

The Grammar of Mimetic Expressions and Neologisms in Japanese Translations of Lewis Carroll's Poem *Jabberwocky*

Mimetic words, also referred to as ideophones, onomatopoeia or iconic expressions, are an integral part of the Japanese language. They may be used as adjectives, adverbs, nouns or verbs by changing their syntactic position and combining them with various particles. But although Japanese grammar theoretically allows for all of these different functions, analyses of written and spoken corpora suggest that many mimetic expressions are predominantly used as certain parts of speech, e.g. adverbs. These preferences are put to a test in translations of foreign literature, in which the Japanese translator might encounter mimetics in a fixed syntactic environment, which might be used as a different part of speech than their Japanese counterparts. This paper aims to give an overview of various methods of translation of existing mimetic expressions and neologisms, with special focus on their grammatical properties.

Lewis Carroll's poem *Jabberwocky* (1871) was chosen as a source text for several reasons: Firstly, nonsense verse provides a comparatively large set of mimetic expressions in a rather fixed syntactic and semantic environment. The author's creative use of nonsense mimetic words, neologisms and portmanteaux such as *slithy* (slimy+lithe) poses a challenging task for Japanese translators, who have to integrate the native set of mimetic expressions into the semantic and syntactic framework of the original poem. Secondly, the continuous popularity of Carroll's works has inspired many Japanese translations in the course of the past 100 years. Besides the official translations commissioned by Japanese publishers, there are several blogs and forums devoted to collecting translations of Lewis Carroll's works by both Japanese native speakers and learners of Japanese. This provides a solid foundation for a contrastive analysis of different translations strategies.

This paper focuses on those mimetic expressions in the original poem that are used in an uncommon or ungrammatical way, i.e. as a part of speech they would normally not function as in Japanese. A contrastive analysis of various free and literal translations shows four main approaches to translating these constructions: Firstly, the substitution with a non-mimetic word. Secondly, combining existing mimetics with particles they are usually not used with (e.g. nominalisation of a mimetic expression generally used as an adverb with *wa/ga* instead of *to*). Thirdly, using existing mimetics, but paraphrasing the original construction such that the Japanese word would not be forced into an uncommon syntactic position. And lastly, the creation of mimetic neologisms which copy the grammatical properties and syntactic functions of mimetics in the original text.

These findings suggest that there are restrictions on the usage of mimetic expressions as different parts of speech, which can be either avoided or overcome by the aforementioned translation strategies. By comparing various translations, this paper will give an overview of the grammatical properties of Japanese mimetics and trace the process of their creation.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass*. Illustrated by John Tenniel. New York: Signet Classic, 2000.