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On the Japanese Translation of Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*

キリギリスの哲学—ゲームプレイと理想の人生 (Romanization: kirigirisu no tetsugaku—gēmupurei to risō no jinsei. Lit.: The Philosophy of the Grasshopper: Game-playing and the ideal life)

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ABSTRACT

The Japanese translation of Bernard Suits's *The Grasshopper* was published in 2015. We report in this article the background of the translation, the way our project was operated, some notable difficulties we had and the impact that our translation has had so far. The description of the difficulties with translation touches upon how we interpreted the terms 'lusory' and 'prelusory'. This article also includes an appendix describing the history of how the word 'grasshopper' has been translated into Japanese.

KEYWORDS

Suits; *The Grasshopper*;
lusory; Japanese; translation

Background of the Translation

I had encountered Bernard Suits's articles before I wrote a book about philosophical and ethical investigations into sport.¹ But they did not leave a strong impression on me, and I did not think it was necessary to refer to Suits's definition of game-playing in my own book, because it was not useful to identify the essence of sport, in comparison to, e.g., the ideas of Klaus Meier and his disciple, Deborah Vossen, who both defined 'sport' using Suits's definition. Therefore, I did not think it would be necessary to read Suits's *The Grasshopper*, either. In fact, I did not read it for about ten years since.

It was in the summer of 2011 that I read *The Grasshopper* for the first time. Several months before, I had been translating S. B. Drewe's *Why sport? – An introduction to the philosophy of the sport*.² Drewe explained Suits's definition of game-playing in her book. I had a major trouble in translating this part of the book. I read Drewe's description repeatedly many times, but I did not know how I should translate the very important terms 'prelusory' and 'lusory' that Suits had created by himself. Eventually, I was obliged to read Suits's *The Grasshopper* directly. I was depressed and reluctant when I started

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[Note by Takahiro Yamada] The manuscript of this article was written by Professor Shigeki Kawatani alone in July to August 2017. However, he unfortunately passed on in February 2018 without seeing its completion or publication. The present version of the article is the result of modifications made by his co-translator of Bernard Suits's *The Grasshopper*, Takahiro Yamada. The content of the original manuscript is kept intact during the modification process as much as possible. On the other hand, some pieces of necessary or useful information are added in the form of notes, such as this one.

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reading it. However, I got gradually interested and absorbed in it, finished reading it in one week, and repeated reading it as a whole three times over about one month. Meanwhile, I utterly forgot about the immediate task, i.e., Drewe's translation.

I came to the conclusion that this book was undoubtedly a masterpiece and one of the best works in philosophy I had ever read, and it should become one of the classics of philosophy (not only philosophy of sport/game) before long. This book is full of tremendously fantastic stories and has a very unique aura that one could not feel from moderate and polite books that turn out to be categorized into ready-made disciplines. I had a question as to why such a dreadfully charming book had not been translated until then, and wondered if anyone had yet read it in Japan. If not, what a waste! I hoped Japanese people interested in games and/or philosophy would read and enjoy it as I did.

I determined to translate it myself and I thought it should be my business. Indeed, I wanted to do the task whatever the obstacles. Therefore, I thought it was very lucky for me that the book had not been widely known or translated into Japanese for over thirty years. All these things occurred because of the great power the original book has. I have been captured by it. This must be a work of a kind of genius!

How Our Project Was Operated

In the autumn of 2011, Nakanishiya Shuppan obtained the translation rights for the book, and I set about the task of the translation in the spring of 2012. Before long, I was able to complete the first full manuscript, but many points remained uncertain with regard to how to translate. It was after I wrote two papers on Suits's arguments that I found a paper on the relevant topic by a young researcher in philosophy. I was so sure that the author must have read through Suits's main work, that I asked him to cooperate in my project.

Fortunately, he accepted my offer. My co-translator is Takahiro Yamada, who is now studying at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. I had him read my first manuscript and point out my mistakes and so on. Our teamwork began in the autumn of 2013, functioned well, and improved my first translation a lot. We finished writing the translation in September 2014. After repeating the process of proofreading several times, we succeeded in publishing in April 2015.

Difficulties with the Translation

Except for some usual problems with translations from western languages to Japanese, one of the most difficult problems with our task was how to translate the terms 'prelutory' and 'lusory'. In the end, we decided to translate them as 'zenteiteki (前提的)' and 'naibuteki (内部的)', respectively. The former Japanese word literally means 'presupposing' or 'presupposed', and the latter 'internal'. Therefore, they are not literal translations but paraphrases, though I should refrain from providing the details of this decision here.³

We had another kind of difficulty which no one would probably face if translating a standard academic work. Suits frequently refers to real or imaginary characters and episodes without giving any identifying information. For example, the story of 'Ivan and Abdul' in Chapter 6 is based on a popular song in the West from about 140 years ago,

‘Abdul Abulbul Amir’, but it is hardly known in Japan. Similar examples are countless. If it were not for the Internet, we would never have finished our work!

I was also anxious about our understanding of Suits’s arguments. I was trying to read all of what Suits wrote in order to translate his main work as accurately as we could. But we could not read his posthumous manuscript *The return of the Grasshopper: Games, death, and the end of future*. I learned of its existence from Vossen’s paper.⁴ This work seems to be so important for the understanding and the interpretation of Suits’s philosophy that I hope it will be published.⁵

Additionally, we discovered an interesting history of the Japanese translation of the word ‘grasshopper’. To see the historical background of the Japanese title of *The Grasshopper*, refer to the [Appendix](#).

Impact of the Translation

After the publication of our translation, two reviews appeared.

1: Tetsuya Kōno (河野哲也, Professor of Rikkyo University, philosophy) published a review on a local newspaper, *The Hokkaido Shimbun*, on 14 June 2015.

2: Masashige Motoe (本江正茂, Associate Professor of Tohoku University, architectonics) wrote a review on his blog, on 13 December 2015.⁶

Students, researchers, and anyone else interested in a theory of games got to read and study Suits’s arguments with our translation. Since 2015 (the year our translation was published), I have used the translation as the textbook for my ethics course at Hokkai-Gakuen University in Hokkaido. In addition, I had two opportunities to deliver a special lecture on Suits’s philosophy. The first was at Tamagawa University on 8 June 2013, and the second at Nihon University on 16 December 2015. In my lectures, I explained that there are three major riddles that Suits suggests and discusses in the text.

- (1) What is the best way to live? —This is one of the most traditional questions in philosophy, having a long history from the period of Socrates, and the Grasshopper suggests a unique answer. He first modifies this question to ‘Which is the best way to live, to play like the Grasshopper or to work like ants?’ Then, he tries to defend his own claim that the best way to live is to play games without working. The Grasshopper in the text, therefore, is not only a player but also a game player.
- (2) What is a game? —This is the central question of this book. Most of the investigations by the Grasshopper and Skepticus are devoted to an attempt to answer this question. Furthermore, the Grasshopper’s answer is very clear and even brilliant. I think no one could come closer to the very essence of game-playing than he. The critical point of his definition is the distinction of the prelusory and the lusory goal of a game. To understand this definition is to understand that distinction. But it is not as easy as it looks.
- (3) Are we all not unconscious game players? —It is in the Grasshopper’s dream in Chapter 1 that this question is suggested in a striking manner. I think this question makes the text really philosophical, because it could never be solved by any scientific project. For it is a transcendental or metaphysical question. In other words, this question does not concern this or that thing inside our life but the conditions that

make our life possible. The Grasshopper/Suits who suggests this critical and immortal question qualifies as a genuine philosopher. But whether he was able to solve it is another story. He tries to do so through an impressive thought experiment about Utopia. Though the relevant arguments in the final chapter (Chapter 15) have now become much more realistic than when the book was published in 1978, and are worth considering more deeply, I think they are not sufficient to solve this riddle.

Through those experiences, I realized that there still remain many theoretical problems to be solved, and, for me, this is rather one of the vital achievements of our translation. It is not a fault but a virtue of the text that it needs further pursuit and explorations. I concluded the 'Afterword by the translator' of the Japanese version with comments along these lines—Suits perceived, gazed at, opened, and showed us an indefinitely abundant space, void, or lack to be explored, the existence of which no one had ever noticed. Maybe *The Grasshopper* appeared too early, as well as our Grasshopper. The times may finally seem to have started to catch up with the book. However, the philosophy of the Grasshopper should be a philosophy in the future at any rate—.

Notes

1. This book in Japanese, スポーツ倫理学講義 (lit.: *Sports Ethics Lectures*), was published in 2005 from Nakanishiya Shuppan.
2. This translation was published as スポーツ哲学の入門—スポーツの本質と倫理的諸問題 (lit.: *An Introduction to the sports philosophy: The essence and ethical problems of sports*) in 2012 from Nakanishiya Shuppan.
3. [Note by Takahiro Yamada] I assume that Professor Kawatani found the reasons of the decision too complex to be fully explained here, and I would agree. However, one short explanation may be as follows. We had another candidate pair for 'prelusory' and 'lusory', i.e., 'zenyūgiteki (前遊戯的)' and 'yūgiteki (遊戯的)', respectively. Notice that the former word is made by prefixing a 'zen (前)', corresponding to 'pre', to 'yūgi (遊戯)' plus 'teki (的)'. 'yūgi (遊戯)' is a word selected with the intention of meaning 'games and/or pastimes'; and the suffix, 'teki (的)', makes an adjective. One of the decision factors in favor of the 'presupposed-internal' pair was how to interpret the following part.

It [= participating in a game] is simply one of the goals that people have, such as wealth, glory, or security. As such it may be called a lusory goal, but a lusory goal of life rather than of games. (Ch.3; p.51 of our copytext.)

Here, it is said that participating in a game can be called a lusory goal of life, but not of games. Professor Kawatani's interpretation was that, in this part, participating in a game, wealth, glory, and security are counted as lusory goals of life, and the sense of 'game' in 'lusory' is pushed into the background. Although I was not fully convinced by this interpretation, the pair was chosen due to the time limitation. On another note, there was a part which this 'presupposed-internal' interpretation does not suit.

Again, Skepticus, I find your suggestion plausible, and although I have one or two reservations about it that I would like to put to you in due course, let me applaud your identification of dramatic ability as the skill appropriate to a distinct class of games. For if that fact were more widely recognized, such recognition might result in a much needed corrective of our lusory institutions as they now exist. (Ch.9; p.94 of our copytext.)

For the 'lusory' of this 'lusory institutions', we used the word 'yūgiteki (遊戯的)'.

4. See Deborah P. Vossen, Good grasshopping and the avoidance of game-spoiling, *Journal of the philosophy of Sport*, 35–2, 2008, 192.

5. [Note by Takahiro Yamada] I obtained the following information from Dr Filip Kobiela. According to Tomas Hurka, an unabridged version of this Suits's manuscript will be published in the fall 2019.
6. [Note by Takahiro Yamada] Additionally, the following paper in pedagogy appeared: Koichi Ito (2017), 'Who is "Spoilsports" in Classes?—Referring to "The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia" Written by Bernard Suits', in 教育におけるゲーミフィケーションに関する実践的研究(2) [Lit.: *Practical Studies in Gamification in Education* (2)], pp.11–23 [in Japanese].
7. [Note by Takahiro Yamada] Or '*The Philosophy of the Katydid*', if we are to be faithful to the literal meaning of キリギリス.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Appendix: Why 'kirigirisu' for 'grasshopper'?—an unknown history of the Japanese translation of Aesop's Fables

We translated the word 'grasshopper' into 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)'. In fact we had no alternative, because the Aesop's fable in question, 'Ants and the Grasshopper', is known as 'アリとキリギリス (ari to kirigirisu)' in the present-day Japan. But here is a small mystery. 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)' does not correspond to 'grasshopper' (as a generic, umbrella term), but more specifically means 'the long-horned kind of grasshopper' or the 'katydid'. The Japanese word that literally corresponds to 'grasshopper' is 'バッタ (batta)'.

Who on earth translated 'grasshopper' not into 'バッタ (batta)' but into 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)'? After researching this issue, we reached an answer. It was 渡部温 (On Watanabe, 1837–1889, a Japanese scholar of English) who we found as the very person who, in 1873, translated Aesop's Grasshopper into 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)' in his translation of *Aesop's Fables* (Thomas James in 1848). The Japanese title of the translation is '通俗伊蘇普物語 (Romanization: Tsūzoku isoppu monogatari; lit: *Aesop's Popular Fables*)'. Since his translation, Aesop's grasshopper has been known mainly as 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)' in Japan.

However, in fact, several different translations of 'grasshopper' appeared: e.g., Yukichi Fukuzawa (福澤諭吉, 1835–1901) translated the title of the fable as 'アリとイナゴ (ari to inago)'. Although イナゴ (Inago) is a kind of grasshopper, it did not get to be as popular as 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)'. Furthermore, it was surprising for us that those translations of Aesop's Fables in the nineteenth century were not the first ones in Japan. The first one had already appeared in the late sixteenth century. The anonymous translator did their job based on what the Jesuits brought into Japan. It was, therefore, not from English but from Latin. It resulted in a remarkable difference. In this sixteenth century translation, the title of the fable, 'Ants and the Grasshopper', was translated into 'Ants and the Cicada', and 'cicada' is 'セミ (semi)' in Japanese. Obviously, cicadas are not grasshoppers. But in the oldest version written in Greek, the character in the fable was not a grasshopper but a cicada (τέττιξ). It is said that, in the fifteenth century, in northern Europe, 'cicada' was replaced by a kind of grasshopper because there were no cicadas in such a cold region.

In short, there are two distinct translations of the fable in Japan, i.e., the one in the sixteenth century and the one in the nineteenth century. The former is from Latin and the latter English. So to speak, Aesop's fable came into Japan twice. In addition to that, in the nineteenth century, there were various Japanese translations of the English word 'grasshopper'. But it is Watanabe's that has survived until now. He dared to put 'grasshopper' into 'キリギリス (kirigirisu)'. This must have been somehow arbitrary, but I think it was an excellent choice. Unlike バッタ (batta) etc., キリギリス (kirigirisu) seems to have something of the spirit of a free player.

It is on a ground of such a complex history of Aesop's Fable's transferring to Japan that our translation has the title, 'キリギリスの哲学 (Romanization: kirigirisu no tetsugaku; lit: *The*

*Philosophy of the Grasshopper*⁷). Consequently, for the Japanese readers of our translation, the main character of the book will be known as ‘キリギリス (kirigirisu)’, not as ‘バッタ (batta)’, ‘イナゴ (inago)’, or ‘セミ (semi)’. This state of affairs may only be accidental, but it was not changeable or at our disposal.

I am, however, secretly gladdened and relieved by the course of these events. For the pronunciation and the spelling of ‘kirigirisu (キリギリス)’ resemble those of some ancient Greek philosophers’ names, such as, Socrates—‘sokratesu (ソクラテス)’ in Japanese. ‘Kirigirisu (キリギリス)’ sounds and looks in Japanese like the name of a philosopher, while ‘inago (イナゴ)’, ‘batta (バッタ)’ or ‘semi (セミ)’ would never. I was horrified when I thought that the title of our translation might have had to be ‘batta (or inago, or semi) no tetsugaku’ for some reason. I could not help it at all. So I have a deep sense of gratitude for On Watanabe: I am, most of all, thankful to his choice of words and to his distinguished feeling for the Japanese language.