option for the interested reader outside of Japan is to have it imported. Being only marketed and published in Japan, and not available online, its potential reach is mainly limited to a domestic readership. Therefore, readers of both source and target text are people who are at least somewhat accustomed to Japanese life and culture. What is different with the target text is the language and the cultural implications which that carries. It can be assumed that the audience of the target text includes those people living in Japan who speak English and have origins in foreign countries. They might be expected to have greater knowledge of Indian cuisine than Japanese people (perhaps true of Indian people, but not necessarily Americans) but not as much understanding of references to Japanese culture. However, as the editor expressed his interest in selling the magazine overseas (without having any specific strategy), I will consider pragmatic problems in light of this, in other

words what further changes would be needed if it were decided to launch SJ for sale in English speaking countries.

The following table summarises extratextual factors, linked to pragmatic problems.

Table 1

Comparison of source text and target text "HMC", according to Nord (2005: 160)

	Source text analysis	Transfer required	Target text profile
Extratextual factors			
Sender	Writer, publisher	Translator not acknowledged	Addition of translator
Intention	Inform a Japanese audience of travel and dining in Thailand	Little change required, Thailand likely to be foreign to most readers	Inform a potentially international audience about travel and dining in Thailand
Audience	Japanese people and others with Japanese ability, interested in ethnic foods	Background knowledge may differ	Foreigners living in Japan, especially those originating from the Indian sub-continent.
Medium	Printed magazine	No change	Printed magazine
Place	Published in Kansai, Japan	No change	Published in Kansai, Japan
Time	Published Spring 2012	No change	Published Spring 2012
Motive	To create sales, to raise awareness of spice-based cooking	Linked to audience, thus need to acknowledge differences	To add authenticity to Japanese publication, to further increase sales and awareness
Function	Referential, expressive	No change	Referential, expressive
Effect (listed separately from extratextual factors by Nord but still relevant here)	Somewhat reassuring of the flooding situation, persuasive of the opportunities to enjoy Thailand	Maintains the original effect	Somewhat reassuring of the flooding situation, persuasive of the opportunities to enjoy Thailand

One major obstacle to worldwide sales might be the sender. In Britain, there certainly is an interest in cooking with spices, with popular Indian writers such as Madhur Jaffrey or chefs already well known to British readers, such as Keith Floyd, having sold many books. Their credibility no doubt stems somewhat from their ethnicity or their already established position. It is obvious that an unknown Japanese writer, writing a piece on Thailand in a magazine usually focussed on Indian cooking, will struggle with credibility.

Despite that, assuming a small number of people were to obtain SJ, some factors need to be considered. First of all, regarding place (and, maybe more significantly, audience), some references to Japan would have to be replaced. The writer's comparison of a noodle dish with one he had eaten in Kyoto, Japan does not mean very much to me, living just an hour's drive away! Other references, such as comparing the service standard of a hotel with that of Japan, are not automatically going to be relevant to readers outside of Japan. Solutions depend somewhat on the situation. Simply comparing the service level with that of the country of publication is one way ("the service is of an even higher level than that of Britain..."), an alternative is to lessen the specificity of a reference in order to be more inclusive ("what was served to me was not unfamiliar" rather than "very similar to a dish I had eaten at Shin-puku Saikan in Kyoto"). The strategy will vary by case, but the guiding principle should be an understanding by the target audience without detracting from the expressive *function* of this piece.

Other problems, although less noticeable at first glance, occur when there is no specific reference to the extratextual factors of the text, and yet the sentiment contained is culturally bound (*effect*). Some examples of this

are contained in HMC, such as the following example which describes the writer's attempts to order in a restaurant:

Me (pointing to another customer's noodles): this, this !
Server: ◎△※∞∴♂♀@＃？
Me: I said this!
Server (puzzled): ◎△※∞∴♂♀@＃？

The appropriateness of Kawamiya's response does not need to be questioned in Japanese. If this were to be sold in some cultures it might come across as unnecessarily frustrated. An alternative approach would be to drastically alter the writer's tone in order to improve his appeal (the disadvantage would be the lack of faith to the source), which could be done with a rather embarrassed attempt to concede to whatever the waiter would suggest. Another point comes during the closing paragraph, when Thailand is described as "そういう国" meaning "that kind of country", perhaps referring back to the headline, but in fact the description of the kind of country is somewhat tied to its perception in the Japanese news, which lines three and twenty three seem to suggest is of a lack of care despite the chaos, already mentioned by Kawamiya as being an overly exaggerated view. At the time of translation, the idea of a "Don't Worry country" felt hard to access in English (the translation I chose, Hakuna Matata, seemed more accessible, at least to those who had seen 'The Lion King', but its association with the African jungle in the film is far from how Bangkok is portrayed in the article). What is unclear is Kawamiya's feeling on this care-free attitude. Where clarity is lacking, the translator needs to consider skopos as a guide and write for the target reader (Vermeer, cited

in Nord, 1997: 29). Of course, this depends on the translator's judgement and it is for the reader to decide whether my translation was appropriate or not.

　　These examples are quite specific and can only scratch the surface of how a translator would approach such a situation. What is needed is a model which could demonstrate the process of solving pragmatic problems in translation. Based on the extratextual factors introduced in table 1, table 2 presents a series of questions aiming to guide the translator, a reinterpretation of part of Nord's table (2005: 160) with an example of how this would work for the target text detailed in this paper.

Table 2

Pragmatic factors and their consideration in relation to the text

	Source text	Target text	Actions : SJ
Sender	Who is the sender?	How does the sender relate to the audience? What effect does the translator have?	The writer is communicating through a translator who has to judge the audience. Consistency has to be applied, with the target readers being the priority.
Intention	Why was it written?	Why is it being translated?	The intention of attracting a wider audience means that the piece has to satisfy the needs of the extended audience.
Audience	Who are the intended readers?	Who are the intended readers of the target?	English speakers living in Japan with some interest cooking with spices, including those with origins in the Indian sub-continent from which a lot of such cuisine originates. Therefore, some basic knowledge might be expected.
Medium	How is it consumed?	How is the consumption different in the translation?	There is no major difference here, just that the source and target need to be of similar lengths.

	Source text	Target text	Actions : SJ
Place	Where will it be read?	Are English speaking readers in similar places to source readers?	If worldwide sales are achieved, readers could be anywhere. Too many references to Japan would be hard to understand.
Time	When will it be read?	Are there any differences in when the target is read?	Unlikely to differ very much.
Motive	What triggered the writing of this text?	What is the motive behind its translation?	These may differ, profit being part of source and target but while the source audience may be less knowledgeable about spice, target text readers are potentially more aware. Educating Japanese people about spice is generally not the same as informing the population of the Indian sub-continent living in Japan about their cuisine.
Function	What is the purpose of the text?	For what purpose is it being translated?	On a wider scale, an increased interest in the cuisine of continental Asia can be developed by the publication. The translation seeks to ensure the foreigner population's interest.

The considerations determined in the right column are just one way to respond to the questions posed. Another translator may have different ideas. However, having reviewed a translation brief and the source text, some reflections on these points might help to channel the process and make sure that consistency is delivered. Therefore, difficulties such as those mentioned in this section can be avoided.

Discussion

　　The functional approach to translation was not on my mind when I originally translated this article in 2012. In addition, the work was done without a brief. Its success as a translation is not the question of this paper, which has been able to highlight some problematic areas, which might not have struck me at the time of the original translation, yet which I dealt with somehow. With the benefit of the research carried out for this paper, I might have applied the principles of skopos and considered the audience a little more. I might have been more choosy with loanwords (for example, if I had found out how many courses the curry meal in line 12 had contained it might have sounded more authentic: "five course curry dinner") or perhaps changed the title to something more widely recognisable ('Que Sera Sera Country'?). On reflection, it is the pragmatic changes which appear to cause the biggest problems for the text. It is well known that Japan is quite a homogenous country with relatively few foreigners, so marketing a specialist magazine at such a small population seems risky. Being sold as a bilingual publication, it is very hard to know how many people are reading the translation. Such problems are somewhat out of the control of the translator, however an understanding of them suggest that writing to as broad an audience as possible might be effective in maximising the readership.

　　Despite these difficulties, I was able to translate the text, and the work of Nord and other researchers demonstrated a logical, systematic approach which is of benefit to translators. Nord's key publications of 1997 and 2005 were invaluable to me in the writing of this paper, but the list of questions produced in table 2 is designed as a quick reference guide for translators

working on a text, in order to guide their writing. Further research could ask two or more experienced translators to translate the source text themselves, for the purposes of comparison. They could give their views on what they felt to be problematic. Another useful research project would be to analyse another similar article (such as part one of HMC) in the same way and see if the same problems emerged.

Conclusion

One aim of writers is surely to get their work out to as many readers as possible, and one way in which this can be done is by arranging for a translation and distributing the work to a wider number of people. Regardless of the skill of the translator, it is obvious that problems will arise and it is neither possible nor useful to aim for complete equivalence. When a target text contains errors, they may have been caused by problems in the source text and by differences between the source and target language. As a result skopos can be seen to have failed and, most significantly, audience is lost. Therefore, a sound knowledge of both audience and language is essential for the translator.

This paper has analysed three kinds of problem in the translation of a text, two quite specific linguistic ones which were seen to be surmountable provided that the translator exercised caution, and one more general category, pragmatic problems, which felt much more significant and seemed to cause potentially much larger problems for a text. Solutions, including a detailed set of questions, were provided to help translators to overcome such difficulties and a careful consideration of such issues is recommended in order to maximise readership in specialist publications with a relatively

small potential audience, such as the one discussed here.

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Appendix 1

Extracts from source text- "Don't worry no kuni" from Spice Journal

１． "Don't worry" の国

２．洪水のタイ見聞記 2

３．2011 年 10 月下旬、日本ではタイが大洪水だと大騒ぎになっていた時、私は気楽にバンコクを観光していた。帰国の前に、水が溢れる Chao Phraya 川も見

ておこう！

[Lines removed]

4．せっかくタイに来て、屋台で食べずには帰れない。が、私はタイ語を一切話せ
　ない。そして、どの店にも私のプアーな英語を理解できる人がいるとも思え
　ない。3日迷ったが、ついに決心し、プロームポン駅近くの屋台へ行ってみた。

5．私「（他の客の麺を指し）これ、これ」

6．店主「◎△※∞∴♂♀@＃？」

7．私「これだって」

8．店主「（困惑しつつ）◎△※∞∴♂♀@＃？」

9．どうやら薬味と肉をどうするのか、と訊かれていたらしい。後ろに並んでいた
　人が「この中から選べ」とジェスチャーで教えてくれた。

[Lines removed]

10．出てきたそれは、京都『新福菜館』の中華そばの、黒ずんだスープに春雨を入
　れ、鶏肉と香菜をトッピングしたようなもの。う〜ん・・・・・臭みがあって、
　決して旨いとはいえない。立って食べていると「座れ、座れ」と他の客が椅
　子を勧めてきた。値段は30Baht（当時で1Baht=3円弱）。このコミュニケーショ
　ンを買ったと思えば妥当な相場かもしれない。

11．ゴージャスなタイ料理も味わいたい。この日の晩は五ツ星ホテル『Four
　Seasons Hotel Bangkok』の中にある『The Spice Market』へ。おお、英
　語が通じる。サービスも日本と同レベル。日本ではホテル内の飲食店で食べ
　たいと思うことなどほとんどないけど、外国では言葉や感覚が通じることが
　非常にありがたい。

12．カレーのコースは約1500 Baht。安くはないが、ナッツや香菜を葉野菜で巻い
　て食べる前菜からしてとてつもなく旨い。

[Lines removed]

13．ここまで来たら、すぐそばを流れる Chao Phraya 川も見に行きたい。川辺に
　整備された公園を水辺へ歩いていくと、なんだ、まだ洪水してないじゃないか。

　　が、違った。水は、堤の遥か下を流れているのが正常なのであって、ここに
　　見えている水は、すでに遊歩道をかなり飲み込んでいる。

14.　だが、それにしても「洪水」と騒ぐほどの荒々しさが一切ない。流れているの
　　かどうかも怪しいくらいの緩い流れ。人々はゆったり夕涼みをしているよう
　　にしか見えないし、浅瀬に上がってくるナマズを狙って釣りをする人もいれ
　　ば、水が溢れ出している船着き場では親が子どもに水遊びをさせている。こ
　　の緊迫感のなさには驚く。さすが MaiPenRai (Don't worry) の国。

15.　「街が水浸しになっています！」。帰国しても TV のニュースはヒステリック
　　に叫んでいたけど、そのレポーターの横ではやはり水遊びに興じる子供たち
　　の姿があった。そうそう、やっぱりそういう国なんだよ。

Appendix 2

Extracts from target text- "Hakuna Matata Country" from Spice Journal

1．Hakuna Matata Country

2．Account of trip to flooded Thailand- Part Two

3．At the end of October last year, as Japanese news shows were showing
　　frantic reports on the huge flooding in Thailand, I went without a care
　　to Bangkok to go sightseeing. Before returning to Japan, I decided to
　　go and take a look at the Chao Phraya River, which had risen so high.

[Lines removed]

4．Having come all the way to Thailand, I couldn't leave without sampling
　　some food from a food stall. I can't speak a word of Thai, and I found it
　　hard to believe that any one would be able to understand a word of my
　　poor English. Having considered what to do for three days, I made up
　　my mind to go to a stall close to Phrom Phong station.

5．Me (pointing to another customer's noodles): this, this!

6. Server: ◎△※∞∴♂♀@#?

7. Me: I said this !

8. Server (puzzled): ◎△※∞∴♂♀@#?

9. I guessed that he was asking me how I would like my meat and spice, based upon the helpful gestures of the customer behind me.

[Lines removed]

10. What was served to me was very similar to a dish I had eaten at Shinpuku Saikan in Kyoto. It contained Chinese noodles in a dark vermicelli soup with chicken and coriander on top. It had a certain smell, and there was nothing very sweet about it. I stood up and started to eat it, upon which I was told to sit down by another customer, who got a seat for me. It cost 30 baht (at this time, one baht was the equivalent of around three yen). It seemed a fair price to pay for this brief communication.

11. I also wanted to try some top notch Thai food. That evening, I went to the Spice Market, within the Four Seasons Hotel Bangkok (five stars). I was able to get by in English at this place, and the service was just as good as that of Japan. I am not the kind of person who regularly dines at hotels in Japan, but overseas I appreciate the familiar atmosphere and language.

12. It was around 1500 baht for a curry course meal. It's not cheap, but from the first dish of nuts and coriander wrapped in green vegetables, it tasted great.

[Lines removed]

13. Having come this way, I wanted to see the nearby Chao Phraya River. Walking through a park which ran alongside and down towards the banks of the river, it seemed like the flooding was yet to hit, but these

thoughts were soon proved wrong. The river usually only came up to a point a long way below the tops of the river bank, but on this occasion it was lapping up against the footpath at its side.

14. Even so, there was little evidence of panic about the flooding. Neither was the river moving very much, to the extent that it was unclear as to whether it was flowing or not. In the relative cool of the early evening, people seemed to be going about their business as usual. There were men trying to catch the catfish which were sticking their heads out in the shallow water, and parents on the quay who had brought their kids along to enjoy the scene. I was surprised by the complete lack of urgency, and realized that I was in the country of "MaiPenRai" (Hakuna Matata- don't worry)!

15. "The town is underwater." These were the hysteric cries of the TV stations upon my return to Japan, but it was possible to see behind the reporters scenes of children enjoying themselves in these conditions. It really is just that kind of country.