

# From Text to Context: How English Stylistics Works in Japanese

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## 0. Introduction

In this study, I will discuss how stylistics works not only in English but also in Japanese. Firstly in section 1, I will review the role of English (education) in Japan. In section 2, I will show some examples of English styles which are adapted to Japanese in a creative manner. In section 3 I will discuss how to teach English and literature in an English classroom in Japan. In section 4, I will discuss how we can use literary texts effectively, referring to my own lessons in which Thomas Hardy's 'The Oxen' and Masaoka Shiki's (1867-1902) tanka poem are used in a classroom setting. I will pay special attention to the theory of 'from text to context'. Finally in section 5, I will discuss the issue of Free Indirect Discourse (FID) in English and Japanese, arguing that paying attention to this significant linguistic and stylistic phenomenon will help to improve 'language awareness' in both English and Japanese.

## 1. The role of English (Education) in Japan

In this section, I discuss how the status of English as the international language has been changing in Japan by considering the fact that as the economic tie between Japan and China has been becoming stronger rapidly, the Chinese language has become much more important to Japan.

Pursuing this issue, I also refer to the Japanese people's "negative reaction" to English. In his bestseller book, *The Dignity of the Nation*, Fujiwara argues:

Everyone always associates the Japanese word *kokusaijin*, "international person," with the English language. But there is no direct link between international people and the English language. My definition of an international person is someone who will be respected as a person when they go overseas.

As a high school student, I had enormous confidence in my English ability, and regularly took first or second place in all the mock exams. I was sure I was the best English student in Japan.

I was rather taken aback when I actually went to the United States and Britain and found that everyone spoke better English than I did. But what proportion of the Americans and the British can be described as "international people"? Less than a tenth, I would say, their ability to speak English is an irrelevance. Being taught English at elementary school is absolutely no guarantee of growing up to be an international person. (Fujiwara 2007 [2005]: 205-207)

In 2000, when Japan was suffering from a serious economic recession, the Japanese government was planning to designate English as the official language. While there are still many to support this measure, it should be pointed out that many Japanese feel uncomfortable about it. Fujiwara's argument is that the Japanese language is most important to Japanese, and, first and foremost, they should master Japanese, especially

Chinese characters, before starting to learn English.

Fujiwara's warning implies that in Japan where English is taught as the first foreign language, it has become much more important than before for an English teacher to emphasize that English education does not hinder Japanese education but actually they have a great combined effect. Thus one of the themes of this study is whether or not the study of English and English stylistics can enhance language awareness in both English and your native language.

## **2. How English style is adapted to Japanese**

In this section I show how the application of English style to Japanese works by focusing upon innovative phonological features in Japanese. While there has been no marked development in rhyme in the long history of Japanese, some Japanese with good command of English create innovative styles of Japanese by introducing English rhyming systems. For example, in the advertisement of a book written by a bilingual professor of international politics and politician, Kuniko Inoguchi, 'hirumanai! higamanai! hipparanai! ga aikotoba,' that means 'I never flinch, envy others success, nor cry over spilt milk', both alliteration and end rhymes are employed. This example seems to suggest that the Japanese who have a good command of English, stylistics specifically, can use even Japanese in a creative manner and also English skills are advantageous to become aware of creativeness in Japanese.

## **3. Teaching English through literature**

In this section I discuss how to use literary texts in an English classroom. As many studies, such as Hall (2005), suggest, literary texts have significant general merits for language education. For example, it is a good source to learn culture and thought from. Another merit is that literary text can be a good teaching material through which to learn a targeted language. To make these merits palpable, however, it is essential to consider how we can make the best use of a literary text or what we can do to produce a good reader of literature.

Brumfit (1986: 188), for example, argues:

The fundamental ability of a good reader of literature is the ability to generalize from the given text either to other aspects of the literary tradition or to personal or social significances outside the literature.

Discussing text and context, Durant and Fabb (1990: 25) also emphasize:

Received opinion about literature obscures actual contact with the text; and the best way to get around this is to strip away context and accumulated opinion: to read closely for yourself.

They seem to agree that overdependence upon an author's or a work's background can hinder students' autonomous interpretation. This is why not only the language teacher but also the literature teacher needs to encourage students to focus upon language. Thus, the principle of 'from text to context' is significant, not only to improve language skills and awareness, but also to understand, interpret and learn from the literary piece of work.

On the other hand, from a pedagogical point of view, especially when the students

are not familiar with the cultural background in a given text, we should consider to what extent the students need background information, and what should be given to students in advance. Therefore, while the principle of 'from text to context' is significant, we need to emphasize that (1) background knowledge is essential for a reader to tackle the text confidently and (2) the teacher's role is significant in encouraging students to associate a specific stylistic feature with a specific interpretation.

#### **4. Reading a poem through the pedagogical stylistic approach**

In this section I examine the validity of 'from text to context' as the reading theory and as the teaching method, using Hardy's famous poem, and Masaoka Shiki's tanka poem.

##### (A) 'The Oxen'

To analyze and teach 'The Oxen', I referred to Carter and Long's (1987) minute insightful analysis of the poem. The following shows how I used the poem in my language and literature classroom.

##### The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
'Now they are all on their knees,'  
An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
'Come; see the oxen kneel

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,'  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so.

I started my lesson by introducing the poem to the students as follows:

'The Oxen' was written at the turn of a century, from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>. Let's read the poem carefully and examine how the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century are reflected there.

Most students studied world history for the entrance examination and thus should have some background information. However, they are not literature majors and their background knowledge should not be considered as adequate enough. More

significantly, it is highly difficult for them (and Japanese students in general) to associate this poem with its social and historical background. Therefore, I asked the students the following questions so that they can associate the poem with the context more easily.

- (a) Do you know Charles Darwin? Do you know any of his books?
- (b) What did he say in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) ?
- (c) What are characteristics of the 19th century ? What are characteristics of the 20th century ?
- (d) Did they believe in God in the 19th century? How about in the 20th century or now?
- (e) Who are more satisfied with life, people in 19th century, 20th century, or 21st century?

Next I led the students to focus upon stylistic features. I emphasized some specific stylistic features.

- (1) Sentence structure: e.g. long VS short; simple VS complex, etc.
- (2) Which personal pronouns are used in each stanza?
- (3) Are there any modal verbs used?
- (4) How are these differences in style related to the theme of the poem?

The question (1) turned out to be a little difficult to my students (partly because English itself is difficult for them!). Some students, however, gave insightful answers, such as:

- (i) In the first two stanzas sentence structures are rather simple.
- (ii) In the third and fourth stanzas they are complicated; the first sentence in the third stanza is, for example, an inverted sentence and the next sentence, ‘Yet, I feel, if someone said [...]’ extends into the fourth stanza.

The questions (2) and (3) were, on the other hand, appropriate to many students. In fact, some students were able to connect these stylistic features with the background of the poem: while the use of the personal pronoun ‘we’ may reflect the ‘19<sup>th</sup> century’ aspects such as ‘trust in others’, and ‘community’, the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ and modal verbs (‘would’, ‘should’, and ‘might’) may reflect the ‘20<sup>th</sup> century’ aspects such as ‘loneliness’ and ‘scepticism’.

#### (B) Masaoka Shiki’s tanka poem

I used the same procedure (from text to context) in a classroom where language and culture are the main issue, by employing a Japanese tanka poem. Masaoka Shiki, a Japanese poet, argued that both tanka and haiku should be drawing, that is, represent things as they really are. The other significant background information is that he suffered from tuberculosis and a spinal caries, which made him bedridden, and was to die at a young age. The following tanka poem is considered as one of his masterpieces.

Kame ni sasu

瓶にさす

Inserted in the vase

Fuji no hanabusa

藤の花ぶさ

The Corolla of the Japanese wisteria

Was so short

Tatami no ue ni

たゝみの上に

The surface of tatami mat

Todoka zari keri

とゞかざりけり

couldn't reach

Placed in order, the poem can be translated as follows:

‘The corolla of the Japanese wisteria inserted in the vase was so short that it could not reach the tatami mat.’ (Translated by Teranishi)

However, the translation (from the ancient Japanese to modern Japanese and then to English) does not render the interpretation of this poem. The next task is to guess or discover what is implicit in this poem and to confirm how it is reflected in the language of the poem.

Even though the poet may attempt to represent things as they really are, he cannot take a perfectly objective position. I focus upon these two expressions: ‘short’ and ‘couldn't reach’, and asked the students whether they are positive or negative. They agreed that they are negative expressions.

The next question might be much subtler, but it should be much more significant, relevant to the theme of the poem:

Do you think it is possible for someone standing to see whether something reaches tatami mat from the above? From what perspective is the poet looking at the flower?

One of the students answered that ‘the poet must be looking at the wisteria from below’. One model answer is that the poet likens the flower to himself, who will soon die of the illness without making his dream come true. Judging from this student's response to the poem, the method of ‘from text to context’ seems to have worked in this lesson. As far as teaching of ‘The Oxen’ and Shiki's tanka poem is concerned, we could give the following (tentative) conclusions:

1. Students can guess the context from the text (with the teacher's guide)
2. The English stylistic analytical framework is applicable to Japanese language learning.
3. Students learn to focus upon textual features when reading any literary text.

## 5. Free Indirect Discourse in English and Japanese

Finally in this section I discuss the issue of FID in English and Japanese. I argue that comparing the natures of the different languages, the students can improve their language awareness in both English and Japanese.

According to Hirose (1995; 2010), there is no equivalent in Japanese to FID:

To begin with, in Japanese the phenomenon of so-called Free Indirect Speech (and Thought) cannot be the issue... Because it is possible to represent other person's consciousness as it is, unless the narrator (or reporter) employs public expression. (Hirose 2010: 27, translated by Teranishi)

Hirose (1995) defines 'public expression' and 'private expression' as follows:

[...] the private self is the subject of a private expression act, and the public self is the subject of a public expression act. [...] they are the subject of thinking and the subject of communicating, respectively [...]

Japanese has different words for private and public self. The private self is expressed by the word *zibun* 'self'. The public self, on the other hand, is expressed by a variety of self-reference such as *boku* 'I (male)', *watasi* 'I (formal)', *watakushi* 'I(very formal)', *ore* 'I (male, informal)' [...] (Hirose 1995: 230)

Thus in the following example extracted from the translated version of Ayako Miura's *Shiokari Pass*, the original Japanese word, *zibun* ('self') as a private expression, is translated into Free Indirect Thought in English.

(1) 信夫は「聖書の一節を」繰り返して二度読んだ。(2) 自分ははたして他の人のために命を捨てるほどの愛をもつことができるだろうか。

(1) Nobuo wa [seisho no issetu wo] kurikaeshi te nido yonda. (2) Zibun wa hatashite hokano hitono tameni inochi wo suteru hodo no ai wo motu koto ga dekiru darou ka.

(1) Nobuo read the passage [of the Bible] through again. (2) Did he really have enough love for somebody else to throw away his life for them?

(Bill and Sheila Fearnough (trans.), *Shiokari Pass*, cited in Hirose, 2010, pp 27-28. The underlining is mine.)

In both the Japanese original and English translation, (1) is narration of the character's action of reading. In (2), it is instructive to examine how differently key aspects of thought representation; personal pronouns, tense, and expressive elements (question here) are dealt with between the two versions. 'Zibun' or self in Japanese is changed to third-person pronoun 'he' in English, 'dekiru darou' is present-tense but in the English version past tense is used, and 'ka' is a postpositional particle to form question and thus in English a question mark is used.

So as Hirose points out, it is possible for the narrator to represent the other person's consciousness from his/her inside, by employing private expression instead of public

expression. Therefore, it may be inferred that the Japanese language does not have to rely on FID to represent someone's consciousness from his/her inside.

On the other hand, the following passage, extracted from Mishima Yukio's novel, *Megami* ('Goddess'), may be a rare case of FID in Japanese. In this passage, Shugo's wife is explaining to him that Shunji, whom Shugo wishes their daughter Asako to marry, has an illegitimate child. The narrator represents the thought of Shugo, who is shocked by this fact.

(1) それをきくあいだも、憐れな父親の耳には、晩夏の軽井沢で、彼の提案を突然遮った朝子の、哀切な高声がひびきつづけていた。

(2) 「あ！それはいけないわ。それだけはなさないで」

(3) 朝子はあの突然の変化を見せたころから、俊二の秘密を知りはじめていたにちがいないのだ。(4) なんとという苦しみを朝子はおりぬけて来たことか！(5) あの誇り高い娘が、ただ恋のために、なんとという屈辱と戦ってきたことか。(6) 今は娘は恋する男のそばにいる喜びだけで、うつろな目をして、ナイトクラブの椅子に座っているのだろう、(7) 嫉妬と屈辱に心はたえず痛み、しかも男から離れることができず、秘密にはそしらぬ顔をし、男を正面から難詰することもできないで。(8) 周伍の夢みた朝子の未来と、なんと似てもつかないみじめな蹉跎であろう。

(1) While listening to this, the pathetic voice of Asako, who had suddenly interrupted his suggestion in Karuizawa last year, was still loudly ringing in (her?) poor father's ears.

(2) "Ah! You must not do that (to ask Shunji whether he loves Asako), please. Don't ever do it."

(3) When Asako showed that sudden change of attitude, she must have begun to realize Shunji's secret. (4) What suffering Asako has endured! (5) What a disgrace my (?) proud daughter has fought against just for love! (6) My (?) daughter must be sitting on the chair in the nightclub, her eyes made blank from the pleasure of being with the man she loves, (7) her heart incessantly aching with jealousy and humiliation but still unable to leave him, pretending not to know the secret, even unable to look at the man from the front to blame him. (8) How completely different Asako's wretched stumbling is from the future Shugo has wished for her! (Mishima 2006: 138-9, translated by Teranishi. )

In this context, Shugo, the father, is completely mistaken about his daughter Asako's feelings: he believes that Asako is in love with Shunji, and that she hesitates to discover whether he loves her because she found that Shunji has an illegitimate child. But actually, Asako rejects her father's suggestion because she has fallen in love with another man and in this context she is not concerned with whether Shunji loves herself or not. So in this passage it seems that the omniscient narrator ironically echoes Shugo's thought.

The passage contains at least three stylistic features worth noting. Firstly, no past tense verbs are used from (3), which may encourage the reader to interpret the section from (3) to (8) as Shugo's Free Direct Thought (FDT). Secondly, in (4) and (8) exclamation marks (which are not included in Japanese orthography) are used, which encourages us to consider whether (4) and (8) are private expression or public expression. Finally in (8), the reference to Shugo by his name (not 'zibun' or self)

incites the reader to construct the presence of narrator.

Since my translation was made as literal as possible, present tense verbs employed in the original Japanese are retained as in the English version. So as far as the tense is concerned, it seems to be FDT or monologue with no narratorial intervention. However, (8) is worth noticing, because the reference to Shugo by his name may reflect the presence of narrator: this does not reflect the character's perspective. It seems like the prototypical ironical echo possibly produced by FID in English classical realist novels like that of George Eliot. Considering Mishima's profound knowledge on occidental literature (including English and French), I would say that here Mishima attempts to embody the narrative situation, equivalent to FID in English.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have attempted to demonstrate that the knowledge of English stylistics can help improve language awareness and thus communication skills even in our native language. While so-called 'communicative approach' popular in Japanese English education requires students to memorize fixed conversational phrases, generally such phrases have contextually limited use and offer few opportunities to consider the nature of English (still less of your native language). On the other hand, as I have argued, by examining by theory and practice how language works, pedagogical stylistic approach to literature will give the students more profound and universal knowledge of language. As far as my lessons are concerned, pedagogical stylistics can work in literature and language education in both English and Japanese.

I have also argued that the influence of foreign language(s) upon Japanese may be an issue to ponder in discussing Japanese classics. For this purpose, I have analyzed how Mishima stylistically deals with speech and thought presentation in his novel. Pursuing this issue further, we should examine other significant Japanese writers such as Nitobe Inazo, the author of *Bushido* (1899). I conclude this study by emphasizing that further studies are essential to reinforce the argument set forth here.

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