

Consuming Cool Japan:
Constructing foreignness and reader identity in two translations of Sailor Moon

1. Introduction

The story of manga in America is one of translation. Manga – Japanese comic books – have become increasingly popular in America since the 1980s, and the strategies employed in localizing or translating these texts for Western audiences have shifted over time.

Well into the 1990's, conventional wisdom held that Japanese cultural products needed to undergo complete localization – via cultural as well as linguistic translation – in order to appeal to an American audience (Allison 1999; Schodt 2011; Wong 2006).

Slide!

Around the turn of the millennium, however, the “Cool Japan” phenomenon (McGray 2002), saw elements of Japanese pop-culture become highly marketable in Western countries, with Pokémon, Hello Kitty, anime and manga all helping to cement Japan's status as a cultural superpower positioning itself for global – and especially Western – consumption.

Slide

With the Cool Japan era in full swing, the expanding manga readership in the United States began to show a demand for translations which retained as much of the original Japanese format and culture as possible (Schodt 2011).

Slide!

As translation practices have shifted over time, so too has the constitution of the sociocultural construct (Vygotsky 1986; Duranti 1985) of foreignness in these translated texts.

Slide!

A striking example of this shift can be seen in two English translations of Naoto Takeuchi's (1992) manga *Bishojo Senshi Sailor Moon* for the US market, released 13 years apart:

slide!

the 1998 Mixx translation

slide!

and the 2011 Kodansha translation. In this paper, I examine the linguistic practices used to construct foreignness in both of these translations, and find that each version broadly employs a different translation strategy to either erase or highlight the concept of 'foreignness' within the text. These strategies in turn afford two very different ways for American readers to engage with Sailor Moon, and construct their identities as readers.

Slide!

2. Framework & Methodology

In terms of translation theory, I use two approaches to characterize the translation strategies in these texts. The first is Venuti's (1995) distinction between domesticating and foreignizing strategies (Venuti 1995). Domesticating translation attempts to align the original text to the target language's cultural values, while foreignizing translation allows the text to maintain features which would seem out of place in the target language.

Slide!

The second approach used is Nida's (1964) concept of formal vs. dynamic equivalence. In formally equivalent translation, form is just as important as meaning – the idea is to make the reader aware that they're reading a translation, and let them identify with the original cultural context. In dynamic equivalence, priority is placed on naturalness in the target language, and no understanding of the original cultural context is required.

Slide!

The textual examples which highlight the relationship between the original text and each of these two translations are presented in the form of diagraphs (Du Bois 2014). While diagraphs are usually employed within the framework of dialogic syntax (Du Bois 2014) to examine interactions in spoken or written language, here they serve to juxtapose multiple translations with both the original text and the alternative translated interpretations.

3. Linguistic practices

Slide!

Turning to the data, three specific linguistic practices are used to construct foreignness in these two texts: loanwords, honorifics, and onomatopoeia.

3a. Loanwords

Slide!

One of the ways in which language is used to constitute foreignness in the Kodansha translation is through the use of untranslated Japanese 'loanwords'. The diagraphs here come early on in the text, and both lines of dialogue belong to the main character in the manga. In the first diagraph, she introduces one of her classmates to the reader, and in the second, she meets the keeper of a shinto shrine.

(In these diagraphs, the first line represents the original Japanese text, the second the earlier Mixx translation, and the third the later Kodansha translation. Vertical alignment indicates where the original and translations match up (so 'koitsu-wa' is translated as "here's our" in Mixx and "this guy's" in Kodansha), and vertical non-alignment indicates where the translations either leave out material from the original, or add in material not present in the original (like 'How cool...' or 'So she's...' in the second diagraph). Curly brackets indicate that a word was moved from its original sequence to facilitate comparison, so for instance in the Kodansha translation, on the page this line reads "this guy's Umino, an otaku".)

(K11)
 OG; コイツは オタクの 海野
 koitsu-wa otaku-no Umino
 this.guy-TOP otaku-ADJ Umino
 MX; Here's our class nerd, Melvin.
 KS; This guy's {an otaku} Umino,

(K94a)
 OG; 巫女
 miko
 shrine.maiden
 MX; How cool... a priestess
 KS; So she's a miko?

What's interesting here is that while the Mixx translation renders the Japanese *otaku* as “class nerd” and *miko* as “priestess”, the Kodansha translation leaves the words in Japanese, romanized but unglossed.

Slide!

Retaining untranslated Japanese 'loanwords' like *otaku* and *miko* foreignizes the text, and presents formally equivalent renditions that index the concepts themselves as foreign. Equally significant is the fact that in order to understand the basic meaning of the text, a reader must necessarily have a certain familiarity with Japanese vocabulary.

Slide!

And beyond simple definitions, a reader needs to be aware of the cultural contexts in which these words are embedded to access the relevant connotations of each. For *otaku*, these include its metalinguistic coinage, stemming from the hypercorrect misuse of an honorific pronoun by “nerdy social outcasts” (Azuma 2009:xv), the subcultures of enthusiasts to which it refers today, and its pejorative use in Japan – as opposed to the positive usage as a self-designation by manga fans in Western countries (Jüngst 2004:99).

For *miko* – a term which refers specifically to shinto shrine maidens – readers must again be familiar with the Japanese term in order to access both the basic meaning and its wider implications, such as the temple's status as a shinto place of worship, and the fetishized, sexualized nature of the *miko* trope in anime and manga.

Slide!

And while the average American reader may not have a command of the cultural and linguistic vocabulary necessary to understand both the literal meaning and connotations of Japanese words like *otaku* and *miko*, it is entirely possible that the target audience of the Kodansha translation does. Learning basic Japanese is becoming a part of modern manga fandom in Western countries – as Jüngst (2008:74) points out, “In letters directed at manga magazines, Japanese loanwords mark the author as insider. *Konnichiwa* or *ohayō* (good morning) have become the standard greetings”.

3b. Honorifics

Slide!

Another way in which the two translations differ in their construction of foreignness is in their treatment of the honorific suffixes of the original Japanese text. The Japanese system of honorific address suffixes indexes “the hierarchical characterization of relationships” (Ishikawa et al. 1981:139, cited in Loveday 1986:6), in terms of age, sex, and social standing (Loveday 1986:7).

Slide!

In these diagrams, three different characters address the main character, Bunny or Usagi, in three different ways, as indexed in the original Japanese and the Kodansha translation by honorific suffixes (or the lack thereof). The first diagram has a male student addressing a female student deferentially with -san, the second shows a male friend addressing a younger female friend affectionately with -chan, and the third shows a female student addressing another female student on equal footing with no suffix.

(K11b –

OG;	うさぎさん	テストどうでした?
	<i>Usagi-san</i>	<i>tesuto dou deshita?</i>
	Usagi-AHON	test how COP.PST
MX; Hey	Bunny	How'd you do on the quiz?
KS;	Usagi-san	{How did you do on the test?}

OG;	うさぎちゃん	また 制服 で
	<i>Usagi-chan</i>	<i>mata seifuku de</i>
	Usagi-AHON.DIM	still uniform in
MX;	Bunny!	
KS;	Usagi-chan!	{You're still in uniform,}

OG;	うさぎ	ったら	信じらんないっ	早弁	なんて
	<i>Usagi</i>	<i>ttara</i>	<i>shinji-ran-nai</i>	<i>hayaben</i>	<i>nante</i>
	Usagi	EXCLAM	believe-COP-NEG	eat.one's.bento.before.lunchtime	EXCLAM
MX;	Bunny		{I can't believe	how much you pork out}	
KS;	Usagi!		{I can't believe you,}	Eating like a glutton!	

Slide!

The inclusion of untranslated honorifics in the Kodansha translation is significant because, in the text as in spoken discourse, they constitute – rather than simply reflect – these relationships. Japanese honorific suffixes are a linguistic unit with “indexical creativity”, creating the different categories of participation in the represented speech event (Silverstein 1976:34).

Slide!

Crucially, the relationships indexed by these honorifics are specifically Japanese; not only do the untranslated honorifics create a linguistic barrier of entry which necessitates familiarity with Japanese, they also index particular relationships among the characters which are foreign from an American perspective.

Slide!

In contrast, the Mixx translation takes a domesticating approach to honorifics by removing them entirely, reducing them to the English 'zero' in dynamic equivalence. In the three diagraphs we just saw, all references to the main character are leveled to the single “Bunny”. The reader is left with no recourse to access the Japanese relationships created by the honorifics in the original, and must instead assume unmarked American equivalents.

3c. Onomatopoeia

Slide!

The third linguistic practice used to either highlight or erase foreignness in these two translations is onomatopoeia. An example can be seen in this diagraph, in which an unnamed woman is praying for her missing daughter's return at a shinto shrine:

(K95)

OG;	ウチの	みいが	帰ってきますようにパンパン
	<i>uchi-no</i>	<i>Mii-ga</i>	<i>katteki-masu-yōni panpan</i>
	1PL-POSS	Mii-OBJ	return-COP.AHON-wish.for panpan
MX;	Lord, please bring	Mimi	home to us... amen
KS;	Please, guide my daughter	Mii	back to me! パン KLAP パン KLAP

In the Japanese original, the woman's prayer is accompanied by the onomatopoeia パンパン (*panpan*, representing a clapping sound). Clapping twice and bowing after a prayer is part of shinto shrine etiquette.

Slide!

The Mixx translation replaces this onomatopoeia with the dynamically equivalent exclamation “amen”, and prefaces the woman's request with “Lord”, essentially turning the (foreign) shinto shrine into a (non-foreign) temple or church.

Slide!

In contrast, the Kodansha translation leaves the Japanese script intact along with an additional gloss (“KLAP KLAP”), a semi-dynamically equivalent translation representing the English onomatopoeia for clapping,

Slide!

but one which still requires familiarity with shinto ritual to understand.

Slide!

Leaving the Japanese syllables untranslated, meanwhile, provides a direct index of the foreign writing system, and therefore the foreign setting, of the original text (Valero Garcés 2008:239).

Slide!

This gloss is also notable for its non-standard spelling. The spelling indexes 'foreignness' in its use of 'k' instead of 'c' in “clap”, but the sequence “KL” does not actually appear in natively romanized Japanese. In other words, this non-standard spelling helps to foreignize the text without any specific recourse to the Japanese source – going beyond formal equivalency in an attempt to, as Jüngst (2008:74) puts it, “look more Japanese than the original”. Here, foreignness is not only highlighted, but actively constructed in translation.

4. Discussion

Slide!

After examining these diagraphs, a clear pattern of translational strategies and stance emerges.

Slide!

The Mixx translation uses domesticating and dynamically equivalent strategies, to take the stance that the foreignness in the original text is an undesirable element to be erased in translation.

Slide!

The Kodansha translation, on the other hand, uses foreignizing and formally equivalent strategies, to take the stance that foreignness is a desirable component of the original text, that should be preserved, and even accentuated, in translation.

Slide!

The shift in translational stance is particularly important in that it represents a shift in the affordances available for manga fans to draw on as they engage with *Sailor Moon* and construct their identities as readers.

Slide!

Before the rise of Cool Japan, American manga readers were primarily comic book readers looking for something outside of the mainstream (Schodt 2011:313). Manga like *Sailor Moon* have a distinct visual language (McCloud 1993:78) which sets them apart from American comics, and *Sailor Moon* herself embodies traits of both traditionally masculine and feminine heroes (Allison 1999:273) in a way then unheard of in Western comics. In this context, readers engaged with *Sailor Moon* as a text which was already drastically different from American comics, even when translated with the domesticating strategies outlined above.

For these readers, the appeal of engaging with *Sailor Moon* stemmed from its unique visual language and storytelling, and this group can be seen primarily as *Sailor Moon* fans –

Slide!

who go by the self-designation of Moonies.

Slide!

Today, however, instead of comic fans turning to manga for a different kind of story or visual style, manga readers are engaging specifically with the Japaneseness of these texts. Modern manga fans constitute their community identity through in-group practices such as learning Japanese, including honorific suffixes in English speech, and familiarizing themselves with aspects of Japanese culture, and their engagement with *Sailor Moon* draws specifically on the affordances created by the foreignizing strategies of the Kodansha translation. If Cool Japan is a brand, these readers' identities are centered around its conspicuous consumption,

Slide!

so I'll refer to this group as Cool Japan Fans.

Slide!

One place we can see these two identities play out is in Amazon.com reader reviews for the Kodansha translation. Here readers from each group talk about the two translations, and the domesticating and foreignizing strategies we've seen play into how they construct their identities as either Moonies or Cool Japan Fans.

Slide!

First is a review from Brad. A self-identified Moonie. Brad expresses concern about the Japanese words present in the Kodansha translation, stating: “Makoto addresses her teacher as “Sensei” even though “Sir” could have been used or sensei removed completely without affecting the meaning of what she said (which was actually done in the original [Mixx] adaptation), [and] the characters refer to each other with Japanese honorifics even when it sounds completely unnatural in English.”

Here Brad states that Sailor Moon fans like himself prefer the domesticating translation strategies used in “the original Mixx adaptation”, and that the Japanese honorifics and loanwords present in the Kodansha translation are undesirable additions, sounding 'unnatural' in English.

Slide!

Next is a review from Amanda. She says: “I love the literal translation! It sounds weird to Americans but I would rather it be translated exactly how it was written [than] translated for people who are not really into manga itself, just Sailor Moon.”

Amanda makes a distinction between ordinary 'Americans' on the one hand, and savvy manga fans like herself on the other, who have the Japanese cultural and linguistic vocabulary necessary to consume this 'literal translation'. She contrasts herself with people who are 'into Sailor moon' but not into 'Manga itself', and in so doing constructs her identity as a Cool Japan Fan.

Slide!

In conclusion, this analysis of two English translations of *Sailor Moon* shows that loanwords, honorifics, and onomatopoeia are all mobilized in the construction of foreignness in these two translations. The shift in translation strategies and in the stance taken towards foreignness between the two in turn affords a change in the way American readers construct their identities and engage with manga, from a preference for a culturally adapted, domesticated reading experience to a desire for formal equivalence, where translations retain as much of their 'Japaneseness' as possible.

Slide!

Thank you!