

## Eleventh Annual JAT Contest for New and Aspiring Translators (Japanese to English)

### Source text

青少年を暴力団から守るために（静岡県警察）

<http://jat.org/?ACT=67&key=239qdQLe17uf24g1>

### The translations of award winners and finalists

1<sup>st</sup> place: [E49](#) Cheriell Neo

2<sup>nd</sup> place: [E3](#) Julia Clark

Finalists: [E4](#) Michael Haley    [E28](#) Lisa Koga    [E48](#) Anna Wada

### Commentaries from the Judges

[James Davis](#)

[Ruth McCreery](#)

[Ken Wagner](#)

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### The translations of award winners and finalists

#### [E4](#) Michael Haley

The Reality of Organized Crime - Mr. A, a former gang member tells his story –

Shackled by “family” relationships

In organized crime organizations, “godfathers” and their “henchmen” drink together and form a father-son relationship. This bond is unbreakable, and if the godfather says, “jump!” the henchman says “how high?” If the godfather orders a hit on a rival gang member, the henchman must carry it out. On the other hand, he may be killed by a rival gang member, and if he fails, he may be punished by having part of his finger cut off. That is why failure is not tolerated whatsoever.

No freedom

As soon as they enter a gang, new recruits are made to live in the office “on duty.” They must answer the office phone, clean, cook, and care for the leaders and other top gang

members. Days of the week do not exist to them, and they have no days off. I had no free time at all.

Tattoos are forever

I was told I was not a man until I got a tattoo. I put up with the pain and got one, but even now that I've quit the gang, the tattoo will be with me for the rest of my life. Even now I am wary of people looking at me, and I cannot go to the pool or onsen. Tattoos are a way of keeping people from quitting the gang.

No way out

The father-son relationship in organized crime is, in fact, stronger than a real father-son relationship, so they don't let you quit easily. If you try to quit, they will extort you for huge sums of money or make you cut off part of your finger. If you still want to leave despite that, you will have to worry that they might harm your family. There are a lot of guys who want to quit but can't.

All that glitters is not gold

You may be lured in with promises of an end to money problems, nice cars, and popularity with women, but these are all lies. The only ones who can live the good life are the godfathers and other higher-ups, and even then it is only skin-deep. Even if henchmen are able to save up some money, it gets collected by the gang as "dues" so they are always nearly broke.

Living is a struggle

Gangs do not pay wages. Long ago, gangs made money by extorting "protection fees" from restaurants, but now with the Anti-Organized Crime Law and Organized Crime Exclusion Ordinances, this has become harder to do. Even small threats will get you arrested by the police. But you still need to pay "dues" to the gang. Gangs are organizations that will do anything and everything for money, so you can never lead a normal life.

In shambles over drugs

Gangs also make money through illicit sales of illegal drugs. But, in fact, lots of guys are driven to using those drugs over the stress of worrying that they will be caught by the police,

killed by a rival gang, or done in by their superiors. If you use these stimulants, your body and nerves are left in shambles, and ultimately the drugs leave you just a shell of a person.

#### Shunned by the world

Nowadays, even famous celebrities can be forced out of their jobs over connections to gangs. The movement toward excluding organized crime is real. Gang members cannot open bank accounts or use hotels, which is inconvenient. They are excluded from golfing clubs. Some guys play under assumed names but get arrested by the police if they are found out. Joining a gang is just stupid, plain and simple.

#### E28 Lisa Koga

##### The Truth About Organized Crime ~The Accounts of Former Gangster A (1)~

#### A Binding Contract

The relationship between boss and subordinate is absolute and unchangeable. The boss's word is law and if he orders you to kill the rival, you must see it through, even if it means putting your life in danger. If you are to fail, what awaits you is the cruel and unusual punishment of finger amputation. Such is the law of the gang and therefore, failing is simply not a choice.

#### No Freedom

When you join a gang, new recruits are immediately forced into the position of live-in caretaker for the members. The entire day is spent as the gang's gopher taking calls, cleaning, cooking, and caring for the chief and his executives. There are no days off in this field of work, and that means absolutely no time for yourself.

#### Ink Will Never Fade

"If you get a tattoo, you're one of us" is what I was told, so I endured the pain and got one, but it has become a scar that will never fade even after leaving the gang. Even now I can feel people's stares and I can't even go to the pool or the hot springs with my family! Little did I know that the tattoos were actually a tactic used to keep people from leaving the group.

#### I Want to Leave But...

The boss and underling relationship of a gang is sometimes stronger than one of actual

parent and child and quitting is easier said than done. To put a means to an end, you are expected to pay an exorbitant amount of money and the amputation of a finger is considered customary. Even if they want to run, the possibility of putting their family in danger keeps many of the guys frozen in fear.

#### Appearances Can Deceive

If you join a gang, you won't ever have to worry about money, you'll ride in the best cars, and you'll even be a ladies man! I was swayed by these wonderful words but in reality, they were all just lies. The only ones who get to put on those airs are the bosses and the senior members, and truthfully, it's only skin deep. No matter how hard the underlings work, the gang and its leaders swallow up all our hard earned money. I remember those days when I didn't even have a penny to my name.

#### Life Gets Rough

There's no such thing as a salary for a gang member. In the past, you could earn a few bucks as a bouncer in eateries but nowadays, things like the Anti-Organized Crime Law and the organized crime exclusion decrees make things difficult. A few threats and next thing you know, the police have you in handcuffs. But because the gang still expects you to pay your gang fees, crimes and activities committed in the name of money is nothing unusual. Living a normal life in this sort of organization is impossible.

#### Broken and Addicted

Hustling (earning money) through selling illegal drugs is a common practice of organized crime. Through it all you are constantly thinking, "What if the police catch me?" or "I might be done in by our opponents" and "If I mess up my chief and group members might terrorize me". This endless fear and anxiety sets plenty of guys over the edge, and many of them end up hooked on the very drugs they sell. Using meth (stimulants) will destroy your mind and body and eventually you'll just be a hollow, lifeless shell.

#### Unwanted Company

Nowadays, even the mention of ties with a gang is enough to push famous celebrities into retirement. Recent actions to eliminate organized crime are becoming increasingly serious. Gang members are banned from making bank accounts, and the use of hotels is a no-go as

well. Even golf courses forbid members, so many guys try and play under a false name only to be caught and locked up. Nothing good ever comes from these ridiculous gangs!

#### E48 Anna Wada

### The Realities of Organized Crime Groups: Testimonial by Former Crime Group Member "A" (1)

#### Bound tightly by familial ties

Organized crime group members exchange ceremonial sips of sake to establish a parent-child relationship between the boss and his subordinate. This relationship is absolute, and the word of the boss is law. If his orders are to kill someone from a rival group, you have no choice but to carry it out. You could be killed instead, though, and a slip-up meant dealing with tough customs like cutting off your fingers (yubitsume), so failure was definitely not an option.

#### No freedom

Once in the group, newbies are immediately assigned to live-in secretarial duties (heyazumi) at the group office. You spend the entire day as a lowly errand boy for the office, just taking care of things like answering the phone, cleaning, and cooking, as well as assisting the boss and executive members. Weekends don't matter so there are no days off, and I didn't have any free time to myself.

#### Tattoos are permanent

Someone told me, "Tattoos are what make you a real member," so I endured the pain to get inked. But tattoos will stay with you forever, even if you leave the group. I still feel people's eyes on me, and can't go to the pool or the hot springs with my family. Tattoos had been a way to prevent desertion from the group.

#### Even if you want to leave...

Familial bonds in an organized crime group are tighter than your ties with actual blood relatives. They will not let you leave easily. As a way of taking responsibility, you'll be ordered to pay an inordinate amount of money, and to cut off your fingers in the yubitsume ritual. Refusing to cooperate and escaping could place their family in danger, so many guys can't leave, even if they want to.

### Misleading appearances

I was lured to the group by promises of money, nice cars, and women, but those were all lies. The only ones making good for themselves were the boss and senior members, and even they were putting up a façade. The ones at the bottom were always left floundering, having their earnings taken away by the group as membership dues.

### Hard to make a living

Salaries don't exist for crime group members. They used to be able to earn money by taking protection fees from places like restaurants, but these days, the "Anti-Organized Crime Law" and "Organized Crime Exclusion Ordinances" make things difficult. One little threat could get you caught by the police, but you still have to pay your dues to the group. These are organizations that are willing to go the length and commit crimes for money, so there's no way you could live a normal life.

### Worn down by drugs

Crime group members could earn side money (shinogi) by the illicit trading of illegal drugs. In reality, many guys use the drugs themselves, unable to bear their constant fears: "The police could catch me." "I could be killed by the rival group." "The boss or seniors could beat me up." Once you use drugs (shabu), your body and nerves will wear out and you'll just end up in ruins...

### Now they're just something to get rid of

Nowadays, even famous celebrities are forced to retire because of their ties with organized crime groups. The recent movement towards eliminating these organizations is real. It's very inconvenient to be a member because you can't get a bank account or stay in hotels. You'll also be rejected from golf courses, and there are guys who get caught by the police after playing under a false name. Being a crime group member is too idiotic to put up with.

### [E3 Julia Clark \(2<sup>nd</sup> place\)](#)

The Truth About Gangs – One Former Gang Member's Experience (Part 1)

### Bound by a Father-Son Relationship

In a gang, the boss and his underlings exchange cups of sake to formalize their father-son

relationship. This relationship is absolute: white becomes black at the boss's say-so, and if the boss tells you to kill a member of a rival gang, you have no choice but to do so. Conversely, you might also be killed by a rival gang member, and there are harsh rules to deal with those who fail, such as forcing them to cut off the tip of their own finger. Therefore, failure was absolutely not an option.

#### No Freedom

When newcomers enter a gang, they are immediately put on duty guarding the gang's headquarters in a "live-in" arrangement. You spend all day acting as an errand boy, answering the phone, cleaning, cooking, and tending to the needs of the boss and other higher-ups. The day of the week is irrelevant, so there are no days off, and there was truly no free time at all.

#### Tattoos Can't Be Removed

I was told, "If you get a tattoo, you'll be a real man," so I endured the pain and got inked, but even if you quit the gang the tattoo will stay with you for the rest of your life. Even now people stare at me, and I can't even go to the pool or the hot springs with my family. Tattoos were also used as a method of preventing gang members from quitting.

#### I Want to Leave, But...

The father-son relationship within a gang goes beyond even an actual father-son relationship, so they don't let you quit easily. To formalize your departure from the gang, they take an outrageous sum of money from you, and they might demand that you cut the tip of a finger off. There are a lot of guys out there who want to leave their gang but can't, worrying that if they try to run away and escape those drastic measures they will only put their family further at risk.

#### Putting on Appearances

I was attracted by claims that if you enter a gang you won't have any money troubles, you'll ride around in nice cars, and you'll be popular with the ladies, but it was all lies. Only the boss and senior group members are able to put on a good appearance, and even that is just on the surface. Whatever money the underlings earn ends up being absorbed back into the organization when they pay their tributes, which was a constant source of anxiety.

### Getting By is Rough

Gang members don't have anything like a salary. In the old days, you could earn money by extorting protection fees from restaurants and other establishments, but it's a lot harder now because of the Anti-Organized Crime Law and the Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance for Eliminating Organized Crime Groups. If you threaten someone even a little, you'll get arrested by the police right away. However, you still have to pay your tributes to the gang. Gangs are organizations that will do anything for money, including criminal activity, so there's no way to live a normal life.

### Worn Out From Stimulants

The smuggling of illegal drugs is one of the main sources of income for gangs. However, there are actually a lot of guys who end up using the drugs themselves, giving in to the constant fears of being arrested by the police, caught by a rival gang, or punished by the boss and senior gang members. When you use speed (stimulants), your body and nerves are worn into tatters, ending in permanent disability.

### Today's Trend of Elimination

We now live in an age where even famous celebrities are forced to retire as a result of gang connections. The recent trend of gang elimination is absolutely real. Gang members can't open a bank account, and they can't even use hotels, so life is very inconvenient. Gang members are even being eliminated from golf courses, and some have been caught by police after trying to play under a fake name. Gangs are just foolish, and enough is enough!

### E49 Cheriel Neo (1<sup>st</sup> place)

#### The Truth about Gangs: As related by former gang member A (Part 1)

##### Oppressive relationships with bosses

In gangs, once new recruits pledge allegiance to the gang boss, they get locked into a 'parent-child' relationship. Within this relationship, if your boss says 'Jump', you say 'How high?', and if he says 'Kill that rival gang member', then you must do it without question. You might get killed by that rival gang member, though, and if you fail, brutal punishments such as the infamous severing of a finger await. There was no way I could ever have got off lightly with failure.

### Loss of freedom

Once they join the gang, new recruits are made to undertake what's known as 'living at home'—round-the-clock house-sitting duty at the gang's headquarters. All day long you'll be their lackey, answering calls, cleaning, cooking and waiting on the boss and other higher-ups. You'll never get a day off because nobody cares what day of the week it is: I had no free time whatsoever.

### Tattoos never fade away

Having been told, 'When you get a tattoo you'll truly become a man', I endured the pain and got one inked, but though I quit the gang, the tattoos will remain for life. Even now, I get stared at in the street, and I can't go with my family to the swimming pool or the hot spring baths. Tattooing turned out to be just another trick the gang used to keep its members from leaving.

You might want to make a clean break, but...

'Parent-child' relationships in gangs are taken even more seriously than real parent-child relationships, so you won't be allowed to break it off so easily. In order to officially make the break, you'll be forced to hand over extortionate sums, and a severed finger will be demanded of you. Dreading this, and fearing that their families might be threatened if they were to leave, many gang members long to quit, but are unable to do so.

### False fronts

You'll be enticed with promises that if you join, you'll get to ride in fancy cars, be popular with the ladies and never lack money, but these are a pack of lies. The only ones who get to cut a fine figure are your bosses and your 'older brothers', and even then it's all just a front. As for underlings, any money you earn will get consumed by dues paid to the gang, and you'll always be dead broke.

### Life is hard

There's no such thing as wages for gang members. In the past, you might have been able to get some cash by extorting protection money from restaurant owners and the like, but now, with the Anti-Organized Crime Law and the Organized Crime Exclusion Ordinances, this is much harder to do. Threatening anyone even a little will get you arrested by the police. Even so, there's no way to avoid paying your dues to the gang. A gang is an organisation that will do anything and commit any crime for the sake of money, so there's no way members can ever lead anything like a normal life.

### Wasting away on stimulants

Part of a gang's revenue comes from the clandestine sale of illegal drugs. In reality, however, there are many members who through constant fretting that 'I might get caught by the police,'

'I might get done in by a rival gang member,' or 'I might get punished by the boss or my "older brothers",' end up turning to drugs themselves. Injecting stimulants causes physical and psychological ruin, ultimately reducing the user to little more than a vegetable...

Treated nowadays as social outcasts

We live in a time where even celebrities get hounded out of jobs because of their links to gangs. The recent movement towards the exclusion of gangs from society is very real. Life has been made very difficult for gang members, who are barred from the use of hotels and from opening bank accounts. They're even banned from golf courses, so some play under false names, and are subsequently exposed and caught by the police. Gangs have become such objects of ridicule: only fools would join them now.

## Commentaries from the Judges

James Davis

General Comments

This passage consists of eight distinct paragraphs, but the entire passage tells the story of one person's experience with a criminal gang. While the translator works out the details of each individual paragraph it is important to maintain the coherence and the voice that bind these eight paragraphs together. Certain details are essential in order for the translation to provide the English-language reader with the same impact that the source text conveys to the Japanese-language reader. Those details should not be omitted or diluted.

The content of this passage may be unfamiliar to many people. However, keeping in mind the identity of organization that produced the document—in this case, the Shizuoka Prefectural Police—and the intended purpose of the document—in this case, to warn young people about the dangers associated with organized crime—will guide the translator as (s)he faces the many choices that confront any translator working on any project. A small amount of Internet research can yield big dividends in terms of background knowledge and a sense of the way certain terms are used.

All five finalists captured the overall flavor of the passage. Some finalists did a better job than others at expressing key details clearly without becoming overly literal, and some finalists clearly did more background reading than others.

A few words and phrases proved to be difficult for several of the finalists. One example is 組抜けするにははじめとして in the fourth paragraph. The term はじめ often signifies a clear "distinction" between two alternatives or the "resolution" of a problem. However, じめ may

also convey a sense of “discipline” or “teaching (someone) a lesson.” In this context, けじめ appears to be directed toward those who want to 組抜けする. Options such as “To formalize your departure from the gang”, “To put a means to an end,” or “In order to officially make the break” miss the mark. “As a way of taking responsibility” comes close, but a better choice would be, “As a way to *enforce discipline* on a gang member who wants to quit,” “As a way to *teach a lesson* to a gang member who wants to quit,” or perhaps “As a way to *put in his place* a gang member who wants to quit.” One person skipped this phrase completely. In this instance the English text reads well, and the target language reader would never know that anything was missing. However, the impact of this phrase is absent, and meaning is lost.

Several finalists had difficulty dealing with the combination “シノギ (稼ぎ)” and the combination “シャブ (覚せい剤)” in the seventh paragraph. In fact, the term シノギ is a slang term for “making dough” or “scoring cash,” and the term 稼ぎ is a standard term for “earnings.” Similarly, the term シャブ corresponds to the slang term “speed,” and the term 覚せい剤 is the standard term for “stimulants.” It appears that in each of these instances the Japanese writer consciously introduced a slang term that a former gang member might use, and then followed the slang term with a standard word that would be easily recognized by those readers who might not be familiar with the slang term. That duality should be preserved in the translation.

The eighth paragraph refers to celebrities who are forced to 引退 because of connections to 暴力団. Several of the finalists used “retire” or “retirement” to describe the situation. In fact, these celebrities don’t give up their careers, but they are forced to give up the shows in which they appear. In this context “forced out of their jobs” or “hounded out of jobs” were more accurate descriptions of what actually happens in such situations.

Additional comments on selected points in the individual translations follow.

E3

Strengths: The use of “speed” for シャブ and “worn into tatters” for ボロボロ indicate a good “ear” for colloquial Japanese.

Weaknesses: The phrase 暴力団排除条例 in the sixth paragraph was translated as “Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance for Eliminating Organized Crime Groups.” Internet research indicates that this phrase refers to ordinances that have been introduced in prefectures throughout Japan. This should be rendered more generally as, “Organized Crime Exclusion Ordinances.” “Smuggling” may be one component of 密売, but the intended meaning of 違法薬物の密売 is “dealing in illegal drugs” or “trafficking in illegal drugs.” The phrase

“permanent disability” has a fairly specific meaning and a rather formal tone. (It doesn’t sound like something a former gang member would say.) In this passage 廃人さ carries a much more colloquial tone. A better choice for 最後は廃人さ would be “..., and in the end you become a wreck” or “..., and you end up fried.” The heading of the eighth paragraph was rendered as “Today’s Trend of Elimination.” The meaning of the English phrase is not clear, and the meaning of the Japanese text (今じゃ排除される身) has been lost. A heading should be translated so that the heading and the body text fit together as a unit. Keeping in mind the content of this paragraph, a better option might be “These Days They are Outcasts.”

E4

Strengths: The combination of “jump!” and “how high?” is an interesting translation for 親分が黒といえば白も黒になる. The phrase “Tattoos are forever” is a nice touch. It makes the necessary point but also evokes the James Bond movie “Diamonds are Forever.”

Weaknesses: The title on this page ends with the numeral “①.” This suggests that this page is “Part 1” of the story. (A glance at the third page confirms this.) The title should include “(1)” or “(Part 1).” In the first paragraph the translation refers to “godfathers” and “henchmen.” The translator may be trying too hard to make the text interesting. Referring simply to “the boss” and “subordinates/underlings/gang members” would be sufficient to make the intended point. In contrast, the phrase 杯を交わして is rendered as “drink together.” If the previous phrase is “overdone,” this phrase is “underdone.” The “exchange” of cups is an important symbol, but this element of the ritual has been completely lost in this translation. The heading of the seventh paragraph reads 覚せい剤でボロボロ. This poster was created by the Shizuoka Prefectural Police. Online research indicates that in police parlance 覚せい剤 are “stimulants,” while 薬物 (which appears in the first sentence of this paragraph) are “drugs.” The phrase “in shambles” is a vivid way to express ボロボロ, but the translation “In shambles over drugs” doesn’t really convey the intended message—namely, that some gang members ruin their own health through the use of stimulants. A better option would be, “In shambles from stimulant use” or “In shambles after using stimulants.” The phrase “golfing clubs” may be acceptable in the UK, but in this context “golf courses” would be a better choice.

E28

Strengths: The phrase “the boss’s word is law” is an interesting translation for 親分が黒といえば白も黒になる in the first paragraph. The use of “hustling” for シノギ in the seventh paragraph expresses the intended meaning and maintains the intended tone. This translation captures both the slang term and the more formal term for the combinations “シノギ (稼ぎ)” and “シャブ (覚せい剤).”

Weaknesses: Both the fact that 親分、子分が杯を交わして and the resulting 親子の関係 are completely absent from the translation. These elements are important parts of the picture. Simply stating that, “The relationship between boss and subordinate is absolute and unchanging” does not tell the full story. The text describes 指詰め as a 厳しい掟. The phrase “cruel and unusual punishment” is a legalistic phrase that seems out of place in this document. A simple phrase such as “harsh punishment” or “harsh treatment” would be a better fit. Internet research indicates that 暴力団排除条例 is a proper noun. The translation should read, “Organized Crime Exclusion Ordinances” not “organized crime exclusion decrees.”

E48

Strengths: The phrase “the word of the boss is law” is an interesting generalization of 親分が黒といえば白も黒になる.

Weaknesses: Including both a translation and a transliteration for two terms that appeared in quotes (指詰め and 部屋住み)—while not providing a transliteration for another term that appeared in quotes(法外な金)—leaves the impression that the translator was not confident of the intended meaning of the first two terms and was hedging his/her bets. Placing the translation in quotes is sufficient; in these instances a transliteration is a distraction. In two places the source text contained the word 指詰め. In the first paragraph of the passage the translation reads, “cutting off your fingers (*yubitsume*),” and in the fourth paragraph the translation reads, “to cut off your fingers in the *yubitsume* ritual.” In both places the reader is left with the impression that an errant gang member must cut off multiple fingers—perhaps even all of his fingers. If the first occurrence is rendered simply as, “cutting off (part of) a finger,” and the translator keeps in mind that the occurrence of this word in the fourth paragraph does not require much explanation, because the word appeared previously in the first paragraph, the second occurrence could simply read, “to cut off (part of) a finger.” The term 兄貴 was rendered as “seniors.” In the US the term “senior” refers specifically to a fourth-year student in high school or college or else to someone over the age of 65. In this context “senior members of the gang” would be a better choice.

E49

Strengths: The combination of “jump!” and “how high?” is an interesting translation for 親分が黒といえば白も黒になる. “Little more than a vegetable” is a creative way to express 廃人さ.

Weaknesses: The translation mentions that “new recruits pledge allegiance to the gang boss,” but the image associated with 親分、子分が杯を交わして is missing. That image is an important part of the story. After all, there are many ways for a subordinate to pledge allegiance to a boss or other leader. In the seventh paragraph the translation refers to

“*Injecting* stimulants.” The drawing does show someone injecting something into his arm, but Internet research indicates that stimulants can be abused in many ways. It would be better to opt for, “*Using* stimulants.”

## Ruth McCreery

The text chosen for this year’s contest required that the translators give thought to the purpose of the text—to deter young people from becoming involved with the *yakuza*—and produce an English version that would be at least as compelling.

The way in which the original was written presented an immediate hurdle: each of the eight brief sections begins with what appear to be general observations about *yakuza* that could be interpreted as written in the third person, then ends with a more personal, first-person statement. Following that pattern in English produced sudden shifts in voice that were awkward, in some cases ungrammatical, and greatly weakened the impact of the translation.

Our winner, Cheriell Neo, dealt with the voice issue by maintaining an informal style, producing what reads like a description of personal experiences, and by writing many of the sections entirely in the first person. The result is effective English. For example, for the first section’s 親分が黒といえば白も黒になる, she wrote, “If your boss says ‘Jump,’ you say ‘How high?’” Another translator rendered it as “If the godfather says, ‘jump!’ the henchman says ‘how high?’”: the same clever choice of phrase, but in the third person, making the account seem less informal and immediate.

The description of entering into a fictive kinship relationship when joining a gang was apparently challenging. Neo avoided the details of ritual saké sharing; while lacking ethnographic detail, her “pledge allegiance to the gang boss” does get the point across. Translator E48’s “Organized crime group members exchange ceremonial sips of sake to establish a parent-child relationship between the boss and his subordinate” is accurate and well written, if rather stiff. Compare it with E4’s “In organized crime organizations, ‘godfathers’ and their ‘henchmen’ drink together and form a father-son relationship,” a translation that omits the ritual component—they could be chugging down beers in a bar—and is syntactically awkward (plural “henchmen,” singular “relationship”).

The finger-severing issue also threw several translators off: “cutting off your fingers” multiplies the injury (usually one finger, and sometimes one joint, at a time), while “finger amputation” is overly clinical. Neo’s “infamous severing of a finger” communicates the brutality of the act but fails to indicate that the underling is forced to cut off his own finger. E3,

our runner-up, did state that—“forcing them to cut off the tip of their own finger”—but with an awkward singular-plural inconsistency.

Oddly, the question of golf also produced a series of unfortunate translations. ゴルフ場からだって排除される was rendered by E3 as “eliminated from golf courses,” which suggests their being expelled instead of excluded or, to quote Neo, banned. “Even golf clubs forbid members” (E28) introduces a new source of confusion, since in that phrase the “members” would logically be members of the club, not gang members.

As these examples suggest, while all the finalists came up with some effective colloquialisms that suit the subject matter, most also produced misinterpretations of the Japanese as well as awkward, even ungrammatical English: all, in the end, translation errors. In the future, taking greater care in the “write a little” phase of Fred Uleman’s “read a little, think a little, write a little” translation process might lead to further thought and closer readings of the original text. The result would be more accurate, more effective translations.

## [Ken Wagner](#)

2014 JAT Contest Commentary Ken Wagner

Translation of social service materials from the local language into the language of foreign residents is a substantial part of commercial translation. [Shizuoka Prefecture's website](#), the source of this year’s contest passage, contains information in English, Korean, Chinese, Portugese, and Spanish. Shizuoka Prefecture’s website presently tends to aim at a higher-end readership, with information on the economy, industry, tourism, and cultural features. However, it contains [links to municipal websites](#) with more practical information on utilities, emergency services, transportation and the like for foreign residents, although much of this information appears to have been machine translated. The Tokyo Metropolitan website contains a larger selection of practical information on topics such as [medical care](#), [legal issues](#), and [transportation](#). So, there is indeed a market for commercial translators working out-of-Japanese to provide translations in various areas of social and public services.

This year’s contest passage comes from a page on the Shizuoka Prefectural Police website, warning of the dangers that organized crime poses to young people. The actual passage is the testimonial of a young, former low-level member of the *yakuza*. In addition to being about organized crime, which has a highly specialized vocabulary, including jargon and legal terminology, a distinctive feature of the passage is that it is entirely speech - a soliloquy. The text sounded like speech and included two instances of the final particle よ, five

instances of *なんて*, and one *だけど*. Thus, the translator of this piece is essentially writing “dialogue.”

Legal translators of depositions, literary translators, and subtitlers must produce human speech or a telegraphed form of it. Even I, as a medical and pharmaceutical translator, occasionally have to translate responses to market research surveys that are colloquial and sometimes very earthy. So, a review of techniques for writing human speech or “dialogue” may be of benefit to many commercial translators.

In general, this year’s five finalists conveyed the information in the Japanese original of the contest passage. The reader knew what former *boryokudan* member “A” said almost all of the time. Only a few errors slipped in here and there, but this is a contest for new and aspiring translators, and the contestants will probably develop better source language understanding and target language writing techniques over time. However, maintaining the spoken tone of the translation, without veering into a written style, seemed to be a major challenge of this year’s passage. When the translation of dialogue veers into a written style, it not only is evident to the pedantic editor or fellow translator, but has a subconscious jarring effect on the reader. Since the other judges will provide excellent commentaries on the translations as a whole, I will focus my comments on writing dialogue and the quality of the dialogue written by the contestants.

I tried searching for tips on writing dialogue on the web and, to my surprise, found several good sites in my first Google search, using the phrase “writing dialogue.” These sites took only a few minutes to review. Here is what I found:

<http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/the-7-tools-of-dialogue>

This site contains seven steps for writing dialogue, which mostly concern the interaction between the parties in the dialogue and creating fiction. However, two stood out: “#2 Act it out” and “#4 Drop words.” A more obvious tip was “#5. Polish a gem” (rewrite).

The need to rewrite is obvious in all types of writing. It also seems like many formal turns of phrase would not have been used if the contestants would have acted out or, at least, read their translations in character.

For dropping words (economy of speech), the website gives the following example:

"Your dog was killed?"

“Yes, run over by a car.”

“What did you call it?”

“It was a she. I called her Tuffy.”

This is the way Elmore Leonard did it in *Out of Sight*:

“Your dog was killed?”

“Got run over by a car.”

“What did you call it?”

“Was a she, name Tuffy.”

<http://homeworktips.about.com/od/writingrules/a/Writing-Story-Dialogue.htm>

Again, most comments on this website are about writing fiction and interplay between two characters. However, there are a few good tips:

Keep the character's voice in mind but keep it readable. Dialogue doesn't have to be grammatically correct; it should read like actual speech. However, there must be a balance between realistic speech and readability.

<http://writetodone.com/10-easy-ways-to-improve-your-dialogue/>

#3: Use Dialect and Accents with Caution

No one was guilty of this. Fortunately, no one descended into caricature or cloyingness trying to reproduce what might be the sounds of A's speech.

#5: Realistic Doesn't Mean Real

(Don't include every “um” and “ah.”).

A lot of translation is imitating the style of writers in the target language. For me, the ultimate example of a hood talking is Henry Hill in the book *Wiseguy* by Nicholas Pileggi and the movie *Goodfellas* by Martin Scorsese. Large portions of the book are available on Google Books. The book consists mostly of long quotes from Henry, his wife, and the prosecutor pursuing him. Although the action is centered in New York and New Jersey, the speech is free of any regional, or gangster-type accents or excessive jargon, as in “Tip #3: Use Dialect and Accents with Caution.”

While Henry Hill is amazingly articulate, you never get the feeling that he isn't talking (Tip #5: Realistic Doesn't Mean Real). To create the movie dialogue, Martin Scorsese allowed the actors to perform the lines while improvising and then rewrote the lines, incorporating the improvisation, as in “Polish the Gem.” So, that is just an illustration of where good dialogue comes from. But, you obviously wouldn't go that far for this short one-off job.

Area Expertise

“Technical” information consisted of *yakuza* jargon, drug jargon, and legal terminology. There is a good Wikipedia article on the [yakuza](#), and a quick Google search netted English-language articles on the *yakuza* by Jake Adelstein and Massimiliano Aceti. Jake Adelstein is a crime reporter, formerly for the Japanese edition of the Yomiuri Shimbun

where he was the first non-Japanese staff writer. He is the author of [Tokyo Vice](#), a book on Japanese organized crime soon to be made into a motion picture. Massimiliano Aceti, whose details were not readily available, wrote an excellent article on shinogi. Several articles by Jake Adelstein are available on the web, including a brief J-E dictionary of Japanese organized crime, with a chart showing the hierarchy within the *boryokudan*. Adelstein's dictionary provides vocabulary that sets a good tone for writing about the *yakuza*. However, it must be admitted that the articles of Adelstein, Aceti, and others use a wide array of Mafia and military jargon to describe the roles of *yakuza* gangsters, so that there seems to be a lot of latitude for English equivalents of many of the *yakuza* terms used in the contest passage. Still, the translator can make choices that help create a certain mood. Adelstein's [chart](#) and [dictionary](#) appear at:

<http://www.japansubculture.com/resources/yakuza-group-structure/>

<http://www.japansubculture.com/resources/yakuza-terminology/>



Yakuza terminology:

(親分・おやぶん) , (子分・こぶん): group elders, group underlings. Literally, ‘father role’ and ‘child role’.

(組長・くみちょう) : family head or boss

(最高幹部・さいこうかんぶ) : senior executives

(幹部・かんぶ) : executives

(組員・くみいん) : group members, often translated as ‘soldiers’

(準構成員・じゅんこうせいいん) : trainees

(周辺者・しゅうへんしゃ) : peripheral associates

(企業舎弟・きぎょうしゃてい) : business associates

(組・ぐみ) : Denotes association, as in, Yamaguchi-gumi (山口組). Similar to *-kai*.

(一家・いっか) : family. For example, Omaeda-ikka (小前田一家), or ‘Omaeda family’. Used as a suffix after the name of the group.

(会・かい): Denotes association, as in, Sumiyoshi-kai (住吉会). Used to describe parent organizations.

(若頭・わかがしら): Gang members who rank second behind a *kumicho*. The gang equivalent of eldest brother. お兄ちゃん。

(若衆・わかしゅう): Used as an umbrella term to indicate gang members who have completed the *sakazuki* ceremony to join an organisation, but are still ranked below *wakagashira*. Foot-soldiers. 兵補 (へいほ)

Here are a few comments on whether the contest finalist achieved a conversational tone.

Cheriel Neo, the First Place Finisher

Cheriel produced perhaps the most accurate translation, and used the first person where appropriate, adding to the testimonial style. Some conversational-sounding flourishes were:

- All day long you'll be their lackey
- Tattooing turned out to be just another trick
- ... if you join, you'll get to ride in fancy cars, be popular with the ladies and never lack money, but these are a pack of lies.
- ... even then it's all just a front.
- Threatening anyone even a little will get you arrested by the police.

However, some sentences tended to have a written style either with complex syntax or written vocabulary:

- Within this relationship, if your boss says 'Jump'...
- Once they join the gang, new recruits are made to undertake
- ... brutal punishments such as the infamous severing of a finger await. (While this contributes to the vividness of the image, it sounds like a third-person narrator describing the situation)
- Dreading this, and fearing that their families might be threatened if they were to leave, many gang members long to quit, but are unable to do so.

Julia Clark, the Second Place Finisher

Julia consistently maintained a conversational tone that was not unlike Henry Hill's speech in *Wiseguy*. "A" was articulate, but still sounded like he was speaking. You could say that for the most part the monologue was realistic without being real, as in Tip #5: Realistic Doesn't Mean Real.

Some flourishes of spoken style were:

- This relationship is absolute:
- You spend all day acting as an errand boy,
- ...I can't even go to the pool or the hot springs with my family.
- There are a lot of guys out there who want to leave their gang but can't, ...
- If you threaten someone even a little, you'll get arrested by the police right away. However, you still have to pay your tributes to the gang. (Good turn of phrase and short, staccato sentences)
- However, there are actually a lot of guys who end up using the drugs themselves,

However, one word was a notable exception. "Conversely" for "だけど逆に" struck a dissonant chord. I couldn't see "A" suddenly saying "conversely" at this point in the story. This might be one case where acting out the speech, as in Tip #2 "Act it out," or at least reading it aloud, would have identified this inappropriate term.

### Michael Haley, Finalist

Michael also seemed to misunderstand a few lines, made a couple of unfortunate translation choices, and was ranked lower. Although this doesn't have anything to do with sounding conversational, Michael used the term "henchmen," which seemed anachronistic and like caricature. Michael also used "Mr. A," usage that sounds like a source language speaker as well as caricature. However, many of Michael's sentences were short and crisp and sounded like real human speech, and the headings were pithy.

Some speech-like turns of phrase were:

- This bond is unbreakable, and if the godfather says, "jump!" the henchman says "how high?" If the godfather orders a hit on a rival gang member, the henchman must carry it out.
- Days of the week do not exist to them, and they have no days off. I had no free time at all.
- There are a lot of guys who want to quit but can't.
- Gangs do not pay wages.

### Lisa Koga, Finalist

Lisa made a real attempt to localize the text by eliminating cultural elements like *sakazuki* that could lead to long explanations or inserting lots of foreign words in the translation. However, Adelstein, Aceti, and other English-language authors seem to be able to incorporate *yakuza* terminology and concepts into their English writing seamlessly. These elements are essential to discussions of Japanese organized crime, and the website's intended readership would be foreign residents who can tolerate and may even appreciate a lot of Japanese words and ideas in their English. Lisa also misunderstood a couple of lines.

Conversational touches included:

- There are no days off in this field of work...
- "If you get a tattoo, you're one of us" is what I was told, so I endured the pain and got one, (Sounds like spoken speech and is one of the few correct interpretations.)
- Little did I know...

### Anna Wada, Finalist

Anna also seemed to misunderstand a few parts of the passage and was ranked farther down. However, Anna's sentences tended to have a short, brisk staccato quality of spoken language that at times sounded more like real speech than the higher ranked translations.

Some high points of spoken style were:

- This relationship is absolute, and the word of the boss is law. If his orders are to kill someone from a rival group, you have no choice but to carry it out
- Someone told me, "Tattoos are what make you a *real* member," ...
- I was lured to the group by promises of money, nice cars, and women, but those were all lies.
- One little threat could get you caught by the police, but you still have to pay your dues to the group.

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The contestants may well have consulted the websites that I found. Almost no absolutely incorrect terminology was used, except for a couple of renditions of the legal terms and some of the drug jargon. There are many other resources on the web, and searching Romanized versions of *yakuza* terminology leads to many interesting and informative websites. I just cited the ones I found and read first.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the winner Cheriell and the other finalists and thank all who participated in the contest with no guarantee of reward or recognition. I hope this year's passage was as interesting to you as it was to the judges and that you received some benefit from translating it.

Ken Wagner

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