

Not Crossing the Boundary: What is Untranslatable in Japanese-English Bilingual Literature

Abstract

The act of choosing the language(s) with which one expresses oneself, or the decision of crossing a boundary of languages, is deeply related to one's identity. If this is considered in the context of Japanese literature, Japanese authors started writing in other languages (e.g. Kyoko Mori, Yoko Tawada) in the 1990s. Around the same time, non-Japanese writers, such as Levy Hideo and Arthur Binard, started publishing works written in Japanese. While this "crossing the boundary of the Japanese language" in both directions has been taking place, one could also find some authors who chose not to choose one language, but decided to mix several. This is called bilingual literature, where the authors use more than one language within the same text, often without translation, such as in the case of *Shishosetsu From Left to Right*, by Minae Mizumura (1995), or *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), by Hiromi Goto. Both these writers mix English and Japanese languages in the text, the former text being published in Japan, and the latter in Canada. This type of work is unique, since what it is transmitted, which could be considered a gap between two languages or cultures, or the disturbing sense of not being able to understand the complete text, refuses translation, at least into the "second" language used in these novels. It might also suggest what these authors consider "not translatable", for either linguistic or cultural distance (or both). In the current study, the language and cultural "hybridity" of the above mentioned works of Minamura and Goto will be analysed, partly in relation to the concept of the translatability in translation studies.

Introduction

The discussion on (un)translatability is something long established in the field of translation studies (see for example, Munday 2008, p.28). The general consensus today seems to be that there is no such thing as absolute untranslatability (De Pedro 1999, p.556). However, this general agreement might not hold when we turn to the field of literature, where some authors challenge this idea of translatability by expressing what they think is untranslatable - something which can be expressed in one language but not in another, or something that can be expressed only by using several languages at the same time. What regarded as untranslatable are not mere cultural terms or linguistic differences between two languages, but something broader. This not only concerns language, but also includes all that language can imply, such as culture, history, power relations or national/personal identity. There are many possible ways to express such themes using language in literary works. For example, when the author has more than two languages, the act of choosing one language, or choosing one and then later translating his/her own text into another, or not choosing any one language could all be a very conscious decision related to such themes.

In the present paper, I will focus on the last of the above cases – when an author decides not to choose one language to construct his/her literary world, but rather to maintain two languages within one text. The paper will discuss what might have been regarded as untranslatable by the author and reasons for this. To find some culturally loaded terms written in a second language is quite common, especially in post-colonial literature. However, the works discussed in the present paper might be called bilingual literature, given that the second language used appears quite extensively in the text. Sometimes this usage is mere terms, but quite often it is paraphrases, phrase or even paragraphs. Most importantly, translation of the second language into the main language of the text is not provided in those works.

Two novels will be discussed here: *Shishosetsu from left to right*, by Minae Mizumura (1995), and *Chorus of Mushrooms*, by Hiromi Goto (1997). In both works, two languages –

Japanese and English – are used, though in the former, the main language is Japanese, whereas it is English in the latter. In both works, the use of the “second” language is quite extensive and carried out without providing translation, which makes it almost impossible to fully understand the text, if the reader does not have at least some knowledge of both languages.

In the following section, some background knowledge related to the theme of this paper will be presented. The next sections will provide an overview of *Shishosetsu from left to right* and *Chorus of Mushrooms* respectively. This will be followed by a section which will analyse the use of a second language in those texts, followed by a discussion on what the languages represent in these works, in relation to such concepts as nationality and personal identity – all in exploring what the authors regard as untranslatable.

Background

The Debate on Translatability

De Pedro (1999) explains the two most traditional positions in this debate in the field of translation studies as universalist and monadist. The former, represented by theorists such as Eugene Nida, believes that the “existence of linguistic universals ensure translatability (p.546)”, whereas the latter, represented by Edward Sapir, argues that “each linguistic community interprets reality in its own particular way and this jeopardises translatability (p.546)”.

The monadist position, which emphasizes the role of language in creating reality (thus different languages create different realities) coincides with what Mizumura and Goto both argue, as will be seen in later sections. Within the field of translation studies, however, it would be considered difficult to prove this concept of (un)translatability. It is true that linguistic differences between two languages, and the lack of directly equivalent terms

(especially in the case of culturally loaded terms) could make translation a very complicated process, but in many cases, these difficulties – or translation problems – are far from making translation of the whole text impossible, especially when the translator is familiar with the use of various strategies in dealing with these problems. Another case to be considered is when the essence of the text lies in the form of language itself. This is the case with many literary texts, especially poetry. There the impossibility of the perfect translation would be more apparent, as translation strategies to convey meanings will be of no use. De Pedro also mentions the tendency to establish a dichotomy between linguistic and cultural untranslatabilities. This is not only about the difficulty of translating culturally loaded terms, but also includes the different interpretations and/or impossibility of understanding the cultural issues within the source text by the readers of the target text.

As mentioned above, the current mainstream attitude within translation studies is closer to the universalist stance, although there would be agreement that a perfect translation without any loss from the original text is not attainable either, especially in the case of literary translation. As De Pedro points out: “...the consensus now seems to be that absolute untranslatability, whether linguistic or cultural, does not exist.” (De Pedro 1999, p.556). Given that the field focuses on identifying various translation problems and their solutions, this would be the natural tendency as well. As Peter Newmark writes in his classic 1988 book, *A Textbook of Translation*: “The principle with which this book starts is that everything without exception is translatable; the translator cannot afford the luxury of saying that something cannot be translated”. (p.6)

However, this general argument in translation studies does not seem to be necessarily replicated when we turn to the field of literature. Mizumura, in one of her articles, titled “On Translation” (2003a), writes:

On the one hand, I want to bring the reader's attention to the materiality of the Japanese language (or theoretically, of any language) as that which resists translation. (...) the possibility of translation has become so much taken for granted in Japan that the Japanese are often no longer aware of the problem inherent in an act of translation, let alone in an act of translation between two languages as far apart as English and Japanese. (p.5)

Where to Place Bilingual Literature?

Japanese immigrant literature flourished and became visible from the mid-1970s (Yamaguchi, 2000). It was mostly written in English, and it was not unusual to find the Japanese language in the text. In those works, however, the use of a “second language” in the text was mostly limited to the level of words. Hirabayashi explains that “(in immigrant literature, which has an omnitemporal viewpoint and incorporates two cultures in one story, two languages are deliberately used (Hirabayashi, 2010, my translation)”, and in that sense it is clear that *Shishosetsu from left to right*, and *Chorus of Mushroom*, belong to the category of Japanese immigrant literature. However, the use of the second language in those works is much more extensive than merely at the level of words.

Another literary genre which is highly relevant when focusing on these two bilingual works is cross-boundary literature, or *Ekkyo Bungaku*, which became popular in 1990s within Japanese literature. As the name suggests, this genre consists of works which “cross” some sort of boundary, which normally consists of nations, cultures or languages. These are authors who are not Japanese nationals, nor natives, but who use Japanese to write their work, such as Levy Hideo, or Arthur Binard, or Japanese natives who write in other languages, such as Yoko Tawada, or Kyoko Mori. Strictly speaking, at least in terms of language, bilingual literature may suggest the decision of the author not to cross the cultural or linguistic border,

but to maintain the two worlds to which they belong. However, the fact that the author had to face the border between two countries, two cultures, and two languages is definitely relevant to what characterises cross-boundary literature.

Shishosetu from left to right, and Chorus of Mushrooms

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Shishosetsu from left to right, by Mizue Minamura, was published in Japan in 1995. *Shishosetsu*, or “I-novel”, is a genre of Japanese literature in which the author writes about what seems to be his/her own life. After using this term, which is distinctively associated with Japanese literature, the author continues the title with an English paraphrase *from left to right*, which indicates that the text is written horizontally from left to right within the book, contrary to the Japanese tradition of writing texts vertically and from right to left. This is, in a way, something out of necessity if the author tries to use a significant amount of English in the text, but the title could also be read as a manifestation of the co-existence of two traditions, or two cultures.

The novel attracted compelling attention in Japanese literary circles when it was published (Mizobuchi 2006, Iguchi 2001, etc.), as the first real bilingual novel using Japanese and English. The main language of the novel is Japanese, but a substantial amount of English is used at the level of words, paraphrases, phrases and paragraphs, without providing a Japanese translation. There are almost no two consecutive pages without some parts written in English.

As the title suggests, *Shishosetsu* is an autobiographical novel. The protagonist, Minae, moves from Japan to U.S. when she is twelve years old, because of her father’s work. What originally seems to be a temporal move, though, becomes a prolonged stay, due to her father’s changing the position within his company. Eventually, the family breaks up because of her

father's illness and her mother's extramarital relationship. However Minae and her elder sister, Nanae, stay on in U.S. The novel is about Minae growing up in a new country, a new culture and a new language to which she never really wants to adapt, despite the fact that she ends up entering a Ph.D. programme at one of the Ivy League universities. The novel ends when she decides to abandon her Ph.D. studies, in order to return to Japan to become a writer, who writes in Japanese.

English is used without providing Japanese translation in conversation, for names, expressions, monologues, and in Minae's diary. Apart from the contents, the visual impact of the mixed letters – the Latin alphabet and Japanese characters – is quite remarkable. This extensive use of the second language within the text, without providing translation, is not only for the purpose of “re-creating the reality” lived by the bilingual protagonist, but also a very conscious choice to express the author's opinion about untranslatability, at least into certain languages. Mizumura (1998) writes:

Indeed, it would be possible to translate *Shishosetsu* from left to right into any other language in the world, be it Korean, Polish or Arabic, and still replicate its bilingual form by leaving the English sentence intact. The only language into which it would be impossible to translate the work would be English. (p.6)

***Chorus of Mushrooms* by Hiromi Goto**

This novel was published in Canada in 1994. As in the case of *Shishosetsu*, the work is partially autobiographical, though it has many fantastical elements and a rather complicated structure. The author, Hiromi Goto, moved to Canada with her parents - who ran a mushroom farm - and her grandmother, when she was three years old. She is Japanese-Canadian and her first language is English, though she learned the Japanese language and culture when she

grew up (Yamaguchi, 2000). In the novel, the two protagonists are Muriel, the alter-ego of the author, and Naoe, her grandmother. The overall structure of the novel is Muriel telling her Canadian boyfriend the story told by her grandmother, but the storyteller's voice alternates between Muriel, Naoe and the third person. Even though the family has lived for twenty years in Canada when the story starts, Naoe can communicate only in Japanese. Muriel and her parents can only speak in English, but Muriel and the grandmother manage to have very close contact, when Naoe tells her granddaughter various stories, which Muriel later recounts to her boyfriend.

The main language of the text is English, but a substantial amount of Japanese without English translation is used at the level of words, paraphrases, phrases and short paragraphs, and for Naoe's or other Japanese **character's** speech. For the most part the Japanese is transcribed, using the Latin alphabet (though distinguished from the English text by the use of italics), but some Japanese characters are also used.

What is Untranslatable?

The Use of English in *Shishosetsu*

For the purpose of this paper, all the Japanese words originally written in that language are transcribed using the Latin alphabet. English is used in various parts in *Shishosetsu*, as follows:

- a. Minae's diary: Though Minae's first language is Japanese, she writes her diary only in English. This is explained by the fact that her computer at the time does not have software to write Japanese letters.
- b. Minae's speech: Frequent changes between the two languages can be seen in monologue and speech by the protagonist. As the novel is written in the first person, this code-switching might be an attempt to re-create her actual mental voice. English appears in proper nouns (e.g.

“Long Island” p.40.), nouns that are not imported into Japanese as loan words (e.g. “carry-on luggage” p.16), nouns that are imported into Japanese as loan words but pronounced as English words by Minae (e.g. “Colonian Style” p.40.), U.S. systems, customs and institutions (e.g. “high school” p.20, “Christmas” p.128), verbs (e.g. “*darega* arrange *shitano*?” p.232) and onomatopoeias (e.g. “Puff! Puff! *to kemuri wo hakitsuzuketa*” p.135).

c. Nanae’s speech: In the speech of her sister, Nanae who “uses English maybe ten times more than I do in her speech, not only that, her English is full of slang” (p.10, my translation) , code-switching is much more frequent when Nanae speaks with Minae. English is mainly used for interjection (e.g. “Jesus” p.21, “Gee” p.24.), verbs (e.g. “unplug *shitenno*” p.23), adverbs (e.g. “*Tsuitawayo*. Finally.” p.23), as well as English words and full sentences mixed with Japanese speech.

d. Conversation between Minae and her American friends, teachers, etc., is all written in English.

e. What Minae imagines as American people’s thinking and conversation is all written in English.

Though the use of second language might seem diverse, on looking closely, one can see a very clear practice for when the author uses English in the text. All the communication Minae has (and imagines) in English, as well as all the words she pronounces as English words, are written in English. This means everything which does not sound to her ears as properly pronounced English – be it loan words whose pronunciation are naturalised into Japanese, or even English sentences spoken with a very strong Japanese accent by her mother or her boyfriend - are all transcribed phonetically in *katakana*, or the Japanese alphabet (e.g. “Ai amu soly mai ingulisshu izu so puaah” p. 82, for “I am sorry my English is so poor”, the line spoken by her Japanese boyfriend). This almost cruel division and attitude is commented upon by Iguchi (2001):

...it is, in a sense, both striking and shocking that Mizumura was bold enough to publish this novel, considering that Japan is a highly monolingual society. English is taught at every secondary school in Japan; however, since there are few opportunities to make contacts with native English speakers, the Japanese speak notoriously awful and unintelligible English, to the extent that their English is often the target of ridicule. (p.65)

The Use of Japanese in *Chorus of Mushrooms*

Unlike *Shishosetsu from left to right*, the novel *Chorus of Mushrooms*, for the most part, does not mix letters from the two languages – this is to say, the Japanese used in the text is transcribed using the Latin alphabet, though it is written in italics, except in two scenes mentioned below. As a result, it is not as visually striking as the text of *Shishosetsu*, but this is undoubtedly due to the difference of the target readers. Whereas Mizumura could expect Japanese readers of her work to be able to read, and to some extent understand English, Goto could not expect her Canadian readers to know any Japanese language, let alone to be able to read its characters. While she dares to use a substantial amount of Japanese in her text, to the extent that Yamaguchi (2000) comments in her article that “the general reaction of readers is that they find it exotic and attractive, but at the same time, find it a little frustrating that they did not understand” (my translation), forcing readers to stare at characters that they cannot even pronounce might have been impossible. The following are examples of Japanese is used in the text:

a. Naoe’s speech: This is the major part of Japanese used in the novel. It is used in Naoe’s monologue and in conversation with Muriel, at the level of sentences (e.g. “*Ohairi kudasai! Dozo ohairi kudasai!*” p.4), proper nouns (e.g. “*Uba-sute yama*”p.62), words (nouns,

adjectives) mixed with English (e.g. "...*midori* green bamboo, *daikon*..." p.5), onomatopoeias and mimetic words (e.g. "*sara sara sara*" p.5), Songs (e.g. "*Teru teru bozu, teru bozu*..." p.6), set phrases (e.g. "*Mukashi mukashi omukashi*..." p.7) and interjections (e.g. "*Ara!*" p.175).

She also writes her name using Chinese characters.

b. The speech of Naoe's relatives in Japan is written using Japanese characters.

c. Family titles: Words such as *otosan*, *okasan*, *obachan* (dad, mom and grandma respectively) are used constantly throughout the novel.

d. Part of the speech between Muriel and her boyfriend

e. A newspaper article about Naoe

Translation Strategies

Though the second language is used in the parts mentioned in above without providing any translation into the main language, sometimes the author uses strategies for the reader to be able to capture the meaning expressed in the second language. The following are some examples of translation strategies used by the authors ("M" stands for *Chorus of Mushrooms*, "S" stands for *Shishosetsu from left to right*):

a. Writing the translation right after the term: ("MOMA *wa* Museum of Modern Art – *Nyuu Yook kindai bijutsukan de aru.*") (S, p.39)

b. Writing the description right after the term: ("small jobs *to iu* *arubaito teki na shigoto de...*") (S, p.37)

c. Adding some words/paraphrases to be able to guess the meaning of the term: ("Shhh, *shizukani*") (M, p.9)

d. The rest of the sentence helping to understand the meaning of the term: ("It is the most *atataakai* room in the house because the heat from dryer turning, the sun through the window") (M, p.41)

However, these examples are few and far between, and mostly used to explain some terms in the second language, but not phrases or paragraphs. This shows that it was thought necessary to express most of the parts written in the second language as such, without making the text "smooth" by providing the translation.

Language, Translation and Identity – What Does Language Represent?

As has been seen, by consciously choosing "not to choose" one language, the two works raise questions regarding both the concept of translatability and cross-boundary literature. These two novels address the first question by asserting that there are messages that cannot be "made easy to understand" by writing the whole text in one language - that there are things that cannot not be translated. Both novels address the latter question by showing that acquiring two languages and cultures does not necessarily mean that one has to "cross the cultural or linguistic boundary" to the other side. It could also be seen as examples of "transcultural formation of individuals" (Welsch, 1999, web edition) – multicultural connections which are decisive in cultural formation of many of us today.

The following section will explore what is considered untranslatable by the two authors in question.

Multilingual Reality, Multilingual Literature – Re-Creating Reality

It is not a coincidence that both works treat autobiographical themes. Both authors grew up in a bilingual world, where misunderstanding and the inability to express oneself would be experienced frequently, and where communication was not something to take for granted.

Much of it remains untranslated in my texts because, although books often make transparent the translation for narrative purposes, language in everyday life doesn't work that way. We don't live with universal translators. If you don't know the word, meaning is not always accessible. What then? You ask someone or you look it up. Or you don't bother and you never know. (Goto, Indiebound interview)

At school, my classmates were all adolescents who were then developing their inner lives. The adults' community, where people were hierarchized according to their abilities to use language, was being formed. I had to learn there that a person who could not use language was not a person. (*Shishosetsu* p.195, my translation)

This impossibility for communication is expressed with special clarity in the excerpt from *Shishosetsu* above, where inequality at language level immediately means inequality of status within the community. The protagonist is forced to accept the reality that her fluency in Japanese means very little, and in the English monolingual society where she grows up, she cannot expect to be treated as an equal until she gains the ability to express herself in "their" language. She has to accept that "they" would not even spare a thought that she might be fully intellectually functional in another language. An excerpt from Goto's interview shows a similar point, though it might not be as acute as that of Minamura. Goto argues that when there are various languages, the risk of miscommunication or the impossibility of communication is a reality. Providing translation to assure that monolingual readers can

understand everything written about the multilingual reality would be pure fiction in itself, as we do not live with a “universal translator”.

What is apparent in both excerpts above is that the use of two languages is an attempt to re-create the lived in reality. The helplessness of the impossibility of communication, the sense of being treated as an inferior have to be experienced by monolingual readers, just as they were experienced by the authors in question. In that sense, it might be also possible to consider that what is untranslatable for the author is not necessarily only the contents expressed in the second language, but also the style of the text itself – that it is a reproduction of the multilingual experience that they grew up with, which could not be changed into something simpler by providing translation into the main language.

“Materiality” of Language

A Multilingual reality, where communication is not to be taken for granted is one of the themes considered as “untranslatable” by Mizumura and Goto. In other words, it is the bilingual experience itself that could not be reduced into one of the two languages. However, apart from the reconstruction of reality, Mizumura (1998) also writes:

By juxtaposing the two languages, what I hoped to convey above all was the irreducible materiality of the Japanese language. (...) I tried, through the Japanese language, to make a case for the irreducible materiality of all languages, the reason for which writing even in the most local of all the local languages becomes a worthwhile activity in itself. (p.6)

This “materiality of Japanese” (or of all languages) is also mentioned in another article by Mizumura (2003a), *On Translation*. Though she does not define nor explain what exactly she means by this term, there are some phrases in *Shishosetsu* which might be relevant:

He was familiar with both worlds, of the Japanese and the English language, so he knew that language creates persons – rather, he knew that it was language that creates the worlds.

As a renowned translator, he was not in a position to easily refuse the translatability of languages. Precisely because he was constantly exploring the limit of translation, he must have been cherishing the originality that exists in the essence of each language, which could not be converted into other languages. (p. 382, my translation)

Levy Hideo (2010), a representative figure of the cross-boundary literature mentioned earlier, shows a similar view on languages:

Even if we understood that everything – nationality, race, ethnicity, DNA and all – is just a fiction, still, it is true that each language has its history, and it can never escape from its originality. (p.120, my translation)

Maybe for the very fact of being multilingual, these authors might feel strongly about the originality of each language which could not be transferred into other languages, and this point would definitely be one of the reasons for choosing the bilingual text form. However, though Mizumura mentions the materiality of Japanese in various places and explains that it is one of the reasons for writing *Shishosetsu*, we only have to notice that in the novel, the “main language” is Japanese, with what is “untranslatable” written in English, and not vice versa. In

that sense, it might not be clear whether the work demonstrates what exactly the materiality of the Japanese language is.

Languages as Representation

Apart from the “practical” necessity of using two languages to be able to express what the authors are trying to express, it seems obvious that this choice is also based on what language represents for them. In other words, if the reasons seen so far have to do with language itself, there also seem to be other reasons, which are to do with what language “can indicate”: “And from that day, when we decided, neither of us could speak a word in Japanese. Not a word would pass our lips. We couldn’t even think it. And I was ashamed. I felt a loss so fine it pierced my heart. Made it ache. So I stopped talking.” (p.207, *Chorus of Mushrooms*)

In the excerpt above, Muriel’s father is explaining to her, now a grown-up, why her parents did not teach her Japanese. From the moment they decided to immigrate to Canada, they both lost the Japanese language completely. Though her father could read texts in Japanese, neither of them could speak a word of it. Japanese was wiped out from their memory – for having chosen “another land”, and he “was ashamed” of having lost his Japanese. Here language is used as a representation of other things, of what Japanese immigrants left behind. It represents country, nationality, and possibly culture.

The experience of living and growing up between various cultures and languages means that one has to face questions that the majority of people might not confront until much later, if ever. Where does one belong? Which world is one really part of? What does country or nation mean? Is nationality really something innate, as people around one seem to think? What is nationality to begin with, and how is it defined? “Soon, I had to realize that the proof

of being Japanese was not in the blood. Then I started pursuing it day and night in the Japanese language” (p.440, *Shishosetsu*, my translation).

Minae clings to language to preserve her identity as Japanese in the U.S., when she realizes that her race, or being Asian does not guarantee anything about her being Japanese in a multi-ethnic society. The connection between language and national identity is very common and often used politically, but in this particular case, one must realize that the fact that Minae has to cling to the Japanese language itself shows that she was not really a member of the community she wanted to think she was part of. Mizobuchi (2006) writes:

For those who live in “Japan”, speaking in “Japanese” and having “Japanese nationality”, whether or not they have a high level of “Japanese language” ability is not related to their Japanese identity. It is just obvious for them to express themselves in the “Japanese language”, and these issues are not even consciously thought about. When “Minae” clearly realized this point and felt her own difference, her illusion of identifying with “Japan” and her wish to “succeed” the “authentic” “Japanese” (...) crumbled away. (p.107, my translation)

The experience one has of dual languages and cultures is irreversible, and by having to recognize the relativity of both, one cannot “come back to be” in the state where one can be unconscious of the lack of absoluteness in some pillars of one’s personal identity, for example, nationality. Minae improves her Japanese through reading works of modern Japanese literature, but without her realizing it, her Japanese develops into something old-fashioned and unnatural, and not the living language spoken today.

This representative power of language is repeatedly mentioned by Mizumura, not just in the novel but in various essays. Choosing Japanese, rather than English, as the language in which to write her works seems to be a central theme – “I always know that I am not just writing but that I am writing in Japanese. This knowledge is at the basis of why I write.”, “On the one hand, I have rather a megalomaniacal agenda. I write to prevent the world from succumbing to the tyranny of English. (...) On the other hand, I have a less megalomaniacal and more practical agenda. I write to see what I can do with the Japanese language.(...) I can only think of the language as belonging to no one but that which allows us to belong to it.”(Mizumura, 2003b, p.3).

What can be seen here is Minae’s “Japanese language” as something she had to constantly fight in order to preserve its level, trying to maintain a part of her identity. This is in stark contrast to, for example, Yoko Tawada, another representative author of the cross-boundary literature genre. Having grown up in Japan and now writing both in Japanese and in German, Tawada writes:

The Japanese language goes on changing, by being used by various kinds of people. I, too, go on changing the Japanese that I speak by being influenced, for example, by German. I think the most important thing is whether I can accept this fact as a stimulus for creation, and as a natural environment.
(Tawada 2007, p.41, my translation)

The difference in attitude seen here might be in relation to the language one had to constantly fight to protect and preserve as the core of one’s identity, and the language which could develop fully before being exposed to the outside influence.

Having to grow up in two worlds can also mean that one develops various identities, which is also represented by the bilingual style of the texts. The fact that both works are autobiographical and that other works by these authors are all monolingual seems to strengthen this point. In both works, the protagonists are given two “names” – one for the self in the world of Japanese, another for the self in the world of English. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe, the grandmother who speaks only Japanese, calls her granddaughter *Murasaki*, though her “real” name is Muriel. *Murasaki* means purple in Japanese, and though it is not common as a name, it has a very strong connotation of Japanese ancient culture, and of Murasaki Shikibu, the author of the Japanese classical literature, *The Tale of Genji*. In other words, it is a term loaded with Japanese cultural connotations. In *Shishosetsu*, the protagonist tells what the “home” where they lived with their parents meant for her and her sister: “For us sisters living in a foreign country, going back to that place meant that we could communicate in Japanese all the time, and could become 奈苗(*Nanae*) and 美苗(*Minae*) again, from being Nanae and Minae. It was the homeland.” (S. p.40, my translation)

The name Minae is written 美苗 in Japanese, and its pronunciation and intonation change when it is uttered in English. It makes sense that she associates “herself in English” with the name Minae, written and “pronounced” in the Latin alphabet, whereas “herself in Japanese” preserves the original name. It is, therefore, impossible to translate the whole text into one of the languages without eliminating one of the “selves” expressed in these works. Mizobuchi (2006), in her article on *Shishosetsu*, elaborates on this point:

Placing two identities on one’s right and left side, and saying that self is not either of them, might mean that the naked, or “true self” belongs somewhere else. However, I don’t think the literary style of this novel which is a mixture of different languages means that. Rather, I see it as an attempt to show the

pain of Minae's system splitting up, her system where "English" and "Japanese" languages and cultures are mixed and co-exist breaks up each time it receives some stimulus. (p. 109, my translation)

Mizobuchi continues, noting that this impossibility of belonging to any one static point or location and making it the core of identity leads to doubt about systems, such as nationality and nation, internalized by so many. She concludes that the resistance to such a system is what makes the style of *Shishosetsu* what it is.

Two Worlds, Two Identities – and?

It might be insightful to compare the chosen bilingual style of the two works discussed in this paper in the context of self-translation. There are bilingual writers who write in one language, and then write the same work again in another – or "self-translate". In one sense, this self-translation is also about the writers who "choose not to choose one particular language", but decide to "translate". Akikusa (2013, p.160), in an article, says that choosing one language to write in is in itself a political act, and whether or not one wishes it, this act results in categorizing literary works within such frameworks as "national language" and "national literature". However, bilingualism and self-translation imply a deviation from this and can cause turmoil in those seemingly static categories.

As we have seen, the bilingual literature discussed here implies a decision not to translate, not to "simplify" the text, and to argue that there are elements which cannot be translated. The elements behind this are the uncomfortable feeling of lack of communication, the co-existence of different cultures and the communities that one simultaneously belongs to, and dual identities. The dual elements co-exist but do not merge, as shown by the texts partially written in one language and partially in another, without making an attempt to bridge

them. Self-translation, in comparison, can be seen as an attempt to merge two systems within oneself, whatever elements which belong to one of the worlds is expressed in both languages. Akikusa cites the Canadian bilingual author, Nancy Huston, as an example. Huston describes self-translation as an immensely satisfactory experience of curing oneself which had been split up into two, and becoming one and the same person in both languages (Akikusa 2013, p.168).

This comment by Huston is a very strong statement about the attempt to, if not merge, then connect two identities constructed in two different languages. By self-translating, she manages to tell the same story in both voices and thus become one person. However, in the case of these bilingual works, the act of self-translation for the purpose of making two worlds to completely overlap was not the solution chosen by the authors. If anything, by the existence of two completely different languages (sometimes visually as well) without translation, the division between two worlds deepens, unless the reader is also familiar with both languages.

Is there then no possibility of reconciling and merging? Maybe it is worth mentioning that in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, if not the languages, at least the two cultures merge and become something new. In this autobiographical novel, which has some elements of fantasy, Naoe, the grandmother who speaks only Japanese, transforms into a young woman calling herself “Purple Mask” (and thus merging herself with *Murasaki*, the Japanese self of the protagonist, who has the name meaning “purple”), participating and winning in the rodeo competition. In other parts of the novel, Japanese folktales transform the stories as they are being told by the protagonist, incorporating variety of modern and western elements from chocolate to feminism:

An immigrant story with a happy ending. Nothing is impossible. Within reason, of course.

When does one thing end and another begin?

Can you separate the two?

(p.211-212, *Chorus of Mushrooms*)

Conclusion

In literary translation, sometimes translating not only means transferring the information included in the text, but preserving its form as well. The most obvious example of this would be poetry translation, which is generally considered quite difficult to achieve. Bilingual literature would be another example – if the form of the text itself is transmitting the message, such as the uncomfortable sensation coming from the impossibility of communication, then it would be quite impossible to translate the text to be written in just one language without losing its sense. It also seems that in the novels discussed here, which are bilingual and autobiographical, different languages are used to represent various elements of the dual worlds that the two authors in question live in. Two languages - English and Japanese - are used not only to reproduce the bilingual realities of the authors, but also to represent dualities (or the lack of stability and absoluteness) of nationality and personal identity, among other things. Rather than trying to solve these dualities by duplicating exactly the same text in both languages, which is self-translating, Mizumura and Goto chose - at least at the linguistic level - to maintain and express the division by providing the texts written in both languages, without translation.

Thus, what is untranslatable in the bilingual works discussed here is untranslatable, because of the strategy chosen by the authors to express the duality. The Languages in these texts are not only used for conveying information, but rather to show the existence of another language – which also represents another culture, nationality, and identity. The message is within the same text in itself.

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