

Translating Mimetics in Japanese: a cognitive approach

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Japanese mimetics, such as *kira-kira*, 'glitteringly,' are dealt with in the English translation of two Japanese novels, *Kitchen* and *The River Ki*. Previous studies note that the concepts conveyed by adverbial mimetics are often translated into different word-classes such as verb or noun, which shows an involvement of 'class-shifts' (Catford 1965) in the translation of mimetics. This study analyzes these class-shifts, focusing on the process of translation. An investigation of the source language and target language texts shows that there are some systematic class-shifts. It is argued that they can be explained based on concepts defined in cognitive semantics (i.e. 'lexicalization patterns', 'reification'). Senses that may be undertranslated or lost in translation are shown to come from two main areas: aspectual senses and detailed characterization of event participants. Given the complexity of the semantics of mimetics, some mimetics may be inevitably untranslatable by a single term. However, fuller understanding of verbal semantic 'conflation' (Talmy 1972) patterns between Japanese and English and enhanced sensitivity toward reconceptualization processes (Talmy 2000a, 2000b) offer insights into understanding how mimetics can best be translated.

KEYWORDS: adverbial mimetics, literary translation, cognitive semantics, Japanese/English.