From *Natsu no Niwa* to *The Friends*:
The Balancing Act Involved in Translating Children’s Books

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Abstract

This paper deals with the problem of translation in general and that of translating children’s books in particular. This report endeavors to critically compare *Natsu no Niwa* [The Summer Garden], Yumoto Kazumi’s Japanese novel for children, with *The Friends*, the English translation by Cathy Hirano. In the general sense, Hirano’s translation, adopting the methods of interpolation, deletion, and replacement, very carefully—and sometimes boldly—attains the level of a creative adaptation while rendering a faithful reproduction so that her North American audience can enjoy the book in the same way as those reading the original Japanese text. Examined in the light of translating children’s books in particular, however, her translation is subject to the assumed social and moral norms of adults, such as didacticism, underestimation of children’s ability and curiosity, and sentimentalizing and prettifying attitudes. In spite of Hirano’s attempts at both pointing out underlying similarities that encourage young readers to overcome superficial differences and bringing out the charm of what is new and strange that broadens their horizons, these two goals are not always easily reconcilable in the translation. Performing a balancing act between faithfulness and intelligibility is a difficult task with which all translators must contend.

Introduction

While a basic aim of translation is to transfer meaning from a source language to a target language, it is not only a matter of language, including grammar and writing style, but is also, and primarily, that of cross-cultural transfer. This is especially true in the case of a literary work, such as Kazumi Yumoto’s *Natsu no Niwa* [The Summer Garden], translated into English by Cathy
Hirano under the title *The Friends* (winner of the 1997 Mildred L. Batchelder Award for Translation), in which social, psychological, and historical factors create cross-linguistic opacity. This is what makes word-to-word translation useless or ineffective and forces Hirano, the translator, to make use of "context adaptation" (87), to echo Gote Klingberg, in order to reproduce a similar response to that of Japanese children in the minds of North American readers. On the other hand, translation plays an important role in aiding the readers of the translated version to recognize intercultural differences as well as similarities and to enrich their knowledge and emotional experience of the foreign cultural context. The substantial increase in cross-cultural contact, along with the economic and political ethos of the shrinking world, has resulted in an unprecedented need for accurate translation. Internationalism, therefore, plays a significant role in children's literature, too. But what does the concept of internationalism mean? Does it consist of knowing the differences between people? Does it mean detecting commonalities with other people? Or does it involve comprehending both? The question is not as superficial as it may seem (Stahl 33). The focus of this paper deals with examining how Hirano attempts to keep a delicate balance between cultural reinterpretation and exotic representation of the original text, dealing not only with the problem of translation in general but also with that of translating children's books in particular.

The Problem of Translation in General

In "Translation and Comparative Literature," Donald Keene argues about the repetition of a word and a sentence pattern in the Japanese language, which more often than not puts translators in a difficult position. In Japanese, it is not unusual that the same words, such as *itta* (said), are used again and again, and that each sentence ends with the same copula, *de-aru* or *desu*. In addition, the subordinate clauses always precede the predicate of a sentence (xxii). In English clause composition, however, variation is very important. The repetition of a word and a sentence pattern creates distracting and annoying monotony. As well as the differences in grammar, including an unstated or understood subject, infrequent use of the plural mode, and different word
order, Hirano refers to the disparity in cultural perspective and subtext that are reflected in the writing style and tone of the Japanese language. Relevant to this point is her following remark: “The Japanese writer dances around his theme, implying rather than directly stating what he wants to say, leaving it up to the readers to discern that for themselves” (35). In contrast with English composition, which flows in a “linear” fashion, according to Hirano, Japanese composition appears “almost circular,” setting greater store by emotional rapport and subtlety than logical clarity and intellectual conviction (35). Therefore, literal translation from Japanese into English is of little use for conveying the author’s intended meaning as well as unspoken cultural assumptions, and yet liberal translation is not without peril, either, because in literature, “the form is as important as the content” (36).

In order to perform this balancing act successfully, Hirano adopted what she calls “a three-way consultation process” (37), in which the translator, a Canadian woman who is married to a Japanese man and has two children who speak primarily Japanese, works in close consultation with the author and her American editor about a workable compromise between conflicting goals, namely faithfulness and intelligibility. For the present, we will examine more concretely some of the important features of Hirano’s method of creative translation, which aspires for the readers of the English version to enjoy the book in the same way as those reading the Japanese text. It seems reasonable to consider Hirano’s approach from the viewpoints of interpolation, deletion, and replacement.

First, interpolation is a powerful means of making explicit in the translation what is implicit, and yet plays an important role, in the original text. Hirano’s treatment of a Japanese word, juku (a cram school), provides a good example of a cultural obstacle which North American readers may have trouble understanding. Juku plays a crucial role in the understanding of the protagonists’ everyday life in Japan, but it is rather different from the image of cram school as understood by American and Canadian children. After going through the consultation process, Hirano wove into the original text an additional description, as follows:

Every day, Monday to Friday, we have cram school after regular school. We’re there from
six until eight and sometimes even until nine o’clock at night, trying to cram in everything we’ll need to know to pass the entrance exams for junior high school next year. By the time we get out, we’re exhausted, not to mention starving. (8)

Additionally, ofukuro (a mother) is another illustration of the same point. Throughout the novel, Yamashita as well as Kiyama and Kawabe refer to their mothers in the neutral and generic form of okasan (a mother). However, at the end of the novel, Yamashita only refers to his mother as ofukuro and begins to speak proudly of his dream of becoming a fishmonger like his father (168). The word ofukuro, with its old-fashioned flavor, has a cultural nuance that reflects the speaker’s sex (male), his age (adolescent or older), and his attitude toward his mother (mature). Given the lack of adequate equivalents, it is impossible to capture all these nuances in translation. These concepts cannot be simply translated; it is, therefore, necessary to find a way to explain them to North American readers who do not know the Japanese word and its assorted implications. In order to compensate for the loss of essential information, Hirano focuses on the description of how the word ofukuro, which is symbolic of an air of reliability and moral growth surrounding Yamashita, evokes admiration from his friends, adding to Kiyama’s monologue: “he already knows what he wants to be when he grows up” (168).

By interjecting details to amplify an explanation, Hirano not only explains words and phrases appearing in the text but also helps her audience read between the lines so that the meaning will be clear and unmistakable. The following conversation takes place between Kiyama and Kawabe, who is afraid to go to the lavatory alone with Yamashita at night when they are staying at an old inn:

“So go with him.”
“I am. But don’t you need to go, too?”
“No.”
“Come on.”

Oh great, I think, getting up reluctantly. It’s not like I’m not a little afraid, too. I mean,
this is a creepy old place. I guess it seems like we should have outgrown our fear of the dark by now. But maybe that's something that never really leaves you.

Yamashita is already at the door fidgeting. "Hurry. I'm going to burst," he whispers.

(138-39)

The italicized words are inserted by Hirano to provide a description of the workings of Kiyama's mind, which is not explicit in the original text. Hirano clarifies that, although Kiyama accompanies the other boys to the lavatory, he also experiences an irrepressible fear of the dark. He is sure that the uneasiness will never leave him, because it is associated with his inexplicable fear of the future, including death, which Yumoto says in her afterword is the motif in this story (Natsu no Niwa 212).

Secondly, if there are situations in which interpolation may be helpful, then there must also be situations for which it should probably not be attempted or should even be deleted altogether. A good example occurs in dialogue. It is not easy to translate dialogue written in a foreign language. Even though the language is simple and provides no problems of interpretation, it is difficult to come up with English expressions that are not only accurate but also flow naturally from the lips of the characters. This is especially true in the case that "a character [...] is expressing sentiments that are foreign to a Western person or makes deductions from another character's words that would not occur to a Western person" (Keene xxiii). From the conversation between the three boys and the old man in the sixth chapter, Hirano deletes four lines in which the old man pulls Kawabe's leg, who is gazing at the kitchen knife with self-satisfaction after his first attempt at cutting a watermelon (67). Translated literally, this part in the original text reads as follows:

"Be careful, for they say 'a knife and something'," the old man said with a grin.

"What is 'something'?"

"I have no idea." It is not clear whether Yamashita played dumb so wisely or he was really ignorant of it. (84)
With a gentle insinuation, the old man suggests to Kawabe a common Japanese proverb about the danger of giving a knife to a madman, and thereupon, Yamashita parries it lightly by confessing his ignorance of the well-known saying with an air of perfect innocence. And yet it seems to Kiyama that Yamashita may be wise enough to feign ignorance to patch things up for the moment. It is likely that this part of the conversation sounds pointless to American and Canadian children, partly because of the Japanese proverb’s being unknown to them. The lack of understanding could also be because Yamashita is rather ambiguous about his intention. This is a typical case for which economy with words and the drift of a conversation are served by omission and should thus be encouraged.

Also, Hirano eliminates some of the Japanese things appearing in the text that play only a minor role in the periphery of the main plot. Four lines are left out of the scene in which the three boys learn Chinese characters that are difficult for sixth graders to write, such as jukai (a sea of trees), shura (Asura), and chibusa (breasts) (117). For the same reason, kokeshi (a kokeshi doll), NTT (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation), and kamaitachi (a mischievous weasel in Japanese folklore that brandishes sharp sickles) do not appear in the English translation (66, 103, 104). It is true that ellipsis could be misleading, but this extreme method is highly effective in preventing too much exoticism in translation from obscuring the essential information of the original text.

Thirdly, Hirano substitutes culture-specific items with generic equivalents or roughly similar elements which help North American children conjure up an image comparable to that perceived by Japanese readers. Because the method of replacement is a subject to which we shall return later, we shall refer here to specific cases only in passing. More often than not, for instance, humor is specific to a particular culture and does not transcend cultural boundaries. There is an interesting case in which Hirano makes up an entirely different joke as an alternative to an original one. In a science class, the teacher calls on Kiyama to answer his question about the characteristics of pebbles in the earth’s strata. Kiyama, who has been lost in thought, hears himself blurring out the name of Tokugawa Ieyasu, a famous shogun in Japanese history. The whole classroom erupts with laughter (Natsu no Niwa 7). However, the use of this person’s name
in the English version would nullify and sacrifice the humor, having no American context. As a result, she replaces the name with Buddha, accepting the American editor’s suggestion (Hirano 40). Another example occurs in the scene in which the boys tail the old man strolling through a shopping district. While they stalk him like “secret agents” in the English translation (40), the Japanese text reads ninja (a person skilled in ninjutsu) (40). In English, the term “secret agents” is more appropriate than “ninja,” because the latter term is in danger of evoking in the minds of North American readers a mistaken image, namely that of evil assassins who kill for fun. Similar examples abound: words with cultural distinctiveness, such as hitodama (the spirit of a dead person), jidai geki (a period drama), and darumasan ga korondo (a traditional Japanese children’s game like “red light, green light”), give way to “a balloon,” “a TV show,” and “playing tag,” respectively (24, 30, 47).

**The Problem of Translating Children’s Books in Particular**

We are now ready to shift the emphasis away from the problem of translation in general to the problem of translating children’s books in particular. The term children’s literature can be roughly defined as literature read silently by children and aloud to them, but it is usually adults who decide what books are appropriate for children, either for pleasure or education (Demers); this issue is relevant to the matter of authority. Klingberg is correct when he points out:

> When the source text is work for children or young people, this means that the author has in some way considered the presumptive readers, their interests, ways of experiencing, knowledge, reading ability and so on. (86)

In addition, to discuss a children’s book in its entirety, we should pay due attention not only to the author’s view of children but also to that of the editor, illustrator, publisher, and reader (though to deal with these distinct vantage points as a whole is beyond the scope of a brief paper). At the very least, however, it is essential in the case of a translated children’s book to take the translator’s
image of children into consideration, because it affects his or her decisions while translating. Hirano’s target readership is children and young adults in North America. According to her, she started translating *Natsu no Niwa* on the assumption that North American readers are rather unfamiliar with Japanese culture, as can be plainly seen in her remark that “I do not expect this audience to have much prior knowledge of the daily life of an ordinary Japanese child or much tolerance” (37). This point deserves explicit emphasis, because it suggests that the text is adjusted to the children’s level of comprehension that she presumes; the text is then made appropriate and useful to children in accordance with what she believes is good for them.

Viewed from the perspective of Birgit Stolt, three points seem to be helpful in attempting to sketch out the primary factors that may have an adverse effect on the faithfulness of the translator to the target audience as well as to the original text: (1) the “educational intentions” of adults or society, based on their attitude toward morals and customs to which children are required to conform; (2) the “preconceived opinion” of adults or society about children, or to put it another way, their underestimation of children’s ability, “of their imagination, of their grasp of matters, of their willingness to concern themselves with what is new, strange, difficult”; and (3) the “childish attitude” of adults or society, or perhaps it would be more correct to say “sentimentalization and prettifying” (132-36).

To begin, let us now make a comparison between *The Friends* and *Natsu no Niwa* in view of instructional, if not authoritarian, intentions to point children in the right direction. Both versions explore topics considered to be taboo. *Natsu no Niwa* includes serious problems like alcoholism, senility, and death. The old man’s reminiscence of the war in which he killed a pregnant woman is frightening enough to give a considerable shock even to adult readers (98-101). It is true that, in this respect, Hirano’s translation is fairly loyal to the original text, making few concessions to the limitations of her audience. Some artificial changes, however, seem to take place in one scene, in which the soccer coach inflicts physical punishment on the boys, who were having a fist-swinging melee at midnight. While the coach slaps Kiyama on the cheek in the Japanese text, it is Kiyama who gives the coach a slap in the face in the English version. They reverse their roles. In addition, the chastisement that the coach delivers to the boys is made milder, from *genkotsu wo omimai*
suru (hit them with his fist) in the text (190) to “rap” them “with his knuckles” in the translation (154-55). The same is true of the punishment that Kawabe’s mother’s gives him, which is mollified from beranda no san ni shibaru (tie him to the railing of the veranda) in the original (108) to “locked” him “out of the apartment” (88) in the translation. There are at least two reasons for these modifications. One is that these modifications reflect an assumed social view of corporal punishment as an act of violence committed against children by adults that is unsuitable for children’s books. These are typical cases in which a moral and social standard of adults affects the translation of a book for children. The other conceivable reason is that the role change between adult (the coach) and child (Kiyama), together with the milder punishment for a midnight brawl, helps enhance the slapstick comedy aspect of the scene: Kawabe is “crawling about looking for them [his glasses]”; two boys in a lower grade stand “like thick-headed zombies”; in answer to the coach’s angry voice, the wall clock bongs lazily “as if it has a screw loose” (154-55).

Another example occurs in the last chapter of the novel. Therein, Kawabe, his mother, and his stepfather are going abroad. It is worthwhile to notice that Hirano changes the country from Czechoslovakia to Romania (168). A political situation in eastern Europe in those days was likely to affect the revision. Natsu no Niwa was first published in 1992, and the English translation appeared in 1996. In the meantime, the Czech Republic came into being in 1993 peacefully as one of the two successor states to the divided Czechoslovakia. No doubt the fall of an independent country is of great international concern. But as far as wording is concerned, the partitioning of Czechoslovakia was not a major concern when translating Natsu no Niwa, in which the country is referred to simply as cheko (Czech) (206). Nevertheless, Hirano changed the setting from Czechoslovakia to Romania, probably as a result of the previously described three-way consultation process. It may be possible to justify her decision by presuming that the tense and uncertain situation in and around the newborn Czech Republic would be inappropriate for a 12-year-old boy who is starting a new life with his new family. It is also true that, among its adjacent countries, Romania established a republic earlier, in 1989. And yet, the replacement of Czechoslovakia with Romania in the translation is open to criticism of making a sweeping generalization of ethnic, national, and cultural diversity in eastern Europe. We may recall here
that Hollywood movies used to depict things Asian so disrespectfully or indifferentely that a wide range of geographical, religious, and linguistic differences—from Istanbul to Tokyo—were jumbled up together, without regard to each distinct cultural identity (Murakami). It is doubtful, therefore, that the negligent treatment of the obvious distinction between the two independent countries with different historical, ethnic, and linguistic identities is educationally acceptable from the viewpoint of the transmutation and understanding of other peoples and cultures of the earth.

*The Friends* was designated “A Notable Children’s Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies,” and Random House encouraged school teachers in North America to use the book in interdisciplinary activities, including language arts, health, and mathematics, as well as social studies (Random House). These appraisals obviously indicate that Hirano’s translation is believed to be so faithful to the original text as to be deemed acceptable teaching material for American and Canadian children to learn about Japan. (These classroom activities are noteworthy as research on the reception of translations by the general readers.) Here is another, less elaborate, example: in the English version, Kiyama recollects that, when he was a second grader, the sixth grade students playing “handball” looked amazingly strong and powerful (4); in the Japanese text, on the other hand, the game described is baseball (5). While baseball is so popular among Japanese boys that many schools and local communities have their own baseball teams, no one can deny that handball, by comparison, is a rather minor sport in Japan. Besides, handball is sometimes confused with fives (a game in which a ball is hit with a gloved hand or bat against a wall) in North America. On this point, the translator’s intention is rather puzzling. All the more because of her conspicuous achievements in helping to improve the situation in the field of children’s book translation in America (the book received the 1997 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, for example), we should not make light even of the particulars of the translation in order to gain insights into the influence of the book on North American readers.

It may be worth pointing out that, in the hospital scene from the third chapter, Hirano makes a slight, but interesting, change in the depiction of the inside of the general hospital. According to the Japanese text, many small corridors radiating from the waiting room lead to each department, such as internal medicine, pediatrics, otorhinolaryngology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, and
obstetrics (41-42). Hirano's translation, however, says that past the waiting room, there are "many small corridors with signs pointing to the X-ray room, and the internal medicine, pediatrics, ophthalmology, orthopedics, surgery, and obstetrics department" (33). Here, we notice that "otorhinolaryngology" is eliminated, probably because the medical term is too difficult for young readers to grasp, and that the word is substituted with a more familiar word, "surgery," not with ENT (ear, nose and throat). Moreover, a phrase, hoshajo ni nobiru (radiate), is changed considerably into "the X-ray room." Neither X-ray room nor surgery appears in the original text. It is true that the word "radiate" has a strong association with the concept of an X ray, a beam of radiation, and that most polyclinics have a surgical department and an X-ray room as well. In fact, the hospital in The Friends is implied to have them when it admits a patient injured as a result of falling down the stairs (34). However, except for these trivial facts, nothing in the text provides justification for the alternations, which are as good as worthless for mutual understanding in the Japanese-American children's literary exchange.

We now turn to the matter of underestimating children's ability to experience the strange and the exotic. The translator's choice of names falls under this category. All the characters' names in the text are used as they are in the original, with the only exception being a girl's name, Eri, who works in a seed shop. Eri, which is a common name for a Japanese girl, is turned into "Elly" in the English version (75). Elly is not a Japanese name; the "el" sound is even alien to the Japanese language. Why was Eri renamed? One possibility is to assume that the pronunciation of Eri sounds like "eerie" or "erring." Another possibility is that the spelling of Eri is close to that of a boy's name, such as Eric. Even if any doubt remains about the reason, it is certain that, if Eri had had to be renamed at all, the substitution should have been a name that is also common in Japanese. Stolt quite accurately observes that "The apparently generally accepted and widespread custom of substituting names should [...] be applied more restrictedly and should more frequently be questioned" (136).

Here is another example: at the sight of Yamashita sharpening a kitchen knife with a practiced hand, Kiyama expresses his admiration, saying, "He's like a samurai on a TV show sharpening his sword" (66). This interjected sentence is not found in the original text. It is
obviously overexplanation, and more importantly, the image of Yamashita superimposed on the original work only helps to perpetuate the outdated stereotype of Japanese as samurai (a historical member of a powerful military caste in feudal Japan), geisha (a Japanese hostess trained to entertain men with conversation, dance, and song), and so on. Even if this stereotypical reductionism is useful in making the translation of more immediate interest to North American children and young adults, it makes them more restricted in their thinking and more confident in their preconceived opinions as a result of undervaluing what can be expected of their imaginations. J. D. Stahl also observes very accurately that “Although it may sound paradoxical, exoticising is a form of leveling or homogenization, because the elevation and exaggeration of certain elements of a foreign society are often a form of fitting that society into already familiar preconceptions” (30).

As a further example of a questionable interpolation, let us consider the following extract:

We cook the okonomiyaki following Kawabe’s instructions. Each serving comes in its own small bowl. First we mix the egg into the batter, which is full of chopped cabbage and other things. Then we spread the batter on the hot griddle that’s built into the middle of the table. [...] We sprinkle fish flakes on top and then flip it over to cook the other side. When it’s done, we coat it with sauce and powdered seaweed and serve it to the three adults. (132)

The italicized part, which consists of 69 words, is inserted into the translation. The passage is an instruction for making okonomiyaki (a Japanese pancake), including an introductory explanation of cooking tools and ingredients. In short, it is a recipe for Japanese fast food. Unlike juku, as we have seen, which frequently appears in the text as a fundamental component of the protagonists’ everyday life, okonomiyaki is touched on in passing in a short restaurant scene, and knowledge thereof has nothing to do with a better understanding of the world of The Friends as a whole. At best, it plays a rather undistinguished role in giving the readers a glimpse of Japanese cuisine. It was pointed out in the preceding chapter that interpolation is a useful means of giving supplemental information, for example, of foreign names, ideas, and customs that are new and
strange to the target readers. A translator, however, should be careful not to overdo it. Interpolation works when it helps the readers understand the “whole situation,” including the text and the invisible or extralinguistic factors beneath it (Oittinen 85). Otherwise, a translation can be marred by redundancy and verbosity, which may dull children’s imaginations.

Finally, sentimentalization and prettifying is another matter that should not go unaddressed in reading a translation of children’s books. Astrid Lindgren is quoted as complaining about “the ambition of many a translator to make everything a bit more beautiful and more full of genuine feeling than the author has succeeded in making it” (Stolt 137). A description of Sakai, a cute girl in Kiyama’s class, is a typical example. The translation says that her smile is “like a TV star” (61). This common simile is interjected by Hirano in order to exaggerate the attraction of the classroom idol. The same is true of a portrayal of Miss Kondo, a physical education instructor, whose beauty Kiyama admires. The Japanese text reads that she looks like gaijin (a foreigner) (111), but the phrase is replaced with “a movie star” by Hirano (90). The word gaijin, a contraction of gaikokujin (a foreigner), expresses the ambivalent feelings of Japanese people, especially toward Westerners. The word can be derogatory to the extent that, beneath it, there lies an emotional nuance of not only a positive view of them, such as yearning and idealization, but also a negative response to them, including a sense of exclusiveness to outsiders and an inferiority complex. The latter is reflected, for example, in Kiyama’s disgust at seeing his own body grow “gawkier” just like a “beanpole” (36) or “the beanstalk from Jack and the Beanstalk” (53), as he is approaching puberty. By replacing gaijin with a movie star, the English translation is evading the latter aspect of what the word gaijin suggests. As a result, this word choice helps to prettify or oversimplify the inner world of Kiyama, who is in the transitional state between childhood and adulthood, experiencing contradictory emotions toward the adults around him.

In the flashback scene of a waiting room at the hospital, Kiyama and his mother hear a doctor’s shrill voice from within his office, pressing a patient with accusing questions about the eye medicine the patient spilled. Kiyama is sure that the patient is a child like himself, but contrary to his expectation, it proves to be a shriveled old man with his wallet in a plastic shopping bag. The sheepish smile on his face is imprinted on Kiyama’s memory. The English
translation goes on to say that, on their way home, Kiyama’s mother, to whom the doctor showed affability, praises the doctor, saying, “[…] that was lucky. We got a good doctor, didn’t we?” (34) But Kiyama cannot help thinking about the feeble old man the doctor yelled at, which makes him feel “kind of sick” to his stomach. This inserted portion illustrates Kiyama’s sentiments, including his painfully keen sympathy toward the old man, more clearly and strongly than is done in the Japanese text, in which Kiyama’s feelings are suggested only in a matter-of-fact way. The point to observe is that the English version emphasizes Kiyama’s growing sensitivity—in counterpoint to his mother’s insensitivity—to old people or death, by bringing out the contrast between their attitudes to the incident in the hospital into sharp relief. While there is no doubt that Hirano’s embellishment helps to clarify Kiyama’s sentiments, there must be a considerable doubt as to the coloring she gives to the characterization of Kiyama’s mother. It is true that she is sometimes not very receptive to Kiyama’s feelings: when she and her husband have a veterinarian euthanize their old pet dog, to take an example, she bluntly tells Kiyama that the dog will be “dead” and drags him off to bed. To him, the anxious eyes of the dog look the same as those of an old person (46). Perhaps this occurrence is considered in the translation to be roughly parallel to the hospital scene. But there is no evidence in the text that Kiyama’s mother is a woman with so shallow a personality as to speak highly of a doctor who throws her a smile immediately after treating his aged patient as if he were a young child. Unfortunately, it is feared that the hospital scene in the translation, as the only part in the novel which mentions the full-time housewife out of the house, is apt to be impressive enough to mislead the readers into underestimating her, for example, concerning her negative view of her son’s friendship with Kawabe and Yamashita (21, 88), her marital discord with her husband (115), and her growing dependence on alcohol.

Conclusion

As these examples demonstrate, translating children’s literature is subject to the assumed social and moral norms of adults. Adults’ attitudes toward children, including didacticism, underestimation of their ability, and prettification, are liable, whether consciously or not, to distort
translation that involves adaptation and transformation. The goal of internationalization of Japanese children's literature, according to Hirano, is for the target audience to understand both similarities and differences between their world and that of Japanese children and adolescents (37). But unfortunately, as we have seen, these desired results are not always compatible or commensurate with each other. The comparison of a Japanese boy to a samurai, for example, gives a pointed emphasis to the difference of the Japanese (66). This simplification is the equivalent of a caricature that curtails the identity of the people into an incomplete or biased image. At the other end of the spectrum, there is a message that underscores the similarity. We may recall here that the chief focus is on emphasizing the homogeneous mentality of boys, both in the East and West, attracted to a beautiful female teacher who looks like a screen actress (90). But this purpose is achieved by blurring the distinctive national sentiment among Japanese toward foreigners, called gaïjin. The process of translation is always influenced by the pull of conflicting goals: namely, intelligibility of the underlying similarities which encourage the young readers to overcome superficial differences and the charm of what is new and strange that broadens their horizons. A translator of children's literature must walk on a literary tightrope between cultural assimilation and separation. While a tightrope walker in a circus troupe is always caught in the beam of spotlight and is allowed to attract the audience's attention, a translator as an aesthetic high-wire artist is usually invisible. As well as the adult authoritarian will to "educate" children, the invisibility of a translator constitutes a major obstacle to translation of children's literature. Because translation is at its best a creative interpretation that conveys the spirit, vision, and style of the original into a second language faithfully and vividly, the voices of translators, who do their best to decide carefully for themselves where they place their work on the spectrum from faithful to liberal, are expected to bring fresh and illuminating insights into the concept of world literature for children.

Works Cited


