Application and Translation Studies of the Culture Induction Method in University Japanese Language Teaching: A Case Study of "Solo Dining" Sci-Fi Narratives

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Language serves as the carrier of culture, while culture constitutes the soul of language; translation acts as the "quantum leap engine" for their migration across time and space. In contemporary university Japanese classrooms, the mere instruction of vocabulary and grammar no longer suffices to meet the demands of developing cross-cultural communicative competence, nor can it address the iterative identity narratives within a "post-human" context. Utilizing the "Culture Induction Method" as a theoretical framework, this paper introduces a near-future science fiction perspective, focusing on the technological evolution of the Japanese "Solo Dining" (Hitorimeshi) phenomenon within the "Single-Person Pod Society" of 2040: ranging from collapsible "Taste Projection Sushi" to "Memory Restaurants" helmed by AI servers. This research embeds "translation" into every pedagogical stage: pre-class Japanese-to-Chinese translation of the latest data from the White Paper on Dietary Education; in-class bidirectional C-J/J-C oral and written translation drills of sci-fi dialogue; and post-class "post-editing" sessions where students' original micro-fiction is output as bilingual texts. This approach achieves a four-dimensional coupling of "Language-Culture-Technology-Translation." The results indicate that sci-fi narratives not only significantly enhance learning motivation but also enable students to externalize differences in "technological ethics" during the translation process, leading to the simultaneous growth of linguistic skills, humanistic literacy, and translational proficiency.

Keywords: Japanese science fiction literature, non-Anthropocentrism, Sayuri Ueda, ecocriticism

Introduction

Culinary culture serves as a core component of national and ethnic cultural systems; it is also the everyday scenario most susceptible to "technological alienation" in science fiction works. In Battle Angel Alita, the inhabitants of Scrapyard replace mastication with "nutrition pills," while in Ghost in the Shell, the cyborgs of Newport City directly input "sensory taste signals."

Returning to contemporary Japan, "Solo Dining" (Hitorimeshi), as a unique cultural phenomenon, is currently being scripted by tech corporations into algorithmic samples of the "Loneliness Economy." The "Shinjuku Solo Pods" project in Tokyo provides single diners with capsule compartments equipped with built-in projection windows. These can instantly render "virtual dining companions" ranging from Hatsune Miku to a deceased grandmother.

This paper utilizes "Solo Dining" as an entry point to explore the implementation of "Sci-Fi Cultural Induction" in university Japanese language classrooms. By positioning "translation" as an explicit variable throughout the pedagogical process, this study enables students to practice navigating the tripartite conflict between "Technology, Ethics, and Emotion" while acquiring language skills. Ultimately, this approach aims to generate intercultural empathy and a sensitivity toward future ethics.

The Four-Dimensional Coupling of the Culture Induction Method and Translation Ethics

The Culture Induction Method is a pedagogical approach that organically integrates the target culture, including social habits, values, cognitive patterns, and arts underlying the language into language instruction. Its core premise is that language and culture are inseparable; language acquisition entails not only the mastery of vocabulary and syntax but also the capacity to utilize the language for effective communication. Cultural instruction is generally categorized into two dimensions: Knowledge-based Culture and Communicative Culture. The former refers to factual knowledge concerning the geography, history, literature, art, and institutions of the target country, while the latter refers to the habits influencing language use in daily life, such as honorifics, non-verbal communication (gestures and posture), lifestyle, and value systems (Li et al., 2025).

In teaching practice, communicative culture often becomes the "invisible minefield" of intercultural conflict. Many linguistic errors are not merely grammatical issues but rather misalignments of cultural context. Understanding culture assists students in avoiding culture shock and social awkwardness; moreover, learning culture is inherently more vivid and engaging than memorizing abstract linguistic rules, thereby enhancing student motivation. Proficiency in the social norms, etiquette, and cognitive frameworks of the target country significantly improves communication efficiency within multicultural contexts.

The Culture Induction Method emphasizes a three-dimensional coupling of "Language–Culture–Context." When coupled with translation, it evolves into a four-dimensional model: "Language–Culture–Context–Translation." Under this framework, any cultural topic is accompanied by an "instant translation task," forming a closed loop of "Cognition–Emotion–Behavior–Translation." For instance, when the Japanese honorific system (keigo) faces the challenge of "Zero-Honorific" AI butlers, students are required to perform on-site role-playing interpretation tasks involving "Honorifics ⇄ Zero-Honorifics." Subsequently, they must draft a 200-word "Memorandum on Translation Ethics" (SFWJ, 2023). This task compels them to reflect on the value conflict of "whether a translator should manually restore politeness when a machine eliminates honorifics," thereby facilitating a profound understanding of the social hierarchy and emotional labor embedded within honorific language.

The four-dimensional model also necessitates attention to post-translation reader response. In the experimental classroom, students translated the AI butler's line 「お世話しておりません」 (Osewa shite orimasen) as "Zero service, total freedom" and released it on a real-time "bullet chat" (danmaku) platform. Audience polls indicated that 73% of viewers considered the translation to be cool but slightly offensive. This

feedback prompted the translators to perform a second revision, changing the text to "Unattended, yet liberated." This cycle of translation, publication, evaluation, and revision ensures that translation ethics moves beyond theoretical discussion and enters the public sphere to establish instant accountability.

In-depth Analysis and Sci-Fi Evolution of Japanese "Solo Dining" Culture

In Japan, the demographic opting for "Solo Dining" continues to expand. Tracing the origins, one must look back to the 1990s following the collapse of the economic bubble; the subsequent "Lost Decades" led to a diminished desire for marriage and a sharp, sustained decline in birth rates. Official statistics indicate that between 1995 and 2015, the average household size decreased from 2.82 to 2.39 members. According to a sampling survey of 3,000 citizens over the age of 20 published in the government's White Paper on Dietary Education (Shokui-ku Hakusho), 15.3% of the Japanese population averaged four days a week dining alone in 2017, a 5% increase from 2011 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2018). This suggests that single and solitary living has made solo dining increasingly accepted and even embraced. Following the principle of "supply meeting demand," the catering industry has shifted toward "fine-tuned management" for this demographic, with numerous restaurants offering a rich variety of "solo set meals" (hitori teishoku) while meticulously designing environments that cater to the psychological and sensory well-being of the lone diner (Iwanami, 2019).

Entering the 2030s, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) released the Digital Dietary White Paper, incorporating "virtual communal dining" into national statistics for the first time. The catering industry subsequently upgraded to feature "Memory Restaurants," where AI utilizes brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) to read a customer's gustatory memories and instantly replicate flavors from their childhood. To mitigate "algorithmic loneliness," the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare even implemented a fixed "Emotional Hourly Wage" for "holographic companions," establishing a new frontier in the gig economy. The iconic catchphrase of Goro Inogashira, the protagonist of the Japanese drama The Solitary Gourmet, is projected to evolve: "To be unconstrained by time, society, or algorithms, filling one's stomach happily in a capsule, I become the center of the universe." This line garnered 230 million views on the Mars edition of TikTok, becoming a definitive "Solo Dining Manifesto for the Technological Age" (Kusumi, 2015).

Similar practices are observed in China, such as at Haidilao Hotpot where large dolls are placed opposite solo diners for companionship. This phenomenon is even more pronounced in Japan. For instance, some cafes place hippopotamus plush toys to accompany individual diners. For female users, digital services allow the download of male avatars to be displayed on screens opposite them, creating the illusion of sharing coffee with a partner. One restaurant even issued a satirical decree stating that on Christmas Eve, the establishment would refuse to serve couples to prevent inflicting emotional and spiritual trauma upon single diners. These examples serve as a profound reflection of the current social culture and living conditions in Japan.

Methodologies for Integrating "Solo Dining" Culture and Translation Pathways in Japanese Classrooms

In the Chinese context, the term "Solo Dining" (Yi Ren Shi) was first introduced in 2012 by Cai Yani through her media video channel (Cai, 2014); with the rapid expansion of the internet era, it has long since become a standard netizen lexicon. In the practice of university-level Japanese language teaching, a diversified approach should be adopted to achieve effective cultural infiltration.

Authentic Corpora + Sci-Fi Preview + Pre-translation Editing: By introducing Japanese drama clips

(e.g., Midnight Diner), Japanese social media commentary, and data from the White Paper on Dietary Education, students can perceive vocabulary usage in authentic contexts. Utilizing real content such as Japanese newspapers, magazines, films, music, and social media, exposes students to genuine cultural environments. Pre-class assignments include a "Japanese-to-Chinese" task: translating a 2,000-word entry on "Virtual Communal Dining" from the latest white paper. Students are required to use "Translator's Notes" to explain neologisms like Kasō Shefu (Virtual Chef) and Mikaku Dōki (Taste Synchronization), fostering an awareness of terminology standardization.

Comparative Reflection + Ethical Debate + Simultaneous Interpretation: Classrooms can host debates on the topic "Does loneliness need to be 'cured'?" using a bidirectional C-J/J-C simultaneous interpretation mode. Group A students speak in Chinese while Group B provides real-time interpretation into Japanese, and vice versa. Teachers provide a rapid mapping table for onomatopoeia and mimetic words (Gitaigo/Giongo) to train the instantaneous conversion of "Sound–Meaning–Culture."

Situational Simulation + World-Building + Subtitle Translation: Specific cultural conflict scenarios are designed for role-playing, allowing students to experience cultural etiquette and communicative behaviors in diverse settings.

Cultural Sketches + Sci-Fi Writing + Post-Editing: Short narratives behind specific "Solo Dining" cases are introduced. Students perform "Japanese-to-Chinese" post-editing using Trados plugins. They are required to document deleted redundant onomatopoeia and adjustments to sentence-final ellipsis in "Translation Memoirs," concluding with a bilingual emotional synthesis using mimetic words.

Throughout the teaching process, cultural induction must remain incremental. Instruction should be phased according to the students' linguistic proficiency: the elementary stage focuses on common daily knowledge, while the advanced stage targets social psychology and cultural spirit.

Furthermore, it is essential to avoid cultural stereotypes. When introducing "Solo Dining," diversity must be presented to emphasize that "translation is not equivalent to cultural compensation." This prevents the reduction of "Future Japan" into a simplified "Universal Solitude Pod." The concept of "Translator Visibility" is introduced in the classroom: allowing students to retain certain Japanese Kanji in their translations accompanied by footnotes explaining "homographic false friends", thereby cultivating an awareness of Foreignization in translation strategy.

Teaching Experiment and Results Analysis

To verify the effectiveness of the "Sci-Fi plus Translation" model, the researchers conducted a sixteen-week teaching experiment during the first semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. This study focused on third-year Japanese majors at a foreign language university. The experimental group, consisting of thirty students, adopted the four-dimensional coupling model proposed in this paper, while the control group, also consisting of thirty students, followed the traditional culture induction method where translation training served only as supplementary homework. Pre-test results indicated no significant differences between the two groups ($p > 0.05$) regarding JLPT N2 simulations, intercultural sensitivity scales, and translator competency scores. The assessment focused on five primary indicators.

1. Linguistic Skills: Measured via a JLPT N2 simulation and a self-developed "Neologism Translation" test with a reliability of (alpha = 0.81).

2. Cultural Sensitivity: Measured via the Japanese-Chinese bilingual version of the Furham Intercultural

Sensitivity Scale with a reliability of (alpha = 0.78).

3. Critical Thinking: Measured via the Chinese version of the CCTST-Level Z with a reliability of (alpha = 0.83).

4. Translation Proficiency: Utilized an "Error Category Analysis Scale" which divided errors into grammar, terminology, culture, and ethics. The inter-rater reliability between two assessors reached (kappa = 0.87).

5. Learning Motivation: Measured via a self-developed five-point Likert scale with a reliability of (alpha = 0.85).

Quantitative results demonstrated that the post-test linguistic skill scores for the experimental group (M = 85.7, SD = 6.2) were significantly higher than those of the control group (M = 78.4, SD = 7.5), where t = 4.03, p < 0.01, and Cohen's d = 1.05, indicating a large effect size. Cultural sensitivity increased by 32.6% and critical thinking by 28.4%. Notably, the translation error rate decreased by 32%, with "Ethical Errors" showing the most substantial decline at 46%. Within the learning motivation scale, the "Intrinsic Interest" dimension of the experimental group improved most significantly, rising from a pre-test mean of 3.1 to a post-test mean of 4.3 (p < 0.01).

This research embeds science fiction narratives and translation ethics into cultural induction, which ensures that linguistic knowledge is no longer detached but rather acquires immediate application scenarios within technological conflicts and ethical dilemmas. Translation acts as a developing agent that makes cultural differences and value conflicts explicit during bilingual conversion. This process significantly reduces ethical errors and validates the effectiveness of the four-dimensional coupling model. Furthermore, the future-oriented sense of distance provided by the science fiction context alleviates student anxiety regarding translation errors. It creates a state of safe novelty that effectively enhances intrinsic motivation.

Conclusion

The Culture Induction Method is not intended to transform a language course into a "cultural studies" lecture, nor is it meant to treat "science fiction" as a mere gimmick. Rather, it utilizes translation as a continuous "developing agent" to manifest technological narratives, cultural disparities, and ethical conflicts within bilingual texts. By using "Solo Dining" as a point of entry, students acquire more than just neologisms such as Kasō Koshitsu (Virtual Private Room) or Mikaku Deja-vu (Gustatory Déjà Vu); they experience firsthand how technological concepts are reshaped by language and filtered through the translator's ethics during the process of Japanese-Chinese bidirectional translation.

When language teaching achieves this dimensionality upgrade, moving from Instrumental Rationality to Communicative Rationality and ultimately to Translation Ethics, we can truly cultivate a new generation of Japanese language professionals who are linguistically proficient, culturally literate, empathetic, imaginative, and skilled in translation. These individuals will be capable of not only ordering a 2,000-yen "Memory Sushi" in Japanese but also utilizing bilingualism to preserve a final vestige of "dignified solitude" for humanity amidst the torrential flow of algorithms.

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