

A Study of Japanese Animation as Translation:

A Descriptive Analysis of Hayao Miyazaki and Other Anime Dubbed into English

Reito Adachi

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Background of This Study

With the rapid spread of multimedia (i.e., television, video games, the Internet, household electrical appliances, and advertisements), people enjoy audiovisual text—where word creates meaning in collaboration with image and sound—in their everyday lives. In addition, more and more audiovisual texts are being translated into a target language. In the past few decades, this activity has coincided with the advancement in the internationalization of the world culture and economy and with the improvement in technological innovation for multilingual support. Japanese animation, which is often abbreviated as *Japanimation*, or more simply *anime*, is one of those types of audiovisual media. *The White Paper on Science and Technology 2008* noted “the promotion of media arts . . . including movies and animations called ‘Cool Japan’ (Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan 239). Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry also regards Japanese manga and animation as part of a uniquely distinctive Japanese culture and designates them as the main components of the Cool Japan Strategy Promotion Program, the purpose of which is “to promote cultural industries (or creative industries, such as design, animation, fashion and movies) as a strategic sector for Japan.” This movement is supported by the popularity of Japanese animation in foreign countries.

According to Jerry Beck, an animation historian, 414 animated movies were released in America from 1937 through 2010. Of those animated films,

87 (21%) were Japanese animated movies that were translated into English. It is evident from the following data that the proportion of Japanese animated films compared with the total number of animation movies has been steadily growing: 14.9% from 1981 to 1991, 26.7% from 1992 to 2000, and 29.4% from 2001 to 2004 (Beck 1-323). Special Board of Contents Investigation (in the Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters, Cabinet Secretariat) conducted research on animated television programs around the world; in December 2003, the board revealed that Japanese animation accounts for about 60% of animated shows broadcast in the world (4). Japanese animated works have gradually garnered public and critical acclaim, as evident from the successes of *Pokémon: The First Movie*, *Spirited Away*, and *Atamayama (Mt. Head)*.

Pokémon: The First Movie was such a box-office success that, according to Box Office Mojo, it grossed approximately 85 million US dollars in America, a record that no other Japanese animated work has since broken. *Spirited Away* was honored with both the Golden Bear (the highest prize awarded for the best film at the Berlin International Film Festival) and the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2002. It was the first time in history that the Golden Bear had been awarded to an animated film. *Spirited Away* is the only translated work that has received the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. (The Academy Award for Best Animated Feature was established the previous year, with *Shrek*, a production of DreamWorks, as its first recipient). *Atamayama* was the winner of the 2003 Annecy Crystal Award (known as the Grand Prix until 2002) at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, which is one of the most prestigious

festivals celebrating artistic animated films.

The breakthrough successes of these Japanese animated works occurred at the turn of the twenty-first century. Lycos, a search engine and Web portal, announced that the most popular search term of 2001 and 2002 was *Dragon Ball* (Sherman). Although many other prominent news events happened in 2001 and 2002 (i.e., the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center; the circulation of the euro; and the 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan), *Dragon Ball* was the term that people all over the world were the most curious to learn about (Hamano 155).

0.2 The Influence of Japanese animation

Japanese animation affects American culture and society in several ways. The popularity of Japanese animation is mutually related to the sales of its associated goods, such as toys, video games, and character merchandise, in America. Pokémon, which first appeared in 1996 as characters in a Nintendo Game Boy game, is a typical example. For the first ten years from 1996 to 2005, Pokémon reportedly yielded a profit of 25 billion US dollars, equivalent to the gross domestic product for Bulgaria in 2005 (Kelts 89). According to the Japan External Trade Organization, the market scale of the animation business in America in 2002 was estimated to be 523.1 billion yen (8), 4.1 times as much as that of steel products imported from Japan in the same year (Iyama 5). Roland Kelts calls this phenomenon “colonization by anime” (91).

Japanese media art, including animation and video games, has added new words sometimes called Janglish or Japlish, such as *Janimation*, *anime*,

and *manga*, to the English lexicon.¹ These terms first appeared in major English language dictionaries in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the import of Japanese animation to America began to rise dramatically. The coinage of new words implies that a new genre with a distinctive visual language had been welcomed into the American consumer culture, thus leading to the development of a niche market in America.² Similar to how Akira Kurosawa is adored by America's most distinguished film directors (i.e., George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorsese), Japanese animation creators are admired by American animated film directors; for example, John Lasseter (director of *Toy Story*) has adopted Hayao Miyazaki as a sensei ("tutor") (Patten 214). Many critics detect a strong influence of Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* and Mamoru Oshii's *Kokaku Kidotai* (literal translation: "Mobile Armored Riot Police"; English title: *Ghost in the Shell*) in James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Hamano 40-60). Joel Silver, a famous Hollywood producer, also maintains that one of his films, *The Matrix*, was meant to create an impression of the live-action version of *Kokaku Kidotai*.

The influence of Japanese animation is felt in the work of non-Japanese animation creators and is to a large extent responsible for triggering the change in the relationship between audiovisual work and the audience. One marked characteristic of Japanese animation is that its popularity has spread across America, not only through traditional mass media (i.e., theater, television, and digital versatile disc [DVD]) but also via video-sharing Web sites on the Internet where fans can subtitle or dub videos of their own. In addition to receiving "licensed" translations made by professional translators,

fans of Japanese animation themselves have provided a variety of translations, which they find to be adequate. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the number of fan-subtitled and fan-dubbed versions (fansubs and fandubs) has increased on the Internet. These versions have sometimes affected “official” translations of Japanese animation. Although fansubbing and fandubbing constitute copyright infringement in countries that subscribe to the Berne Convention, they have had an alleged positive impact on the animation industry through its ability to generate publicity. The polyphonic dynamics of translational phenomena are characteristic of Japanese animation (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 37-38).

Japanese animation is an important factor in enhancing the engagement and motivation of Japanese learners overseas. Watching translated Japanese animated works stimulates viewers to learn Japanese so that they can enjoy these works in their original form. In addition, audiovisual works, including animation, are rich in information about Japanese culture and society, thus making this type of learning visually and aurally appealing. Therefore, audiovisual works, including animation, have a considerable potential to promote Japanese language education. According to a survey by the Japan Foundation, Japanese-language instructors have observed a growing interest in Japanese displayed by their students as a consequence of their fascination with Japanese animation and manga (Kumano and Hirotochi 56).

There is a report in the field of art education that children in America are influenced by Japanese animation and manga (Toku). From the 1990s onward, the esthetics of Japanese animation has differed from that of American animation. This difference in esthetics is apparent in the issue of

American *TV Guide* dated February 27, 2003, which had Yugi Muto, the main character of *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, on its cover. The depiction of Yugi Muto on this cover of *TV Guide* is typical of that of Japanese animated characters, who are known for their visually distinct physical features—namely, their extraordinarily large eyes, unique hairstyles, and unusual body shapes. Japanese animation often adopts photographic composition techniques to create perspective. In addition, medium shots and closeup shots are used to express action or state of mind effectively instead of long shots, which are dominant in traditional animation. Masami Toku, a professor of art education and art history at California State University, points out that the influence of Japanese animation and manga is seen in the pictures drawn by American children. American children who are exposed to Japanese animation become familiar with its distinctive grammar and naturally acquire a new kind of literacy, which they then express in their drawings (Toku).

0.3 Aims of the Dissertation

Despite the growing popularity and influence of Japanese animation in America, the importance of animation studies has not been appropriately recognized in the academic field. Although many studies discuss Japanese animation from the viewpoint of cultural studies and critique individual animation creators and animated works, there is a lack of systematic accumulation and organization of knowledge concerning the theory and history of animation (Tsugata, *Animeshon-gaku Nyumon* 104-15). There are several reasons for this gap in the research. One reason is that animation has had only a three-decade history since its rapid development in the 1980s.

Another reason is that, with the expansion of television, Japanese animation has spread widely to foreign countries in so short a time that the practice of translation has always preceded the study of translation theory. Yet another reason is the perception that animation is entertainment for children or is a kind of subculture at best, which is a contrary concept to high culture. Researchers at Japanese institutions in particular have adhered to this perception. Animation has only recently become an area of research and a subject of study at these institutions. Takamasa Sakurai criticizes animation research for its tendency to measure the popularity of Japanese animation in foreign countries based on numerical economic indicators, saying that “it lacks a view . . . toward young people who watch, read, and wear Japanese content” (9). To develop a better understanding of the actual popularity of Japanese animation overseas, it is essential first to assess fundamental studies of how Japanese animation is translated into English. It is a matter of course that it cannot be revealed how people in foreign countries have accepted Japanese animation without first knowing how the original Japanese versions have been changed in the process of translation.

Based on the abovementioned awareness of the issues involved, this study aims to clarify the characteristics of Japanese animation as cross-cultural translation. What happens to the text of Japanese animation in the process of translation is investigated through quantitative analysis using bi-directional parallel corpora and qualitative case study analysis to explore how the same content is expressed both in Japanese and English. Moreover, translational norms evolve according to changing times and society. The evaluation of Japanese animation in foreign countries changed markedly

around the turn of the twenty-first century. The influence of change on the translational attitude toward Japanese animation is also examined from a diachronic point of view.

0.4 Previous Studies

Translation studies had dealt mainly with written text until the 1970s when the idea of audiovisual translation (AVT) emerged from the theory of text typology. However, AVT was initially trivialized as a subgenre of the written text that was available in the mainstream. Descriptive translation studies then became influential in the 1990s when translation studies took a “cultural turn” from “a more formalist approach to one that laid emphasis on extra-textual factors related to cultural context, history and convention” (Palumbo 30). With the development of multimedia technologies, AVT attracted attention as a treasure trove of materials for descriptive translation studies. The study of AVT is now at the stage of identifying the characteristics of the multi-code text of AVT, which is uniquely different from the written text.

One approach used in the study of AVT is from a macro-contextual point of view. By adopting a broader view of the entire process of translation—from research to commercialization in relation to such issues as the social system, human factors, and market trends—scholars can examine the characteristics that are common to all types of AVT text and, in so doing, draw connections between AVT and social and cultural phenomena. The adoption of the macro-contextual approach has opened up new territory, thus allowing the discovery of interdisciplinary links between AVT and various fields of

study.

Another approach involves a micro-contextual point of view. This approach attempts to examine the process of creating meaning within AVT text through detailed analyses of interactions among multi-codes, including nonverbal factors. The micro-contextual approach goes one step further to develop some effective methods so as to shed light on the uniqueness of multi-code texts in various genres consisting of audiovisual media. Macro- and micro-contextual approaches play complementary roles to each other.

0.5 Scope of this Study

The meaning of speech and actions depend on the situation in which they occurs (Johnson 153). Translating an audio-visual text is particularly dependent on its context. As will be seen in Chapter 1, studies of AVT fall into two main groups, macro-contextual approaches and micro-contextual approaches (See 1.5). The present study highlights the detailed consideration of AVT texts from a micro-contextual viewpoint, concentrating on describing the specific phenomenon of how Japanese animation is treated in the process of translation. Micro-contextual approaches provide an effective methodological tool in breaking down a film into its frames, cuts and sequences, and conducting a detailed analysis of multimodal characteristics of audiovisual text.

On the other hand, how macro-context influences translation is a question which is beyond the scope of this present study. This is simply because a macro-contextual analysis of many Japanese animated films involves too complicated and diverse subjects to be treated here in detail.