Graduation Thesis
Bachelor’s Degree
Case Study of Manga Translation Problems

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Subject: Japanese
Credits: 15
I would like to thank my supervisor, Hiroko Inose, whose invaluable help made this thesis possible.
1. **Abstract**

日本語と英語の間には様々な奥深い違いがある。このことを翻訳者は承知しているがその違いを翻訳することが難しいという事実に変わりはない。本論文は漫画を翻訳する際の問題について調べたものである。実際に漫画作品を翻訳していくなかで現れる翻訳上の問題と、解決法を分析した。本研究のために翻訳した漫画作品は、「機動戦士ガンダムカタナ」（曾野由大、石井誠）であり、111の翻訳上の問題を抽出、分析している。

キーワード・漫画、日英翻訳、ガンダム、スキャンレーション。

2. **Introduction**

2.1. **Foreword**

When deciding what to write about I hoped my interest in Japanese animation and comics, or anime and manga, could serve as the basis of the thesis but didn’t know if that was viable as a subject. As luck would have it I was also a fairly experienced scanlator so I thought perhaps that could be part of the theme of my thesis.

Scanlation, a portmanteau of scan and translation, is the act of amateur translators translating digitally scanned manga, most often manga not available in the West, and releasing it to the fans online. Leaving the ethical and legal aspects of it aside, I had originally
started doing this as a way to practice my Japanese during the summer between my second and third term at university. I found it to be a great way to expand my knowledge of the Japanese language.

My first idea for the thesis was a self-analysis where I translated a manga and collected problems I found hard to translate, which I would then analyze to find out what I would need to improve on. However, the more I thought on that, the more I came to realize I didn’t know how to put it down properly on paper or, if I did manage to collect something, how to properly analyze it. I did not have the skills to analyze the collected data.

The first idea was a failure, yet I knew I wanted to translate a manga and do something in that regard. Through consultations with my supervisor Hiroko Inose the idea of collecting translation problems, problems any translator could run into, came up.

This was a concrete theme and data that was much more objective and easier to work with. The theme was not only something to write about, it was also really interesting. Therefore I decided to do just that.

I translated a manga, collected examples of problems that any translator would run into when translating manga and then tried to solve them.

2.1. Background

When Akira, one of the first manga to be brought over to America and Europe, was translated in 1988, it had the advantage of already having a dedicated cult following. As Johnson-Woods says, fans of the anime Akira wanted more of their favorite cartoon and the manga publisher found that they had an audience waiting for them with the anime they loved acting as a sort of commercial at no cost to them, drawing a bigger audience and giving their manga free publicity.

However, it was not until the late nineties that manga started to change from a cult phenomenon to mainstream entertainment in North America and Europe. With the introduction of the hit series Sailor Moon and Dragon Ball popularity exploded in the West. Again, both Sailor Moon and Dragon Ball had the aid of anime adaptations running on TV as well as a wide arrange of marketable toys and other goods to help spreading their popularity. Dragon Ball was also among the first manga brought to the west without having its pages mirrored to change the reading direction from right-to-left into left-to-right, which had been standard practice. The reasons for not mirroring, or flipping, the images were for the sake of authenticity and the fact that the original Japanese publishers demanded on behalf of the author that the images remain unedited. Nowadays, leaving the Japanese reading direction has become the norm.

In Japan most manga are serialized in magazines with one chapter released at a time, along with many other series, once a week or once a month. They are later compiled into volumes which are released a few times a year. Until very recently, the standard way of releasing

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manga in the West was to release each volume as they were translated one by one. Recently however, there has been an increase in manga released digitally. In order to compete with the increasing fan demand on speed and manga made available when compared to unofficial translations, sites like Viz’s Shounen Jump Alpha (http://shonenjump.viz.com) have begun publishing their translated series chapter by chapter, much like the serialized magazines in Japan do, weekly or monthly before compiling them into volumes. This fan demand most likely comes from the fact that Scanlation has gotten fans used to being provided with their manga within days of it being published in Japan. Shounen Jump Alpha has taken a big step towards being increasingly competitive against Scanlation as they just announced (http://shonenjump.viz.com/sja-simul) that from January 2013 they will provide their subscribers with their manga on the very same day it is published in Japan.

2.2. Earlier Studies

Translation studies in the field of manga are fairly limited. In “Japanese Comics in Germany, Perspectives: Studies in Translatology” Heike Elisabeth Jüngst speaks of some of the difficulties faced when translating manga into German such as the need for footnotes to explain certain historical or cultural aspects that appear in the manga version of the Japanese literary classic The Tale of Genji. She also speaks of the fact that many translation standards that have been developed when translating manga stem from the opinions of fan groups or publisher’s demands rather than the translator’s own decisions. The results of Jüngst’s study showed that many of the techniques used when translating manga come from the fact that the audience sees themselves as part of an “in-group” separate from other comic fans, where closeness to the Japanese original is part of the charm.

Minako O’Hagan’s work “Fan Translation Networks: An Accidental Translator Training Environment?” takes a look at the fansub and scanlating community as a training environment for amateur translators. In a case study, which her text is centered on, she had a professional translator without experience in manga translation and an amateur translator with manga translating experience both translate the same manga to compare how the fan translating environment functions as translator training. O’Hagan concluded in her study that the fan translator’s work “was beyond the work of a novice in the sense that it presented and reflected global concerns beyond the lexical grammatical level.” It also showed a great awareness of style and textual genre conventions.

Similarly, in Hiroko Inose’s “Scanlation – What Fan Translators of Manga Learn in the Informal Learning Environment” two pilot studies are performed to study the informal learning environment of scanlation. The first study compares the original Japanese version

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with a scanlation and the official translation. The second compares the original Japanese version with two different scanlation works. The results of the study suggested that “though the online fan community could provide an informal learning environment for the fan translators of manga, it might be rather difficult to achieve the overall translation quality required of professional translators just by translating there.”

The study also showed that some skills such as speed of translation and treatment of cultural references could be acquired through this practice. However since the accuracy of the translations vary much from translator to translator, more study is needed.

Mikael Svensson has published a more specialized but still related study of translating Japanese Onomatopoeia, sound imitating words, in Manga into Swedish. In it he collects examples of onomatopoeia in four manga published in Swedish in order to get a clearer view of how they are translated, what methods are used and if some words create more problems than others. His study showed that some word classes or forms had a tendency to appear more often than others, such as the roots of verbs. He also noted that even though the translators were translating into Swedish they often used English or English inspired words to translate onomatopoeia.

Inose has also published a short study on how Japanese onomatopoeia and mimetic words in manga are translated into Spanish and English. In her study she concluded that the techniques used show much more originality compared to techniques used when translating similar expressions in novels which could suggest that translators of manga have a wider arrange of techniques at their disposal thanks to the aid of the pictures.

This study is different from previous research in that the translation being studied is my own. The other studies all look at translations done by a third party. Being part of the translation process makes finding translation problems more accurate as you can see the whole process as it progresses, not just the finished product. If you only see the finished product some translation problems that have been overcome, and some that have not, may go unnoticed.

2.3. Research Questions

The following are the research questions of this study.

I. What translation problems are found when translating manga?
II. Are there any problems particular to manga?
III. How might these problems be solved?

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3. Methods

3.1. Material

The manga translated in this project is the first volume of Mobile Suit Gundam Katana (機動戦士ガンダムカタナ第一巻, Kidou Senshi Gandamu Katana dai ikkan, Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten 2009. 193 pages. Volume 1 of 6 as of December 2012). The artwork is done by Yoshihiro Sono and the script by Makoto Ishii. Sono’s other works include being an assistant artist on Ai Yori Aoshi (Hakusensha 1998) by Kou Fumizuki as well as being the prop designer on the anime series Lagrange – The flower of Rin-ne. Makoto Ishii is a freelance writer, mainly working for the magazines Hyper Hobby (King Records 1994) and Gundam Ace (Kadokawa Shoten 2001). The manga has never been translated into English prior to this thesis was written.

The reasons for choosing this manga were threefold. The first reason was because it is part of an extensive series. Mobile Suit Gundam Katana (hereafter Gundam Ka) is part of the Mobile Suit Gundam series. The series was first created in 1979 when the anime series Mobile Suit Gundam (機動戦士ガンダム Kidou Senshi Gandamu) by the animation studio Sunrise first aired in Japan. The series is 43 episodes long and it aired from April of 1979 until January 1980. Mobile Suit Gundam has since expanded significantly in size spawning comics, games, television shows and merchandise and is one of the biggest animation related businesses in Japan. The series revolves around giant robots, or mecha, called mobile suits and Gundam being the name of one of them. At the time, what made Mobile Suit Gundam stand out was the fact that it was more focused on the human drama between the pilots of these machines of war rather than the robots themselves. In earlier giant robot animation the robots were often considered super heroes just as much as their pilots. In Mobile Suit Gundam the robots were nothing more than weapons, like a pistol or a rifle.

Gundam Katana is a spinoff manga set in the same world as the original Gundam animation but in a different period of time. The manga is an action comedy that follows an anti-terrorist unit of soldiers called BGST. In a time of post-war recession lieutenant colonel Ittou Tsurugi, newly appointed commander of BGST, has to deal with the threats from terrorists and other anti-government plots as well as the possibility of having his squad downsized to save money. The first volume introduces the characters as well as sets up the beginning of an overhanging longer plot.

Because Gundam Katana is part of a larger series of works with already established settings, terms and translations the translator must be fairly well versed in the Gundam Universe to avoid translation problems that can and will occur when one’s specialist knowledge is limited. The fact that it is a comedy also invites the possibility of more translation problems considering the difference both in the use of language and the cultural differences in humor. A joke that works in Japanese may not work in English.

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8 Ishii, Makoto. Twitter account. Received 2012-11-13. [https://twitter.com/MakotoIshii](https://twitter.com/MakotoIshii)
The second reason for choosing this manga was the demographic. Gundam Katana is a so called Shounen Manga, a manga aimed at young boys around their early teens. While shounen manga may be aimed at young boys it has a wide readership of both men and women, young and old\textsuperscript{10}. They are also the most widespread type of manga in the western market and therefore the sort of manga that a translator has a very high chance of running into when working in this field\textsuperscript{11}.

The third reason is personal experience. I have translated similar manga in the past, both manga from the Gundam series and other manga but with similar settings. This allowed for some confidence in tackling this project. When working with something with an established setting as vast as Gundam having previous experience allows you to avoid traps that otherwise may not even have occurred to you that they existed. These unfound traps may cause trouble later on and the translator would not know their source.

3.2. Definitions

The problems I have collected all pose some kind of difficulty when trying to translate them literally\textsuperscript{12}. The translation problems that have been encountered and the translation techniques that have been used have been divided into a number of categories, ten problem categories and eleven technique categories. This section will take a look at their definitions.\textsuperscript{13}

3.2.1 Translation Problems:

a) Ateji

In Japanese you often find that words are supposed to be read in a way that is contrary to the spelling. This is shown by having so called furigana, a phonetic guide, to indicate the reading, like the example seen here: 昼食. In this example the word chuushoku is supposed to be read ranchi or “lunch”. The meaning is the same in this example but the author may have had a reason for picking just this way of reading.

Ateji can also provide extra information. Take for example うちの 夫 (uchi no otto). Here the word otto, meaning husband, is instead read as hito, meaning simply person. Here the speaker is implicating a special meaning to the word person that the listener is supposed to understand without it being said. The reader on the other hand can immediately see the extra meaning thanks to the Ateji.

This category is all about the problems that occur when there is a difference between the spelling and the reading of one or more words or when additional meaning is implied by its use.

\textsuperscript{11} Svensson, Mikael. 2012. Översättning till svenska av japansk onomatopé i manga. Kandidatuppsats, Göteborgs Universitet p. 9
\textsuperscript{13} Translation Problem Definitions A-J and Technique Categories B, D, F, H, J and K were thought up by myself during translation and may be labeled differently by others.
b) Cultural Terms
Words that have a special cultural meaning to the source language, in this case Japanese, but does not make sense or have its meaning lost in English fall under this category.

c) Foreign Language Grammatical Mistakes
This category is for problems caused by the source language making grammatical mistakes when using foreign words.

d) Linguistical Ambiguity
Japanese is a language with a lot of room for ambiguity, forcing the reader or listener to assume or read between the lines. This category is for problems occurring when that ambiguity impedes the translation process. An example would be the ease with which gender neutrality is kept in Japanese yet the same cannot be said about English.

e) Mimetic Words
Mimetic words are words that describe non-auditory sensations such as feelings, visual impressions or a state of mind. An example would be ガーン (gaan) which is a mimetic word to describe a person’s state of bafflement. These words are often the cause of translation problems because mimetic words do not exist in English as an independent category of words like in Japanese.

f) Onomatopoeia
This category deals with problems that occur when translating sound mimicking words such as sound effects.

g) Proper Nouns
Translation problems related to names or titles, such as those of people, objects, and organizations, fall under this category, whether it is a problem in regards to the spelling or any other problem.

h) Register
This category is for problems regarding the various degrees of formality found in Japanese speech and writing, problems such as how to show the appropriate level of respect, or a lack thereof, in English. This can be a serious problem when translating manga due to the relatively small space (the speech bubble) you have to work with.

i) Word Play
Problems caused by a play on words fall under this category.

j) Other
This category covers translation problems that do not fit in any specific type of problem, be they a matter of personal taste of the translator or only semi-problems which could be overlooked.

3.2.2 Translation Techniques:

a) Compensation
This technique is used when a loss of meaning, sound-effect, metaphor or pragmatic effect in one part of a sentence is compensated for in another part, or in a contiguous sentence\(^{15}\).

b) Correction
Here you correct spelling or grammatical mistakes when the source language text has used a foreign language. An example would be the original Japanese text has something written in English which is grammatically incorrect.

c) Functional Equivalent
Using a culture-free word, sometimes with a new specific term, to neutralize or generalize a source language word. The goal is to find the closest natural equivalent to the source language message\(^{16}\).

d) Omission or complete change
When using this technique one or more words have either been left out of the translation or the meaning of the source language word or sentence has been completely changed for one reason or another.

e) Paraphrase
Here you explain the meaning of a word or sentence by using a paraphrase in an attempt to convey the essential thought expressed in a source text\(^{17}\).

f) Partial Translation
This is a technique where one or more aspects of the source language meaning have been left out.

g) Recognized Translation
This is a technique where official or generally accepted translation already exists for a word or phrase. This translation may or may not vary from what you as the translator would suggest but it should be used to avoid confusion with other sources\(^{18}\).

h) Target Language Onomatopoeia
This category is for translating source language onomatopoeia by using target language onomatopoeia. However, what distinguishes it from the categories “using noun” and “using verb” is that Target Language Onomatopoeia are not real words in that they do not appear in a dictionary. An example would be “Caw” versus “BZZZ”. “Caw” is a noun and the onomatopoeia for a crow’s call and it can be found in a dictionary. “BZZZ” is not a real word but a commonly accepted and easily understood onomatopoeia for an electric shock.

i) Transference

Transference is a technique where you take a source language word and leave it as is, creating a loan word. This loan word may or may not come with an added text explaining its meaning.\textsuperscript{19}

j) Using Noun
This category is for the translation of source language onomatopoeia and mimetic words by using target language nouns. The word used in translation was categorized as a noun according to the definition of dictionary.com. Some words may also be onomatopoeia, sound imitating words, but not necessarily.

k) Using Verb
This category is for the translation of source language onomatopoeia and mimetic words by using target language verbs or phrasal verbs. The word used in translation was categorized as a verb according to the definition of dictionary.com. Some words may also be onomatopoeia, sound imitating words, but not necessarily.

3.3. Method and Process of Translation

The three main tools used when translating this manga have been Denshi Jisho (jisho.org), an online Japanese to English dictionary based on Jim Breen’s WWWJDIC (http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/cgi-bin/wwwjdic.cgi?1C), Eijiro (alc.co.jp), another online Japanese to English dictionary, and Weblio (Weblio.jp), an online Japanese encyclopedic dictionary. These three were chosen based on previous experience, making them a familiar tool to use. Information from the dictionaries was gathered during December 2012. Google was also used as an aid in order to understand the context in which certain phrases may occur.\textsuperscript{20} Gundam Wiki (gundam.wikia.com) was used to check any recognized translations regarding names of robots and characters where possible.

When translating this manga I started by reading it twice. The first time it was simply read to know the story. The second time I was conscientiously looking for things that might become translation problems and taking notes of them. I then started to translate the manga from the beginning page by page until the end, collecting translation problems as they appeared. When translating I found several new problems I had not noticed before and also noticed that some things I had thought were problems actually were not. I collected the translation problems in an excel document as I went along (see appendix). The entire translation and collecting of translation problems took approximately 18 days to complete.

3.4. Method of Analysis

When collecting the translation problems I assembled them in an excel table like below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Type of Problem</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Translation Technique</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>ジオン</td>
<td>Proper Noun</td>
<td>The name of a nation.</td>
<td>Zeon</td>
<td>Recognized Translation</td>
<td>Zeon is the official name even though it could be written Jion or Zion. Short form of Principality of Zeon (ジオン公国)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: An Example of a Translation Problem – Proper Noun

In the above example simply searching for the word ジオン in a dictionary would give you the translation Zion. This is not a correct translation in this case. Gundam, being an already established series, already has an official translation of the word, that translation being Zeon with an “E”.

Another example would be onomatopoeia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Type of Problem</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Translation Technique</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ドカドカ</td>
<td>Onomatopoeia</td>
<td>Heavy boots on a metal floor.</td>
<td>CLUNK CLUNK!</td>
<td>Using Noun.</td>
<td>Used a noun to explain it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: An Example of a Translation Problem - Onomatopoeia

The word ドカドカ or dokadoka is the Japanese onomatopoeia for loud footsteps. To simply transcribe it as dokadoka makes no sense in English. So the translation problem here is how to effectively reproduce the same impression. Should you make up your own onomatopoeia or try some other way of translating it? In this case I chose to simply use the noun “clunk” to give the impression of a heavy object being dropped onto a metal floor.

4. Results

After translating Gundam Katana a total of 111 translation problems were found. The table below shows frequency with which they appeared. Percentage has been rounded up to closest decimal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Problem</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>% of total amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ateji</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language Grammatical Mistakes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistical Ambiguity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimetic Words</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onomatopoeia</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Nouns</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Plays</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Total Number of Types of Translation Problems
A total number of 11 different translation techniques were used. The next table shows the frequency with which each technique was used for each translation problem.

For the sake of saving space the following acronyms have been used:
- Ateji = A.
- Cultural Terms = CT.
- Foreign Language Grammatical Mistakes = FLGM.
- Linguistical Ambiguity = LA.
- Mimetic Words = MW.
- Onomatopoeia = On.
- Proper Nouns = PN.
- Register = R.
- Word Plays = WP.
- Other = Oth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>CT.</th>
<th>FLGM.</th>
<th>LA.</th>
<th>MW.</th>
<th>On.</th>
<th>PN.</th>
<th>R.</th>
<th>WP.</th>
<th>Oth.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Equivalent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission or complete change</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Translation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognized Translation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Language Onomatopoeia</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transference</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Noun</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Verb</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Total Number of Types of Translation Techniques Used

5. Analysis

In this section we will look at the translation problems found when translating Gundam Katana. The thesis will bring up at least one example of each translation technique used, more if there are several problems especially interesting to look at. Not every technique was used with every problem.

The examples will be listed like this:

1. Source Text (Appendix Row #) (Page #)
   Phonetic Reading of Source Text

   Translation

5.1. Ateji
5.1.1. Using Transference

1. 刀 かよ~(2) (6)
   Katana ka yo~

   One of them Japanese Katana swords...

The character in question is literally saying the Japanese word Katana when speaking English. This is most likely a reference to the title of the manga and therefore important to carry over in the translation. However, the word Katana, meaning sword and in this case specifically a samurai sword, might not be common knowledge to every English speaker.

I transferred the word Katana but added the explanations Japanese and Sword to make it more accessible to everyone.

5.1.2. Using Compensation

2. いつまでキバッてんだ ヤスコビッチ
   Itsumade kibattenda Yasukobicchi shuugou kakattendaro!

   Yaskovic! How long are you going to be in there!?
   Damn it, Yasu! We’ve been ordered to assemble!

Here is the first time the author introduces one of the main characters, Bonchai Yaskovic and he does it in a very clever way. The character speaking is actually using the nickname Yasu as indicated by the phonetic guide. In this case, the Ateji works as an introduction of the character for the sake of the reader telling us that Yasu is his nickname and Yaskovic his real name. This is a clever use of Ateji as it gives the reader a large amount of information in the space of a single word.

In order to include the introduction of both name and nickname I chose to use Compensation to translate this. I split the Ateji in two, using the name in the first sentence and the nickname in the second. Translating it this way the translation gives the same information as the original text. The problem of using this technique when translating manga is of course that you have a limited space to work with i.e. the speech bubble. It worked in this case but it is worth being careful.

5.1.3. Using a Functional Equivalent

3. 一般人
   Ippanjin

   Civvie
The soldiers in this unit behave much like the Japanese mafia, the yakuza. Even though they are a military unit the soldiers all act as if having the traditional yakuza hierarchy, with a family boss, middle lieutenants and the lower ranks. Also, while they may come off as ruffians, they see themselves as following a strict code of conduct. In this example one of the soldiers has referred to a civilian as being a katagi meaning someone with a respectable occupation i.e. not part of the mafia or being a prostitute, etcetera. Here the word below the phonetic guide, the main word, explains that by katagi this soldier means civilians.

Unfortunately it lost the underworld aspect of the original in the translation but it still has the same rough and informal tone, something one would not expect to hear from a soldier on duty.

5.1.4. Using Omission or Complete Change

4. ジャンプしようとしても 毒糸にやられちまう(10)(136)
   Janpu shiyou to shite mo dokuito ni yararechimau
   If he jumps he’ll get hit by the heat hawk!

The main character is being attacked by the enemy. The opponent is using a technique called doku ito, or Poisoned Thread, which consists of swinging around wires with large tomahawk axes with superheated blades, called Heat Hawks, attached to the ends of them.

In this case I omitted the poisoned thread aspect of the sentence. The fact that what was going to hit was the Poisoned Thread attack was obvious when previous dialog and frames were taken into consideration.

5.1.5. Using Paraphrase

5. 道具を出せ！！ (11)(76)
   Dougu wo dase!!
   Time to gear up! Ready the mobile suits!

In this sentence the soldiers are preparing to head into battle. The Ateji shows that they consider their Mobile Suits their tools. I rewrote the sentence in order to capture both what was being said as well as its implied meaning.

5.1.6. Using Partial Translation

6. 全てを教わったお養父さんを守るため。(12)(134)
   Subete wo osowatta otousan wo mamoru tame.
   I will protect my stepfather, the man who taught me everything.
In this example the kanji explains to the reader that the person the speaker talks about is her adoptive or stepfather. However, the phonetic guide tells the reader that what she is actually saying to the character she is talking to is only “father” not “stepfather”. The problem that occurs here is whether or not the character she talks to is supposed to know that this person is not related to her by blood. The reader knows, but is the listener supposed to? If it’s translated as “stepfather” and later it turns out that the fact that the listener wasn’t supposed to know was an important plot point then part of the story will basically have been ruined. The author is able to give different information to the readers and the characters with the same word.

I chose in favor of the reader and translated it as “stepfather”. Nothing in the rest of the volume indicated that the fact that the relationship was unclear was important. What was important was that the girl in question thought of the man as her parent.

Nothing was omitted but part of the nuances in the original sentence was lost making this only a partial translation.

5.2. Cultural Terms

5.2.1 Using Functional Equivalent

7. 任侠部隊(28)(16)
   *Ninkyou butai*

   *Yakuza squad*

*Ninkyou Butai* is the nickname for the battalion starring in Gundam Katana. They behave like the stereotypical image of the Japanese mafia, also known as the Yakuza. *Ninkyou*, literally meaning honor or chivalry, is a term heavily associated with the Yakuza. Yet translating it as *Honor Squad* or *Chivalry Squad* does not connote the same sense of the underworld as the original text.

I chose to translate it like above because the fact that Yakuza means the Japanese mafia is fairly common knowledge and thus retaining the criminal aspect of the name.

5.2.2. Using Transference

8. あれは先代の技、居合いの奥義・・(29)(45)
   *Are wa sendai no waza, iai no ougi...*

   *That’s our former commander’s special move. An iaido sword skill...*

The term *iai* comes from iaido, a sword discipline where you draw your sword and then resheath it. This is a difficult term to explain in the small amount of space found in a speech bubble.
I chose to leave lai untranslated but added the "do" as well as “sword skill”. This makes it easier to understand since many know of kendo and can therefore figure out that this is something similar.
I also changed waza, meaning simply “technique”, into “special move” so as to keep the feel of the original sentence since I changed ougi, meaning secret or ultimate technique, into just "skill".

Here is another case of transference:

9. ナギナタ(30)(171)

Naginata

Naginata

A naginata is a long bladed weapon and can refer to a halberd as well. The weapon in question is a so called beam naginata with a blade made out of a laser beam, so it is not a real naginata and therefore it could be either a naginata or a halberd.

I chose to transfer it as naginata simply because the characters in the manga have a very Japanese aura to them. They behave in a Japanese manner, are called a Yakuza Squad and they use Katana or other Japanese weapons so leaving it as naginata was appropriate.

5.2.3. Using Paraphrase

10. その天下り先の連邦国営カジノが襲われたって事自体クサかったですしね。(31)(49)

Sono amakudarisaki no renpou kokuei kajino ga osowaretatte koto jitaikusakatta desushi ne.

The cushy position of running a federal casino is usually given to former high ranking officials. The fact that such an establishment was attacked in the first place was suspicious.

The term amakudari refers to retiring high-ranking government officials receiving a lucrative job in a private or semi-private corporation.

Here I rewrote the original sentence into two separate sentences in order to fit a longer explanation instead of the term amakudari.

5.3. Foreign Language Grammatical Mistakes

5.3.1. Using Correction

11. 灰色 蛇の牙(40)(84)

Razan no deru saapente gurijio

Hairo hebi no k i b a
Le Zanne di Serpente Grigio

In this example we look at the name of a sword technique. The kanji indicates that it is called Fangs of the Gray Snake but the phonetic guide tells us that it is pronounced in something that is supposed to be Italian. The supposed Italian however appears to be grammatically incorrect. It appears to be something along the lines of La Zanne no del serpente grigio. The author may not have known that the E in Zanne is not silent and therefore misspelled it as “ra zan”.

Since the author felt that Italian was important to the character in question my translation kept it as such however I corrected the grammar of the original and put the English translation as a translator’s note.

Another example of Correction:

12. オレたち「シン・フェデラル」に来ればな。(41)(159)
Oretachi [shin-federaru] ni kureba na.

Once you come join Federal Sin.

Here we have the name of an organization called Sin Federal. The name sounds awkward in English and does not flow naturally.

I changed the grammar into Federal Sin in order to have a more natural sounding English sentence. The origin of this name was likely something akin to 罪連邦 (tsumi renpou) meaning sinful federation, which was then simply literally translated into English, to make it sound cool, without first changing the word order.

5.4. Linguistical Ambiguity

There was just one account of this type of problem in the manga but it is a quite interesting case to look at.

13. 何であの方はこんなヤツ選んだんだぁ？(121)(155)
Nande ano kata wa konna yatsu erandanda?

Why would such a distinguished person choose a twerp like this?

Ano kata is written in bold and is a sign of respect, literally meaning that person. The problem here is that the person being talked about is an as of yet unknown character. Whether it is a man or woman is unknown, or anything else for that matter. It is difficult to stay as gender neutral in English as in Japanese.

I chose to go with distinguished person here to keep it both respectful and gender neutral.

5.5. Mimetic Words
5.5.1. Using Paraphrase

14. ゴゴゴゴゴゴ(44)(129)
    Gogogogogo

*Malevolent intent*

This phrase simply says *gogogogogo*, which may sound like gibberish in English but in Japanese it is the mimetic word for a feeling of immense psychological pressure. Something or someone is giving off an aura that instills dread and uneasiness in you. It does not actually have a sound, it is simply a feeling.

I chose to simply use a translator’s note outside of frame to explain with a paraphrase the feeling the mimetic word gives. In this case this works fine because the mimetic word is part of the background art surrounding the character almost like an aura. With the meaning explained the art work itself makes it clear that this is simply pressure resonating from the character.

5.5.2. Using Verb

15. ひょい(45)(19)
    Hyoi

*Jump*

*Hyoi* is the mimetic word for doing something with spryness or agility, in this case jumping over a fence. It was part of the art work as an explanation to the way the action was performed.

I chose to simply translate it as *Jump*. Translating it like this however, instead of being an explanation to the way in which the character does an action, in this case with ease or agility, it becomes an explanation of the action itself. It is possible to translate it with a phrasal verb as well, like *jumping with ease*, but that would disrupt the flow of reading.

5.5.3. Using Functional Equivalent

16. ガーン(46)(75)
    Gaan

*Whaaat?*

*Gaan* is the mimetic word to express shock and disbelief.

I translated it this way because it both shows the shock of the character and fits with the character having his mouth wide open in astonishment. The word fits that image.

5.5.4. Using Noun
17. ガクガク (47)(93)  
Gakugaku  
Wobble Wobble  

Gakugaku is the mimetic word for something trembling, wobbling or clattering, in this case a robot about to fall over. I used the noun wobble to translate it.

5.6. Onomatopoeia

5.6.1. Using Noun

18. キュラキュラ (81)(77)  
Kyura kyura  
Rumble Rumble  

This onomatopoeia represents the sound made by the caterpillar tracks on a tank as well as being a neologism, a word invented probably by the author of the manga.

I translated the above word, kyura kyura, as simply Rumble Rumble, using a noun to explain the sound produced.

5.6.2. Using Verb

19. ビィ (111)(65)  
Bi  
Straighten  

This onomatopoeia indicated the straightening of one’s posture which I simply translated as straighten. I used a verb to explain the action with a small notice at the side of the frame.

5.6.3. Using Target Language Onomatopoeia

20. ヴィー (116)(12)  
Viii  
BWEE BWEE!  

Here is another neologism and the sound of an alarm going off. This time the meaning of the sound effect was not as obvious as kyura kyura. The alarm bells were not shown in frame, instead you had to associate the noise with the fact that an emergency announcement was called out at the same time and the soldiers in the frame were all stopping what they were doing very abruptly.
The sound effect of an alarm is easier to understand than the subtleties of straightening one’s posture and was therefore simpler to adapt into a strictly sound imitating nonsense word.

5.7. Proper Noun

5.7.1. Using Recognized Translation

21. グフ・フライトタイプ(18)(81)
   Gufu furaitotaipu
   Gouf Flight Type

   This is the name of a robot. The spelling might suggest that it could be Gufu but the official translation according to Sunrise, the creators of the series; it is supposed to be Gouf21.

Now let’s look at a second example of using Recognized Translation.

22. スーチー(19)(114)
   Suuchii
   Suu Kyi

   This is the name of a girl. The recognized translation of this name can be either Suu Qi or Suu Kyi depending on whether the name is Chinese or Burmese. I chose to translate it as Suu Kyi for two reasons.

   The first is that I felt the name may have been taken from the rather famous Burmese politician and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi.

   The second reason is that spelling Suu Kyi is already an accepted translation in the Gundam fan community22.

5.7.2. Using Functional Equivalent

23. いよーメンゲルちゃあん略して「ちゃんメー」。(20)(22)
   Iyoo Mengeruchaan ryakushite [chanmee].
   Hi there, Mengel my boy, or Menboy for short!

   What we have here is a nickname and in this case a spiteful one. Both the speaker and the listener are adult men not that different in age and of the same rank, yet the speaker is using the diminutive honorific “-chan” with the listener to suggest he stands above him. He then

takes the honorific and the first part of the listeners name and creates a ridiculous nickname of it. I used “my boy” to impart the same sense of the speaker looking down on the listener.

5.7.3. Using Paraphrase

24. 開眼一瞬裂斬(22)(91)
   Kaigan issen retsuzan
   Insight Flash Strike

This is a sword technique and it is read as Kaigan Issen Retsuzan, literally it would be something along the lines of Enlightened Flashing Rendering Slash. That is a fairly awkward sentence. It takes up a lot of room and, most importantly, it lacks the distinct 2-2-2 syllable rhythm of the original with three distinct words though the last is a neologism, all made up of two kanji. This creates a very nice flowing rhythm completely lacking in the literal translation.

The translation consists of three short words also with a distinct rhythm. The synonym “insight” does the work of “enlightened”. I chose “strike” rather than “slash” also for the sake of rhythm. Since “slash” rhymes with “flash” it creates an uneven rhythm, where the two last words are more alike than the first. Like Yagi does in Rurouni Kenshin, you could transfer the name in roman letters.

5.7.4. Using Omission or Complete Change

25. 濃緑の毒蜘蛛(23)(103)
   Nouryoku no dokugumo
   Venomous Green Spider

Here we have another nickname. Nouryoku translates into Dark Green but I chose to omit the “dark” part, making it Venomous Green Spider for the sake of fluidity in the text. Another way to translate it could be to substitute Dark Green with another dark greenish color with a different name, like what cyan is to blue, but I could not find one that didn’t have a name with the word “green” in it.

5.8. Register

5.8.1. Using Functional Equivalent

26. へい! (33)(15)
   Hei!
   Yes Boss!

The word hei here is a very informal salute the soldiers use with their commanding officer. The squad behaves in a stereotypical Yakuza manner, not at all like professional soldiers.

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When translating it like above the underworld aspect of the original was lost for the more neutral Yes Boss. However the informal aspect still remains keeping the relaxed image of the soldiers intact.

5.8.2. Using Paraphrase

27. 水中型ガンダム様々だよ (34)(116)
   Suichuugata gandamu samasama dayo

   *All hail Gundam Marine Type, am I right?*

Here the speaker is singing the robot’s praises in a sarcastic tone of voice with the use of the double honorific *sama*.

By rewriting the sentence this way the appropriate sense of sarcasm comes across. “All hail” does the work of the double honorific and “am I right” suggests that what is being said is more or less in jest.

5.9. Word Play

5.9.1. Using Compensation

28. その大技も当たらなければどうって事ないねガラガラ蛇君 (38)(85)
   Sono oowaza mo ataranakereba doutte koto nai ne garagarahebi-kun

   *You can rattle your tail all you want but if your fangs can’t reach me then they’re as good as useless, Mr. Slithers.*

The nickname here, *garagarahebi-kun*, is a pun. The man in question used his special technique called *Fang of the Gray Snake* but missed his target and instead only destroyed a building, making it crumble with a noise that went *garagara* while *Garagarahebi* means rattlesnake.

I removed the rattlesnake reference from the nickname, settling for a demeaning way to liken the man to a snake but compensated for the pun earlier in the sentence.

5.9.2. Using Omission or complete change

To understand the next play on words first we must take a look at how it came to pass. The word play’s basis is in the name of an operation the squad is to undertake. The name is *愛をもってコモ川へ GO!! B G S T ラブラブ大作戦* (Ai wo motte komogawa e GO!! Baagesuto B G S T raburabu daisakusen) which I translated as *To Como River with love!! Barghest’s Grand LoveLove Operation!* The operation’s goal is to find out how much the troops love their squad. *持って meaning bring and 以て meaning with are both pronounced motte.*

One of the soldiers misunderstood and brought his girlfriend to the battlefield sparking this comment from one of his comrades:
29. 愛を以ってだろう！何で女持って作戦領域まで行くんだ？(37)(78)  

Ai wo motte darou! Nande onna motte sakusenryouiki made ikunda?  

It’s a figure of speech!! Who’s stupid enough to bring their woman onto the battlefield!? 

I changed it from a pun into a play on the character’s stupidity. He didn’t come to the battlefield with feelings of love for his squad in his heart but actually brought the object of his love.

5.9.3. Using Paraphrase

30. 「刀」と恐れられた先代がいなけりゃただの「ナマクラ」かァ？(36)(24)  

[Katana] to osorerareta sendai ga inakerya tada no [namakura] kaa?  

Without “The sword”, your fearsome former commander, you’ve all gone blunt like butter knives. 

Here the squad is being put down. Their former commander was feared and known as “The Sword” but without him the squad has gone blunt. However, the word Namakura, meaning blunt, also means to be lazy. The same sense of laziness does not transfer well in a direct translation.

I used paraphrase to compare the sword with the butter knife, the most harmless of bladed tools.

5.10. Other

5.10.1. Using Paraphrase

31. 重装甲機の弱点であった機動性の確保のため脚部スラスターを改造することで卓越した瞬発力を誇った。(26)(5)  

Juusoukouki no jyakuten deatta kidousei no kakuho no tame kyakubu surasutaa wo kaizousuru koto de takuetsushita shunpatsuryoku wo hokotta.  

It is equipped with improved leg thrusters in order to overcome the low maneuverability of heavy armored units, giving it a power output above the ordinary. 

This is a technical description of a certain robot. The word hokotta, meaning to have pride in something, is too much of a human emotion to put to a machine. It cannot feel pride since it doesn’t have an awareness.

I chose to paraphrase it as “above the ordinary”, giving it a more neutral impression.

5.10.2. Using Omission or Complete Change

32. *普警より入電！ (27)(12)
Report from the civilian police received!

The first line is the text in the speech bubble. The second line is an editor’s note outside of the frame explaining that fukei is an abbreviation of the word futsuu keisatsu meaning civilian police.

Since English isn’t as heavy with abbreviations as Japanese I left fukei as civilian police without shortening it and thus had no need for the editor’s note and omitted it all together.

6. Discussion

This section is a discussion on the possible solutions for the translation problems found, where thoughts are given on their advantages and disadvantages as well as looking at similar problems from other manga works and how the translator’s solutions there.

6.1. Ateji

Ateji was the second largest translation problem type in number with 11 examples of problems with only onomatopoeia being bigger. However, it had the widest range of different types of translation techniques used in the study at a total of 6. This would suggest that Ateji is a very flexible type of problem, lending itself to a wide array of solutions. The two most used techniques for Ateji in this study were Compensation and Functional Equivalent. They both have positive and negative sides to their solutions.

As seen in Translation Example 2 (here after Ex.#) Compensation sacrifices space, i.e. the space of a frame or speech bubble, for accuracy. The longer sentence gives the translator room to fit all of the nuances of the original sentence into the translation. However, this technique is dictated by the amount of space you have to work with (Paraphrase also has this disadvantage).

Functional Equivalent on the other hand sacrifices cultural meanings or impressions in order to make the translation more accessible. However, with this technique it is possible that important aspects of the author’s intent regarding the characters, or the setting in general, could be lost. As seen in Ex. 3 translating Katagi into Civvie, the word lost the mafia or underworld impression given in the original text.

An alternative way to deal with this problem could be like the following example taken from the video game Steins;Gate by Nitroplus & 5pb.

The main character, Rintarou Okabe, has a habit of making up ridiculous nicknames for his friends. His friend Moeka is unbelievably fast at typing messages on her mobile phone, earning her the nickname 閃光の指圧師, Shainingu Finga. The kanji reads flashing masseuse (my translation) but the phonetic guide reads Shining Finger. The translators at The Illustrated Timeline chose to simply use their own phonetic guide and
translated it to Shining Finger using an extreme case of Transference, transferring an entire way of writing. This could also be a valid technique albeit unconventional. It works in this situation because of the character using it. He is doing it on purpose, often explaining to the other characters that the name is spelled Glowing Masseuse but read as Shining Finger. The fact that Ateji is being used is important to his character i.e. he is speaking with Ateji in mind.

This technique has the strength of Compensation because it can convey the exact impressions the original conveyed but it does not require the extra space. However the new writing convention could come across as distracting and confusing, disrupting the flow of reading.

6.2. Cultural Terms

The preferred technique to use when translating cultural terms differs from case to case.

In volume 6, chapter 75 of Jin Kobayashi’s School Rumble the translator William Flanagan translates the yakuza term Ane-san which is a respectful title for a woman of higher standing in the mafia, literally meaning “big sister”, into simply “boss”. “Madam” would have been a better choice since it preserves the femininity of the title. This case is similar to Ex. 7 in that it uses a functional equivalent for a word with a wide arrange of different impressions to its meaning. However, like in other examples of translations using a functional equivalent you risk losing aspects of the original text perhaps important to the story. Translating using functional equivalent should be done with care.

In One Piece volume 21, chapter 195 there is a problem similar to Ex. 8 where the translator Simon Lundström translates the technique 一刀流「居合」獅子歌歌 (Ittoryuu iai Shishi Sonson) into Ensvärdsteknik, Lejonsång (One Sword Technique, Lion Song [my translation]) omitting iai.

However, in volume 39 chapter 371 Lundström translates 二刀流「居合」羅生門 (Nitouryuu iai Rashoumon) into Tvåsvärdsteknik, iai, Rashomon (Two Sword Technique, iai, Rashomon [my translation]) leaving iai but with no explanation other than the image itself.

Why he decided to use omission in one instance and transference in the other is unknown. There isn’t really any reason for him to not be consistent in both cases. If you use Transference there needs to be an explanation to what the transferred word means if it’s not immediately obvious. In Ex. 9 the picture itself explains that a Naginata is a type of two handed pole-based melee weapon, but iai is such an obscure term that simply looking at the pictures will not tell you anything.

In volume 1 chapter 5 of Yotsuba&! by Kiyohiko Azuma the translator Karin Ahlman Toyama transfers the prayer word Namu from the Buddhist prayer Namu Amida Butsu and explains it

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in a translators glossary at the end of the volume\textsuperscript{28}. In volume 2 she transfers the foods \textit{sata andagi} and \textit{taiyaki} as well as the instrument \textit{sanshin}\textsuperscript{29}. In volume 4 she transfers the bean \textit{adzuki}, the foods \textit{onigiri} and \textit{hayashi rice} and the event \textit{hanami}\textsuperscript{30} (flower viewing).

Yotsuba&! is a manga taking place in small child’s everyday life, where nothing much out of the ordinary ever happens and that being its main selling point, which would suggest the translator wanted to keep the experience as close to the original as possible, foreign terms and all. However, it is possible that using a translator’s glossary with explanations rather than working the explanation into the text could disrupt ones rhythm when reading.

In volume 6 of Ranma ½ by Rumiko Takahashi the translator Simon Lundström chooses to explain the concept of the tea ceremony with a translators note at the end of the volume rather than try to explain a foreign term within the text itself\textsuperscript{31}. The difference in this case is that Lundström has used the recognized translation \textit{Teceremoni} (Tea Ceremony) rather than transferring the original Japanese \textit{sadou}.

Again, the problem one faces when trying to be as accurate as possible is the lack of space one has to work with when translating manga. The use of glossaries, lack of explanations or need for functional equivalents, which are less accurate but more economic space wise, would suggest that these techniques could be last resorts used when there just isn’t enough room to write a translation which gives both an accurate meaning, both contextual and emotional, as well as maintains an undisruptive reading rhythm.

6.3. Foreign Language Grammatical Mistakes

How to deal with grammatical mistakes that appear when the author of the original text writes in a, to him or her, foreign language could be argued to depend on whether the incorrect text becomes a distraction to the reader or not.

In Oda Eiichirou’s One Piece volume 23, chapter 209 the translator Simon Lundström changes the original \textit{砂漠の金剛宝刀} (\textit{Sabaku no Kongou Houtou}) into \textit{Spada Artiglio} to change it into a more correct Italian in regards to context. In the same chapter he also changes \textit{砂嵐重} (\textit{Suna Arashi Juu}) into \textit{Tempesta Pesante}, changing a mixture of French and Spanish into Italian to keep a common theme in his translation\textsuperscript{32}. One could argue that in these examples the text could have been left as is. Unlike Ex. 11, where the \textit{no del} creates an uneven rhythm, these expressions do not sound out of place to someone unfamiliar with the language spoken.

However if the foreign language grammatical mistake happens to be in the target language, like in case of Ex. 12 and the example found in volume 2, chapter 23 of School Rumble by Jin Kobayashi, there is an immediate sense of distraction. The translator William Flanagan

corrects the phrase “Not ever dream of it”, written in English, into "Don’t even dream of it" making it more natural sounding and context appropriate. 

6.4. Linguistical Ambiguity

I am still not satisfied with the translation in Ex. 13. I would have liked it to be "distinguished person like him/her” to emphasize someone unseen but if I chose him and it turns out to be a woman it would ruin the sentence completely.

Problems like these are ones that test your writing skills as much as your translation skills. The only way to translate sentences like this without possibly destroying the continuity of the story is to have great confidence in your ability to write. This type of problem could be argued to be typical of manga and other weekly or monthly serialized products such as TV shows, where unlike a story that is released in its entirety at once, you have to wait, possibly for quite a long time, before you find out the specific details of the problem. You cannot simply read ahead and find out the gender of ano kata. You either let your writing skills find a solution or you just guess.

6.5. Mimetic Words

The mimetic words found in this thesis have, with the exception of Ex. 16, all been part of background art and not part of dialog. This does not mean that there were no mimetic words in the dialog at all, but rather that they posed no particular translation problem. The mimetic words that have posed translation problems have all done the work of what I would like to call symbolic effects, as opposed to sound effects. They have been part of the background art, much like the onomatopoeic sound effects, but rather than giving the reader information regarding the sound heard, they give information on for example what kind of state an action or situation is taken in. Whether it is implying that a jump is taken with spryness or agility like in Ex. 15 or that a person is emitting an aura of psychological pressure like in Ex. 14.

It could be argued that using mimetic words as simply symbolic effects is specific to manga, where the written word can be used as part of the background art, aiding in giving a scene a specific emotion that is decided by the author. Since mimetic words do not actually produce sounds they would not work as part of the background in mediums dependent on audio, such as television, or in purely text based mediums, such as books, where one would have to work the described situation into the narrative.

6.6. Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia in manga is a breeding ground for the creation of neologisms due to the fact that you get an immediate association between the onomatopoeia and the picture it is put up against, like in Hirohiko Araki’s “Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure”, where punching a frog sitting on a rock produces the sound メメタア or memetaa. 

Memetaa is nonsense but the author felt it was the appropriate sound effect and thus created a neologism. This creates a problem though. Since the neologism lacks the commonly known aspects of more traditional onomatopoeia it is harder reproduce the same impression in the translation or even understand its meaning all together if the onomatopoeia is used in a vague way such as in Ex. 20.

In my translation I have used nouns or verbs to translate the majority of the onomatopoeic translation problems as opposed to gibberish non-words, such as the ones in Ex.20, which are only supposed to represent a sound. Like Svensson says, it is most likely because deep down I find using such words in text to be somewhat childish. I worry that the appropriate impression of the original text will not carry over unless I put it into real words. It could be argued however that this is due to the fact that I do not possess enough writing experience.

There have been many studies on the use of onomatopoeia and mimetic words in Japanese but, to my knowledge, non that focused purely on onomatopoeia used as sound effects in manga, which the majority of the onomatopoeic translation problems in this study represent. I would argue that the way to translate these types of onomatopoeic words are different than that of those found within dialog or sentences as these words are also part of the background scenery of the manga. Too expressive translations may ruin the scene but too vague of a translation will not get the point across. An interesting study to see would be one purely focused on the translations of background sound effects, something along the lines of what Inose writes about in La Traducción de Onomatopeyas y Mimesis Japonesas al Español y al Ingles: Los Casos de La Novela y el Manga.

6.7. Proper Nouns

When translating proper nouns, if you are not familiar with the terminology of the work you are dealing with, in this case Gundam, you could make a mistake much like David Ury, the translator of Kio Shimoku’s Genshiken. In Genshiken volume 3 there are references to Mobile Suit Gundam and its characters. Ury mistakenly translates the robots Gouf, GM and Ball as Gufu, Jimu and Bour as well as the characters Ramba Ral and Crowley Hamon as Raru Ranba and Hammon Crowley. In the examples with the robots, the katakana spelling of the names has clearly misled the translator due to his lack of familiarity with the series. The same can be said for the people but here he has also mistakenly assumed that the characters’ names were written in the Japanese fashion of having the family name first and given name second. With proper research this would not have been a difficult problem to solve using Recognized Translation.

However it is not so easy when, like in Ex. 22, there are two different ways to translate a certain name or when the source material gives you conflicting information, like the problem translator William Flanagan runs into in volume two, chapter b05 of Jin Kobayashi’s School Rumble manga. In this manga there is an English girl named ララ. This name is written with Roman letters in the original Japanese edition twice, but both times with different spellings,
Sala and Sarah. Flanagan decided to stick with Sarah because of the more traditional accepted spelling. Flanagan made the right decision here. Choosing Sarah over Sala, he avoids disrupting the flow of reading with an unnatural sounding name as well as enforcing that the character comes from England.

6.8. Register

The degrees of formality in speech are one of the biggest differences between Japanese and English. What only a few words can imply in Japanese may take several sentences to portray in English. The easiest way to deal with Register would be Paraphrase or Compensation but, as said earlier, these techniques require writing space perhaps not always available to translators of manga. The translator may be forced to sacrifice accuracy for the sake of saving space. If the Register Translation Problem is a matter of honorifics, a type of specific noun used with names which may pose another problem when translating, then one could transfer them into English like Yagi does in his translation of Rurouni Kenshin by Nobuhiro Watsuki, something which is often appreciated by the target audience. However, I would argue that transferring honorifics creates awkwardness when read in an English text and the same impression an honorific gives can usually be attained through other means such as Paraphrase or Functional Equivalent. It should be said though, that the use of honorifics when subtitling anime is different. Other than leaving them out entirely, changing them can create a dissonance between read information and heard information. You hear a name but read a different one, leading to the subtitle reader to become distracted.

Word Plays

In volume 5, chapter 30 of Kiyohiko Azuma’s manga Yotsuba&! the character Yanda tries to recall the girl Yotsuba’s name. He knows that it is something happy sounding, like a grass or flower (Yotsuba means four leafed clover). He makes a guess that it’s Dandelion and gets corrected that it’s Yotsuba. The translator Javier Lopez uses a translator’s note at the side of the frame to explain that Yotsuba means four leafed clover. This type of word play is very difficult to translate without completely changing the dialog.

Is it worth changing the original text for the sake of fluidity? Or should one keep it as close to original as possible but risk a loss of meaning, in this case losing the word play? Lopez chose the latter, keeping it close to the original but lost the word play and instead had to explain it with a note.

In volume 3, page 140 of Kiyohiko Azuma’s Azumanga Daioh we find a similar play on words. One of the characters announces that she is about to impart some 豆知識, mamechishiki, meaning “trivia”, but the word is spelled with the kanji for “beans” (豆) and “knowledge” (知

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The translator Javier Lopez changes the punchline into “That’s not trivia, it’s just plain trivial.” This time Lopez went with the former option, deciding to slightly alter the meaning of the text in order to create a word play.

In volume 1 chapter 4 of Jin Kobayashi’s School Rumble there is also a word play where the translator chose to change the pun in order for the joke to not get lost in translation. The girl Tenma wants the boy she is in love with to read a word from Sun Tzu’s Art of War for her. The word suki means to be unguarded but is pronounced the same as "I love you". The translator William Flanagan solves the dual meaning word play by changing the context so the boy is to read another word from The Art of War, talking about how you must treat your soldiers as if they were your beloved children. Making use of the word beloved it gives a similar impact while staying within the same area as the original.

6.10. Other

The category Other covers a very large set of problems, all with their own preferred solutions depending on the translator. What they all have in common is that one must still decide whether it is worth sacrificing accuracy for space or a natural flow in the text. In Ex. 32, where the abbreviation fukei was omitted, the decision was made to not try to force a likeness to the original by inventing an abbreviation in English and instead simply left it as it was. One could argue that this changed the setting of the characters, whose use of jargon may be an important character quirk, but in this case it was decided that the natural flow of the text took precedence.

6.11. Overview

The recurring points that have appeared in the discussion chapter have been “losing accuracy due to lack of space” and “a natural flow of reading.” Techniques such as Paraphrase or Compensation give the translation a high level of accuracy, where the translator can impart as much of the original sentence’s meaning, impression and feeling as possible but at the cost of space. The lack of space to work with, i.e. a speech bubble, is something particular to manga as opposed to translating books. On the other hand, techniques such as Functional Equivalent, Omission or Complete Change, or Transference are there to deal with a lack of space but at the cost of risking a loss of meaning, impression or feeling.

Intermixed with all the techniques used has been the importance of keeping a natural flow of reading. Which technique in any given situation has the least disruptive impact on the flow of reading?

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Transference is the technique that first comes to mind when thinking of which ones that poses the biggest risk. If the use of a loan word causes distraction or confusion for the reader, such as having to look up a glossary or even a total lack of explanation, then Transference may not be the appropriate technique to use. However, if an explanation can be woven into the narrative, for example in a combination of Transference and Compensation, then it may be a good solution.

Functional Equivalent and Paraphrase could be seen as the most adaptable techniques due to their widely spread use over the different types of translation problems and they can both be used to create a good flow of reading. As opposed to Paraphrase, Functional Equivalent has the strength that its size is easily constrained due to not needing longer phrases with explanations since cultural words are exchanged with similar but cultural neutral words. This is important in manga where, as stated earlier, the lack of space is a big issue. However it has the weakness of sacrificing accuracy of the translation. Paraphrase on the other hand, which is not as easily used due to the lack of space, can fit all aspects of the original text into the translation through clever wording or sentence structure.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, during the course of translating Gundam Katana, a total of ten different types of translation problems were found namely Ateji, Cultural Terms, Foreign Language Grammatical Mistakes, Linguistical Ambiguity, Mimetic Words, Onomatopoeia, Other, Proper Nouns, Register and lastly Word Plays. To solve these problems a total number of eleven different translation techniques were used. The techniques were Compensation, Correction, Functional Equivalent, Omission or Complete Change, Paraphrase, Partial Translation, Recognized Translation, Target Language Onomatopoeia, Transference, Using Noun and Using Verb.

This thesis was a case study of one particular manga which means that all of these problems may not appear in a different manga. There is also the possibility that all of them and more may appear as well.

Onomatopoeia was by far the largest category, consisting of 63.9% of the total amount of translation problems, followed by Ateji at a 10% and Proper Nouns at 8.1%. The sheer amount of onomatopoeia is due to the fact that they serve as sound effects for a majority of the time. For the sake of this thesis I chose to translate them all but the policy of a hypothetical employer may decide whether they are worth translating or not. Like Jüngst says, some publishers or editors may decide that the visual element of sound effect onomatopoeia in manga may serve just as good as a translation44.

While onomatopoeia may have been the largest category in this translation, 54 cases out of 71 were translated using Nouns even though alternatives are possible as previous research shows 45.

Ateji was the problem type with the widest range of different techniques used. A total of 6 out of 11 techniques were used to solve the eleven Ateji problems where Compensation and Functional Equivalent both shared the top spot with 3 cases each.

Paraphrase was the most widely used technique at 7 cases and functional equivalent being the second most widely used with 6 cases. Both were used a total of 8 times each, the top use for Paraphrase was twice with Mimetic Words and the top use for Functional Equivalent was 3 times with Ateji.

Onomatopoeia and Mimetic Words pose a very particular problem when translating manga. Onomatopoeia is particular because with the aid of the images, onomatopoeic neologisms are very easily created. These neologisms however, lack the commonly known aspects of more traditional onomatopoeia making them harder to translate in a way that gives off the same impression as the original word. The sheer number of instances where onomatopoeia appear, especially in an action oriented manga, compared to written sentences makes them stand out all the more. Also, because onomatopoeic sound effects are often part of the background art too liberal or expressive translations may ruin the scenery and art whereas a vague translation may not get the point across.

Mimetic Words are particular because they can create so called symbolic effects where the words are used much like sound effects but instead of giving information on sound they give information on in which state an action or situation is in. Is the situation tense? Is a jumping action taken spryly or sluggishly? Symbolic Effects can help the author impart a specific impression on the reader not possible as conveniently in other mediums.

Particular to both onomatopoeia and mimetic words is their use as part of the pictures itself which may pose not only a translation problem but an editing problem as well in how to best deal with the translation without ruining the artwork.

A problem specific to manga found when analyzing the different translation problems and techniques was the lack of space available for the translation. No matter what type of translation problem one finds or what technique one uses, one must constantly take the following into account: Will the translation fit in this speech bubble?

I hope that this thesis can be of some use to other translators of manga, to prepare them for what they may run into when they translate and what effects certain techniques can have on one’s translation. Even though the problems touched upon here may not all appear in the works they choose to tackle, this thesis gives a taste of how to solve the ones that do. The ways problems are solved in this thesis are not the only ways to solve them, but they are one way to do it. Keeping proper self-distance and critiquing your own translation is difficult, so

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whether the best technique was chosen in any given case was hard to decide, but I am still pleased with the end result.

Lastly, a theme worth further research is the phenomenon of Ateji and Onomatopoeia as Sound Effects. The many ways in which Ateji can be used is intricate and the subtle nuances they can give a text are astounding. It is something I have not seen any other researcher take a look at. A suggestion for a topic regarding Ateji would be the way the author can give different layers of information to both the readers and the characters within the manga. The difference in how a word is said and read is a subtlety not as easily recreated in English. For Onomatopoeia the suggested research topic would be how background sound effect onomatopoeia is translated in different manga. Do translators prefer to leave them untranslated; hoping the artwork alone will explain its meaning? Or do they try to create onomatopoeic artwork of their own? Is this decision up to the translators or is it something the editor has full control over? Background Sound Effects are a surprisingly deep subject.

8. **Summary**

This thesis was a case study where a manga was translated in order to find translation problems that occur when translating from Japanese into English and how you can solve them. The manga translated was *Mobile Suit Gundam Katana* by Sono and Ishii, published by Kadokawa Shoten in 2009. Ten different types of translation problems were found and eleven different translation techniques were used to solve them. These problems were then analyzed, many compared to similar problems in other manga translated by other translators. The most frequent problem was Onomatopoeia while the most surprising and multifaceted problem was Ateji, where the difference in how a word is read and spelled can give different impressions and implications not only to the reader but to the characters within the story as well. Problems particular to the translation of manga found where the use of onomatopoeic neologisms, onomatopoeia as background sound effects, mimetic words used as symbolic effects as well as the lack of space for ones translation.

9. **References**


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10. **Appendix**

See “translation data – sorted Per G.pdf”