A Study of Translating Extra-Textual Expressions from a Non-English Language into English: A Case of Contemporary Japanese Computer-Mediated Communication

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Abstract
This study discusses how extra-textual elements found in computer-mediated communication (CMC) (such as smiley faces or emoticons) can effectively be translated between English and non-English languages. To approach this question the study focuses on Japanese CMC as CMC is quite advanced in Japan and is widely used by Japanese people (e.g., MSN or mobile e-mail); the Japanese language also integrates five different scripts when written, which can be further applied in translations from other languages. The study firstly analyses how professionals have attempted to handle these non-textual parts in translation when they explain the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Japanese CMC, and it finds that in general intersemiotic translation is a major method of handling such extra-textual elements (other than emoticons which are basically left in their original forms). After a review of previous translation methods, the study considers how these elements can be more effectively translated, in particular using an intrasemiotic means of translation in order to convey the meaning of the original message more directly without loss of some extra-textual meaning. The discussion focuses on cultural aspects and foreignness, giving case studies for a few elements which very frequently occur in Japanese CMC.

Keywords
intrasemiotic translation, Japanese-English translation, emoticons, computer-mediated communication (CMC)

1. Introduction

In the study of sociolinguistics, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has gained growing attention, and non-textual elements in CMC texts are one of the main foci of CMC studies. With the growth of CMC studies in English, CMC other than English has also gained increasing attention (Danet & Herring 2007: 5), and this has raised the issue of how to translate such extra-textual but important message conveyers for readers other than non-native speakers of the source language in order not to lose meaning. This translation of extra-textual meanings will become increasingly significant in the current environment of rapid growth of intercultural communication using the multi-language platform of smart phones. It is highly probable that non-specialists from the general public, i.e., not academic specialists, will be asked to translate messages containing non-linguistic elements at some point in their
lives. In even more serious cases, these aspects may play an important part in a lawsuit. In this respect, to pay attention to the extra-textual elements in translating is a logical step under conditions of globalisation and this study will discuss this topic with a special focus on English and non-English language translation, using Japanese as an example of non-English language since Japanese people commonly utilise CMC in their daily life and Japanese-English translation is a challenging task even at the textual level. The study firstly reviews how previous Japanese CMC studies have handled this issue, then discusses several issues in translating these elements and gives some suggestions as shown in few case studies.

2. Japanese language

The Japanese language utilises five types of script: Hiragana, Katakana, Kanji, Romaji and Arabic numerals. The Hiragana syllabary represents the sounds of Japanese and there are forty-six of them (e.g., あ, い, う, え, お, か, き, く, け, こ). The Katakana syllabary is mainly used to spell foreign loan words, representing the same sounds as Hiragana (e.g., ア, イ, ウ, エ, オ, カ, キ, ク, ケ, コ). Kanji are Chinese characters; (e.g., Sunday to Saturday in Kanji can be written as 日, 月, 火, 水, 木, 金, 土). Romaji are the letters of the Western alphabet. Japanese writing also uses Arabic numerals. Of these five scripts, Hiragana and Katakana are native Japanese writing systems, whereas the other three share properties with language systems from some other countries. Writing in Japanese is a combination of these scripts.

3. Translation and elements that are translated

The task of translation can be seen as translating several elements in written languages into other sign systems. Munday (2001) defines translation as having three directions:

- **intralingual:** translation, or ‘rewording’: ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language’;
- **interlingual:** translation, or ‘translation proper’: ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language’; and
- **intersemiotic:** translation, or ‘transmutation’: ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal sign systems’ (Munday 2001: 5).

In order to focus on extra-textual elements in translation, this study mainly deals with the issue of intersemiotic translation, since these aspects are part of the non-verbal sign system. Gottlieb (2005) gives a further explanation of inter/intra semiotic translation: