

Translating the Punctuation of Kawabata's *Izu no odoriko*

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Introduction

This paper considers the English translation of specific instances of punctuation in Japanese literature, focusing on the rendering of the Japanese comma and dash as exemplified in three English translations of Kawabata Yasunari's novella 『伊豆の踊子』 *Izu no odoriko*, two by Edward G. Seidensticker (Kawabata 1954/1974, 1997) and one by J. Martin Holman (Kawabata 1998). Punctuation is often overlooked in translation analysis, and it is my hope that this paper will help begin to redress this in the context of Japanese-to-English literary translation.

I begin by outlining the types of punctuation available in both languages and the differences in form and function that can be observed. The paper then classifies specific types of Japanese usage of the comma and dash that can be seen to differ significantly from the equivalent forms of punctuation in English, focusing on three types of comma usage and two uses of the dash. I exemplify these five types with instances from the case study, comparing and contrasting the two translators' renderings of punctuation

from *Izu no odoriko*, and evaluating the relative success of their choices. Sentence (§) numbers refer to the sentence order of the ST (source text) in the Horupu Shuppan (1985) version of *Izu no odoriko*.¹ Translations in single quotation marks are my ‘direct’² (‘Dir.’), or reference, translations; double quotation marks indicate Seidensticker’s and Holman’s professional translations (the TTs (target texts)).³ The ¶ mark indicates a paragraph indent in the original text.

Japanese punctuation (句読点 *kutōten* or 約物 *yakumono*) was largely nonexistent until the 20th century. Prior to this it had, however, imported from China the sentence break 〇 (句点 *kuten* or more colloquially 丸 *maru*) and Chinese comma 、 (読点 *tōten*, often colloquially referred to simply as 点 *ten*), and this is sometimes now rendered as the Western , (コンマ *konma*). In the modern era Japan imported from the West the unmodified dash (ダッシュ *dasshu*), exclamation mark (感嘆符 *kantanfu*), question mark (疑問符 *gimonfu* or colloquially はてな *hatena*),⁴ ellipsis dots (省略符号 *shōryakufugō*; when occurring in sentence-terminal position, often finished with the Japanese 〇, as in 「...。」「点点点丸」 *ten-ten-ten maru*), and brackets (括弧 *kakko*, comprising parentheses () (丸括弧 *marukakko*), square brackets [] (角括弧 *kakukakko*) and braces { } (波括弧 *namikakko*)).

The punctuation that was modified or enhanced in its transition to use in Japanese includes lenticular brackets 【 】 (隅付き括弧 *sumitsukikakko*) and quotation marks (「 」 鉤括弧 *kagikakko* and double quotation marks 『 』 二重鉤括弧 *nijūkagikakko* often used within the single ones, as a kind of equivalent of the English nested structure “ ... ‘...’ ...” or ‘... “...” ...’).

Japanese also possesses a few marks that do not exist in English. First, the raised point called the interpunct ・ (中黒 *nakaguro* or more colloquially なかほち *nakapochi*) is often used as the equivalent of an English slash to

indicate alternatives (e.g., 「土・日閉店」 *do/nichi heiten* ‘shop closed on Sat/Sun’). Second, emphatic marks can be placed over characters instead of italics (e.g., 日本語が好きだ *Nihongo ga suki da* ‘I like Japanese’). Third, the wave dash ~ (波ダツシユ *namidasshu*) is used to indicate a range (e.g., 2~3月 *ni kara sangatsu* ‘from February to March’).

Punctuation marks present in English but largely absent from Japanese (except when romanised text is used directly, for example in a URL, or in some academic writing) include the hyphen (-), the forward slash (/), the colon, and the semicolon. The absence of the colon and semicolon restricts the use of intra-sentence punctuation, as only the dash and comma are available. Unsurprisingly, apparent comma splices are fairly common, especially given Japanese’s tendency to use loose clausal connectors, often dispensing with them entirely and relying on concatenative verb forms such as *-te* (Martin 1975: 474ff.), or using the loose clausal connector *shi*. (Of course, these are not actually comma splices, since one cannot impose English grammatical expectations onto Japanese, but they become an issue when translating into English.)

This paper focuses on the uses of the (Japanese modified) comma and the (unmodified) dash in *Izu no odoriko*, and how these are conveyed in the English translations. I shall begin by summarising the differences between the languages.

The comma has an emphatic function in Japanese that is largely absent in English. A comma can be placed after a noun+subject particle, sometimes even replacing the subject particle, and inviting the reader to pause. Pausing was the original function in English, but was supplemented by a grammatical function, and now such caesura is usually only possible at such points in a sentence where, grammatically, it is allowed, as in these cases, to mark parenthetical, non-essential, asides, or to mark a shift to

another clause of the sentence.

While the dash can be used in a similar way in Japanese and English, although perhaps not so much parenthetically—that is, in pairs—it also has other usages in Japanese. In *Izu no odoriko* Kawabata uses it for ‘open’ quotations, as an alternative to quotation marks, much as James Joyce does in some of his short stories.⁵ Further, Kawabata uses a dash emphatically to indicate abruptness. All these points are addressed in the examples below.⁶

1. Frequently occurring Japanese comma usages in *Izu no odoriko* and their renderings in translation

a. comma splice⁷

Occasionally one finds sentences where the use of a comma is so loose as a clausal connector that it appears like a comma splice:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
404.『「あんなに大きく見えるんですもの、いらっしゃいませね。」と、踊子が云った。	“It looks that big, doesn’t it, please come, all right,” the dancing girl said.	『‘It’s so big! You really will come, won’t you?’ the dancer said.	『‘Of course it is. See how big it looks. Please do come,’ the dancing girl said.

The translators avoid the comma splice by starting a new sentence, but in so doing to some extent interrupt the flow of the original dialogue.

b. emphatic comma

Japanese often uses commas to create a caesura after conjunctions in a similar way to how English uses them before conjunctions. In addition

to this inversion, there are a few emphatic uses that cannot be found in English.

Most instances in the ST (except §20, where the comma separates two nominal premodifiers) occur after grammatical particles (*ga*, *wa* and *ya*), and sometimes these follow (long) noun phrases:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
336. ¶栄吉は向かい側の料理屋の二階座敷に呼ばれて何か唸っているのが、こちらから見えた。	(That) Eikichi had been called to a second-floor banquet room in the restaurant on the opposite side and <u>that he was intoning something</u> , could be seen from over here.	¶We could see Eikichi on the second floor of the restaurant across the street. He was bellowing away at something for a dinner party.	¶Eikichi had been called over to the banquet room of the inn on the other side of the road. I could see him across the way. From where I watched, it looked as though he were groaning.

The underlined nominalised clause *nanika unatte iru no* ‘that he was intoning something’ or ‘his intoning something’ is not so long, but the preceding clause, which may or may not be part of the subject marked by *ga* (the ambiguity is marked in the direct translation by putting the first ‘that’ in parentheses), is in any case closely connected with it by the *-te* verb (*yobarete* ‘had been called (and)’). The length of this preceding structure likely occasions the use of the comma after *ga*, similar to the way in which Dickens follows some of his longer noun phrases with a comma.⁸ The problem for the translator is that this use of the comma is less acceptable now in English than it was in Dickens’ day, and in fact is often considered poor style, attested to by the ‘revision’ of Dickens’ footnoted sentence in a later edition.⁹ Indeed, both translators hew to modern punctuating norms,

dividing the long sentence up, Seidensticker into two and Holman into three, and thereby eliminating the pause point in the ST.

Sometimes there is no obvious reason for the commas after grammatical markers, thus their use is likely to stem from rhythmic considerations:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
46. 紙の山は、諸国から中風の養生を教え て来た手紙や、諸国 から取寄せた中風の 葉の袋なのである。	As for the mountain of paper, there were things such as letters from various regions that told about the treatment of palsy, and bags of palsy medicine that he had ordered from various regions.	The mountain around him consisted of advice he had received from all over the country on the treatment of palsy, and the bags had contained medicines, these too from all over the country.	The mountains of papers were actually correspondence from every possible source describing treatments for palsy and packets of medicine the old man had ordered from throughout the country.

The first comma after *wa* has no equivalent in English and is absent in the translations, which remove the topic marker (‘as for’) as usual. The second, after *ya* ‘such things as ... and’, coincides with a ‘natural’ comma caesura before “and”, although only Seidensticker inserts the comma.

c. quotative comma¹⁰

This ST feature has no equivalent in English, and is used to set off dialogue (both with quotation marks and without) from narrative text. It mostly appears after dialogue, often preceding the quotative marker *to*, but in some cases (§123, 136, 235, 238, 247, 331, 431) can be found *prior* to the dialogue. In a few cases (§123, 247, 431) the commas occur in pairs before and after the dialogue, almost acting as additional quotation marks:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
247. そのうちに私は勝っていた碁を負けてしまったのだが、紙屋は、「いかがですもう一石、もう一石願いましょう。」と、しつこくせがんだ。	Meanwhile I lost the <i>go</i> game I had been winning, but as for the paper seller, he pleaded persistently, “How about one more game, please one more game.”	I quickly lost the match I had in fact been winning. ¶“How about another?” said the merchant. ‘Let’s have another game.’	Meanwhile, I indeed lost the <i>go</i> game that I had previously been winning. ¶“How about it? One more round, just one more round.” the paper dealer pleaded. [...]

Neither translator bothers with the first comma after *wa*, but Holman’s comma within the quotation marks can be said to parallel the second ST comma after *to*.

2. Frequently occurring Japanese dash usages in *Izu no odoriko* and their renderings in translation

a. emphatic dash

This is exclusively a dialogue device in the ST, occurring at the *beginning* of a sentence,¹¹ at the end,¹² or very rarely in the middle (in the ST, §338 only).¹³ The purpose of the dash is to indicate an abrupt start or end to a line of dialogue. While, as indicated earlier, a dash device may be used in English in open-quotation format, in place of quotation marks (and hence with no implied sense of abruptness), it is never used *within* quotation marks as it is here in the ST. However, dashes are of course occasionally used at the end of an English sentence to indicate an interruption to the dialogue, similar to their usage in the ST.

Yet it is notable that in no instance does a translator retain a dash in

the TT, wherever it may appear in the ST.¹⁴ In the case of sentence-initial dashes, the translations never reflect this element directly, except in §95:

ST/Direct Translation	Seidensticker 1	Seidensticker 2	Holman
94. 「お足が早いですね。 “Your feet are fast, aren’t they.	“You’re quite a walker....	‘You’re quite a walker.’	“You walk fast....
95. —いい塩梅に晴れました。」 —Fortunately it has cleared up.”	Isn’t it lucky the rain has stopped.”	<u>Then, after a pause:</u> ‘Aren’t we lucky the rain has stopped.’	We’re lucky the weather cleared up,” he said.

Seidensticker’s first translation converts the sentence-initial dash in §95 to sentence-final ellipsis dots in §94. Holman does the same thing. Interestingly, Seidensticker’s second translation instead verbalises the dash as “Then, after a pause:”, an example of the sometimes explicative tendency of translation.

Arguably, Seidensticker attempts to reflect the abruptness of a sentence-initial dash through more indirect means in §210:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
210. —ほれ、こちらを見つけたと見えて笑っていやがる。」	—Hey, it looks like they’ve found us and they’re laughing.”	<u>Damned if they haven’t seen us.</u> Look at them laugh.’	I think they’ve noticed us. They’re laughing.”

His idiomatic and elliptical “[I’ll be] Damned if they haven’t seen us” can be seen as reflecting the rough, potentially pejorative verb suffix *iyagaru* as well as the abruptness implied by the initial dash and proceeding

utterance *hore* in the ST.

At the other veritable end of the sentence, Holman makes an effort to reflect sentence-terminal dashes with ellipsis dots:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
146. ¶「へえ。尋常五年とはどうも——。」	“Hmm. A fifth-grade pupil is, well—.”	¶‘Oh?’	“Oh, you have a fifth grader?...”

Perhaps Holman feels that a dash would be too abrupt in the English, and that Kawabata actually intends for the dialogue to trail off, which is better represented in English by ellipsis dots. He does the same thing in §297, 306 and 338. Seidensticker never does anything similar.

b. quotative dash¹⁵

Here Kawabata echoes such Western contemporaries as James Joyce with his use of a dash to indicate an internal monologue:

28. ——あの日が修善寺で今夜が湯ヶ島なら、明日は天城を南に越えて湯ヶ島温泉へ行くだろう。

Dir.: —If that day was Shuzenji and tonight was Yugashima, then tomorrow they would go over Amagi to the south and go to Yugashima Onsen.

Seidensticker: On the bridge yesterday, here tonight, I had said to myself; tomorrow over the pass to Yugano, and surely somewhere along those fifteen miles I will meet them again. [...]

Holman: “If they were at Shuzenji the other day and Yugashima tonight, then they would probably go to Yugano Springs on the south side of Amagi Pass tomorrow.”

Seidensticker signals the monologue by adding “I had said to myself”, but no italics or quotation marks. Holman turns the sentence into a closed quotation with quotation marks.

In the other ST example, Kawabata uses the dash to announce the contents of a roadside sign:

ST	Direct Translation	Seidensticker 2	Holman
500. [98] ¶途中、ところどころの村の入口に立札があった。	On the way, at the entrances to various towns was a sign.	¶Now and then, at a road into a village, we would see a sign: ‘Performer-beggars keep out.’	¶Here and there along the way stood signs as we entered villages: “Beggars and itinerant entertainers—KEEP OUT.”
501. ¶——物乞い旅芸人村に入るべからず。	—Beggar travelling entertainers keep out of the town.		

Both translators convert the open quotation with the initial dash to a closed quotation with quotation marks. Holman does use a dash, but puts it in the middle of the sentence, adding emphasis by capitalising “KEEP OUT”. It is thus noteworthy that in both of these ‘fringe’ quotative situations, where no-one is actually talking, the translators have rejected Kawabata’s use of open quotation in favour of a more conventional form, despite the existence of multiple precedents in English literature. Such decisions offer evidence of the inherent conservatism of the Western translator as a mode to facilitate a ‘fluid’ translation (Venuti 1995).

Conclusion

Japanese and English share enough punctuation to make it obvious when usages differ. English, having a larger range of punctuation, presents a variety of options to the translator for conveying the original sense; however, some caesural uses of the comma in the SL have no equivalent in English, and while sometimes approximated by verbalisation of the pause, they are often left unreflected in the target text. On the other hand, English writers such as Joyce have demonstrated that the use of the dash in dialogue is an acceptable variant, and it would be interesting to see a translator of such a ST carry its use over into the TT.

Kawabata's employment of the comma and dash sometimes challenges the translators, and they largely respond by finding forms with some sort of equivalency of effect rather than attempting to preserve the original punctuation. This at times may be evidence of a general conservatism among translators: a solicitude to the norms of the target-language reader that may sometimes occlude potential opportunities for more creative, and possibly more literary, responses to ST punctuation.

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Notes

¹ The CD-ROM appendices to my PhD thesis (Donovan 2012) contain a table of the parallel texts of *Izu no odoriko* and the three English translations in which the ST is numbered by sentence. The text is only available as a CD-ROM for copyright reasons.

² I prefer the term ‘direct translation’ to ‘literal translation’, as the latter rarely refers to an actual literal translation of an idiomatic construction. A direct translation is a ST-orientated translation, where lexis and syntax follow the original Japanese as closely as possible without breaking grammatical rules in the TL (target language English).

³ Seidensticker’s translation excerpts should be assumed to be from his second version unless noted otherwise.

⁴ Exclamation is sometimes represented by the sentence-terminal particle よ *yo*, while interrogation is sometimes represented solely by the particle か *ka*—thus sometimes Japanese particles perform the role that sentence-final punctuation does in English.

⁵ See, for example, the story ‘Eveline’ (Joyce 2000: 29-34). Leech & Short (1981: 322-323) discuss the role of such open punctuation in “free direct speech”. The dash’s use in free direct speech is, however, still fairly uncommon in English literature.

⁶ Although not addressed in this paper, Kawabata often doubles the length of the dash, as can be seen in some of the examples below.

⁷ §255, 404, 472, 537.

⁸ Example from *A Tale of Two Cities* (Wordsworth Classics): “A face habitually suppressed and quieted, was still lighted up under the quaint wig by a pair of moist bright eyes [...]” (Dickens 1992: 15)

⁹ ‘Revised’ version (Penguin Classics) with parenthetical commas: “A face, habitually suppressed and quieted, was still lighted up under the quaint wig by a pair of moist bright eyes [...]” (Dickens 2003: 20). The original version still stands, however, in the Penguin *Popular Classics* edition of 2007 (Dickens 2007: 15).

¹⁰ §35, 86, 104, 112, 113 (twice), 116, 117, 123 (twice), 125, 132, 136, 168, 235, 238, 247 (twice), 259, 271, 274, 276, 319, 331, 404, 431 (twice), 455, 462, 469, 478, 505, 513, 518, 529, 537, 541, 562, 579.

¹¹ §95, 204, 210, 392.

¹² §42, 113, 132, 146, 259, 297, 306, 368, 375, 455.

¹³ Dashes as punctuating, rather than purely emphatic, devices, such as that at the end of this sentence, are increasingly seen in modern Japanese literature, presumably due to the influence of Western languages—but they are still never used in pairs, parenthetically.

¹⁴ In §297, Seidensticker uses a dash, but it occurs in the middle of the sentence, while the ST instance is at the end.

¹⁵ §28, 501.