

# Difficulties of Translating Japanese Literature into Foreign Languages: With Special Reference to Malayalam Translation of Ishikawa Takuboku's *Ichiaku no suna* (A handful of sand)

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Room 6019

Kanagawa University, Minatomirai Campus

**Abstract:** In this lecture, an attempt will be made to highlight certain problems which were confronted by me during my translation of *Ichiaku no Suna* (A Handful of Sand) by Ishikawa Takuboku (1886–1912) into the Malayalam language. Takuboku, a well-known poet of tanka and modern style poems of the late Meiji period, left a unique mark in the world of tanka poetry by making two major reforms. Traditionally tanka poems, consisting of only 31 syllables, are usually written in a single line, whereas Takuboku introduced a new style of writing tanka in three lines while maintaining the number of the syllables. Since maintaining 31 syllables while translating tanka into a foreign language is impossible, this new style of writing in three lines has given a kind of liberty to the translator as he/she can easily maintain the three-line style. Another reform Takuboku introduced was the usage of common man's language (spoken form) instead of elegant, rhetoric and classical style language.



Ishikawa Takuboku Memorial Hall, Morioka

Translation of *Ichiaku no suna* into Malayalam not only gave me an opportunity to feel and realize the true intensity and depth of Takuboku's tanka, but also it made me realize the difficulty of the task of translating a literary work, especially poetry, from one language into another, as the racial or linguistic characteristics, thought patterns, cultural and historical evolution of societies, etc., are different from country to country. Prior to the translation of *Ichiaku no suna*, I had translated into Malayalam several short stories and novellas of Miyazawa Kenji and Shimazaki Toson but never faced such difficulties as I confronted when I translated the above-mentioned tanka poems.

In my lecture, first of all, I will be briefly introducing various Western theories on translation and then touch on various difficulties I faced while translating. In my opinion, translation theories are not essential for producing highly accurate translation; what is required is sound knowledge of the source language and its culture, sound knowledge of the target language and its culture, and deep knowledge of the socio-cultural background of the author or poet. But still sometime, the so-called theories help the translator to determine usage of certain terms and idiomatic phrases. Translation theories, like “domesticizing,” “foreignizing,” “use of third language words and phrases,” etc., are helpful. I have mainly applied the theory of “foreignizing” where if a word in the original (Japanese) text does not find an appropriate equivalent in the target language (Malayalam), the original word will be introduced to the readers of the translation in transliterated form. But I also used occasionally the strategies of “domesticizing” and “use of third language words and phrases.”

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