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# *Theory and Other Dangerous Things*

# Pragmatic Translation Choices Using Etsuo Iijima's "On the Concept of the Universal Ki-energy"

Jeroen Bode

Tsukuba University

**Abstract:** Through another text type I would like to introduce here some practical applications of the translation strategies discussed in my previous OTB articles (Bode, 2009a, 2009b). After the original Japanese text on this page I will give an integral translation of the complete text. The main strategy followed for this text can be referred to as information change (Pr3) as described by Chesterman (2000) under the heading of the pragmatic strategies (Pr). We will look at omission and addition more closely with this example. Omission happens when the original information is not relevant for the target text, or when the original is being summarised as a translation text. As an example of omission, I gave the omission of the main characters title in the English translation of the story by Issai Chosan (1727/2006, p. 177) where instead of teishu (亭主=head-of-the-house) has been replaced by he or his. An example of addition in translation will be introduced through the English translation of Iijima's text hereafter.

*Editor's note:* Mr. Bode's translation is presented in the text boxes; for the original Japanese text, see the Appendix.

## Comparative observations regarding the original text and the translated version

The original explains to the general public, and the Aikido students in particular, the classic concept from Chinese philosophy of universal ki-energy as applied in the Japanese martial art form of Aikido.

The text itself is short but highlights the difficulties faced by translators. The author assumes the reader is well versed in basic Aikido concepts, ideas, history, and facts. I would like to suggest to the OTB reader that the translator is also part of the reading audience. Before there is any translation done, the translator reads the text as a reader. The text under discussion was afterwards selected as a possible text for translation.

The text is a clearly written text for Japanese readers, but it needs supplemented information in translation to keep the text lucid. In this text case I use square brackets where additional text has been included for readability in English. The omitted sections are shown by crossed out text sections. However, the Japanese text in itself is well organized and does not at all inhibit the

Bode, J. (2011). Pragmatic translation choices using Etsuo Iijima's "On the Concept of the Universal Ki-energy". *OTB Forum*, 4(1), 33-36.

## On the concept of the Universal Ki-energy

Par. 1: Within the thinking of the Japanese people there are general ideas regarding the power (chikara 力) of Universal Ki-energy (ki 気). Among the meanings of power there is also included in it willpower/vitality (kiryoku 気力), and spiritual strength (seishinryoku 精神力). From these [basic ideas] the power of thought is brought forth in the expression "passing through a rock by the power of thought" ["where there is a will, there is away"], a power containing a full spiritual concentration.

smoothness of the reading process.

In the first paragraph (Par. 1) we find the following:

From these [basic ideas] the power of thought is brought forth...

The original text did not include the phrase of [basic ideas] If [basic ideas] were not added, the original sentence would have to be altered too much to make it readable in English. The translator has to make a choice here: either adapting the original text for the English language, or adding an implied entry to keep the original flow intact.

A secondary challenge is the inclusion of a Japanese proverb: "Passing through a rock by the power of thought." While the words are clear, the meaning is likely opaque to most English readers. The addition of the English

proverb “Where there is a will, there is a way” ... in some cases proverbs can be translated, but in the present case needs an English equivalent almost in meaning.

In also the second paragraph (Par. 2) some Japanese vocabulary has been kept in the English translation to facilitate future use in further entries that reemerge in further writings on Aikidō. The translator foresees this eventuality and includes the references to motion picture here to make sure that Yamato and Star Wars are correctly understood. This information the author expects the reader to know.

In the third paragraph (Par. 3) the author does not explain what the Kōjien is. In the translation it is briefly referred to as a monolingual Japanese dictionary. This is one of the major dictionaries and provides much more detailed information in its entries than regular dictionaries. It sometimes also includes historical and etymological explanations. Also the additional [this concept] is actually not stated in the original, but it is implied by the sentence it refers to. The translator should be sensitive to these implied messages in these sentences.

In the next paragraph (Par. 4) we see one omission in the English translation:

[The character of ki-energy (気)] is also used in compound expressions. There are a lot of examples, such as[, starting from]: kūki (空気: atmosphere), ...

For the English translation it is not needed to state where the starting point is of the examples of entries under consideration. This has already been made clear from what is stated previously.

The next paragraph (Par. 5) does not present any particular translation difficulties except that the topic shifts more towards the main topic of Aikidō and its own specific expressions containing the this ki-character element.

In the last paragraph (Par. 6) special names given to persons are one of the most difficult challenges to deal with. The name here given in paragraph six and seven refers to Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of Aikidō. In other countries he is also known as Ō-sensei. However, the honorary name Okina sensei

Par. 2: From these basic ideas are created the [concept of the] willpower force (nerikipawaa 念カパワー) in Dragonball, a manga for children, the wave-power cannon (hadōhō 波動砲) in [the motion picture] Space Battleship Yamato, or the force in Star Wars [movies].

Par. 3: However, when consulting the Kōjien [a Japanese monolingual dictionary] on the concept of the ki-energy as it appears in the term Aikidō (合気道) it is difficult to express [this concept] in a single word. Briefly put, one can understand it as “something that is very expansive and profoundly deep, something that cannot be seen very clearly.” [In a sense], it is the foundation that fills Heaven and Earth, and forms the universe, it is the source of all in existence, in other words, the source of the life-force [in everything] (Shinmura, 1998).

Par. 4: [The character of ki-energy (気)] is also used in compound expressions. There are a lot of examples, such as[, starting from]: kūki (空気: atmosphere), kikō (気候: climate), tenki (天気: weather), genki (元気: health, energy, vitality), yōki (陽気: season, cheerfulness), gōki (豪気: courageous and powerful), kinori suru (気乗りする: strongly encouraged to do something), ki ga deru (気が出る: feel encouraged, feel inspired), kibun ga yoi (気分が良い: feel good) and many more. There are also the opposites of these given above and even in trying to count them all the limit will [not => never] be reached.).

Par. 5: During Aikidō training the expressions that are regularly mentioned consist of the following three among others: ki wo dasu (気を出す: to extend one's ki-energy), ki wo awaseru (気を合わせる: to adapt to the ki-energy [of the other]), and ki wo michibiku (気を導く: to lead the ki-energy of the other).

Par. 6: The Wise-and-old sensei (Okina sensei: 翁先生) [of Aikidō] (the honorary name of Ueshiba, Morihei: the founder of Aikidō. 1883 - 1969) explained the ki-energy as follows: “Everything that exists, emerges from the ki-energy.

seems to be more a formal written one and mainly used in Japan. The translator could choose here to remain close to the original and introduce the name to the reader as another name for the Aikidō-founder. Another option is to opt for either the real name of the Aikidō-founder (Ueshiba Morihei), or use the honorary name (Ō-sensei) well established outside Japan. In the present translation I have

decided for introducing the less familiar name as he is also referred to in Japanese sources.

In this paragraph (Par. 7) the author provides additional information in parentheses in the original text. In the translation, however, the parenthetical remarks were omitted since these merged with the translation of these special expressions as a whole. The omission was maintained in order not to duplicate the same text part twice. The following is a translation of that paragraph in which the parenthetical remarks are faithfully rendered (to disastrous effect!):

In order to live one's life fully, making the words of this *Wise-and-old sensei* as a guiding principle, it is by practicing *Aikidō* one cultivates and develop one's ki-energy and courage and by it reviving a bright spirit (皓然の気 [kōzen-no-ki]: state/condition of brightness), but also a honest and open spirit (浩然の気 [kōzen-no-ki]: a wide and extensive state/condition). It makes one want to live in good spirit a bright and full life.

## Conclusion

With the present text we could see that, for instance, the application of a single strategy as indicated above needs to be applied with care. It is definitely not good to apply it automatically for any difficult part encountered. The best advice in this case would be to continue with the other parts and return afterwards. It is very likely that the translation difficulty can be solved after the process of the whole text translation has been done. Sometimes, the solution presents itself to the translator in the process of continuing to translate the whole text. In much longer texts you need to highlight these difficult keyword sections in order to be able to find them back again. Perhaps before continuing

**About the authors:** After Iijima Etsuo's retirement he has continued to teach Aikidō in Mito on weekday evenings. At that time he started also his Rinchi-kai branch-school for Japanese calligraphy. Presently he is the director of the Ibaraki-prefecture Aikidō-renmei. Jeroen Bode has been working since 2005 for Tsukuba University as a lecturer. From 2007 he began working as an independent official translator of Japanese. His translation work led him to redirect his attention to applied language skills during the process of translating. He received his M.A. in Japanese language and culture in 1996 from Leiden University in the Netherlands.

Par. 7: In order to live one's life fully, making the words of this *Wise-and-old sensei* as a guiding principle, it is by practicing Aikidō one cultivates and develop one's ki-energy and courage and by it reviving a bright spirit (皓然の気: kōzen-no-ki), but also a honest and open spirit (浩然の気: kōzen-no-ki). It makes one want to live in good spirit a bright and full life.

with the other paragraphs it might be helpful to give a short summary statement of the difficult section/paragraph between square brackets. By this one can still see the topic development of the whole text.

The matter concerned here for the translation of the Japanese original was the pragmatic strategy of information change (Pr3). In any situation that the translator considers either to omit or add text parts in the translation one of the guiding principles is that the text unaltered is not clear for the target language reader. With these omissions or additions it sometimes has the advantage that the original topic development can maintain the same order and let the author still be read in his particular and individual style.

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## Appendix

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茨城県合気道連盟理事長

飯島悦男

### 講習会講話

#### 「気」について

**Par. 1:** 日本人の思考の中に、気のカの概念が有ります。カの意味の中には、気力、精神カも含まれております。それらから、念力とは、精神をこめたカ「思う念力岩をも通す」で表現されております。

**Par. 2:** これらの発想から、子供向けの漫画ドラゴンボールの念カパワー、宇宙戦艦ヤマトの波動砲あるいはスターウォーズのホースに現わされております。

**Par. 3:** 合気道の「気」について広辞苑で調べて見ましたが、一言で表現しにくいものです。一口に言ってしまうと「幅広く用いられ奥深いもの、はっきりとは見えないもの」と理解しました。意味として、天地間を満たし宇宙を構成する基本 — 万物が生ずる根元 — すなわち活力の源であります。

**Par. 4:** 言葉としての使われ方ですが、空気から始まり気候や天気、元気、陽気、豪気、気乗りする、気が出る、気分が良い等多数ありその反対の言葉も有り、数えればきりがありません。合気道を修行するに当たって、よく口にする言葉は、「気を出す」「気を合せる」「気を導く」等です。

**Par. 5:** 合気道を修行するに当たって、よく口にする言葉は、「気を出す」「気を合せる」「気を導く」等です。

**Par. 6:** 翁先生は、気について「万物すべて気より生ず」説いています。

**Par. 7:** 人生を生き抜くためには、翁先生の言葉を旨とし、合気道の稽古を通して、気力、胆力を羨い、陪然の気(明らかなさま)、決然の気(太く大きいさま)を生かし、豊かな人生を明るく元気に過ごしたいものです。