DECODIFYING JAPANESE ONOMATOPOEIA: A STUDY CASE OF LAUGHTER IN THE COMIC BOOK *KAMISAMA HAJIMEMASHITA*

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ABSTRACT. *Decodifying Japanese Onomatopoeia: A Study Case of Laughter in the Comic Book* **Kamisama Hajimemashita.** This article explores the possibility of translating Japanese onomatopoeia used as role language markers, from Japanese (source language) into Romanian (target language). The study case is conducted on a Japanese comic book (*manga*), analysed in terms of pragmatic sense conveyed through a multimodal text – various semiotic systems (verbal, images, layout, etc.) that interact and produce a coherent meaning.

Keywords: onomatopoeia, role language, multimodal texts, pragmatics

REZUMAT. *Decodificarea onomatopeelor din limba japoneză: studiu de caz – exprimarea râsului în banda desenată* **Kamisama Hajimemashita***.* Acest articol explorează posibilitatea de a traduce onomatopeele din limba japoneză (limba sursă), folosite ca marcatori ai limbajului personificator, în limba română (limba țintă). Studiul de caz este realizat pe o carte de benzi desenate japoneze (*manga*), analizată din perspectiva sensului pragmatic transmis printr-un text multimodal - diverse sisteme semiotice (verbale, imagini, aranjare în pagină etc.) care interacționează și produc un sens coerent.

Cuvinte-cheie: onomatopee, yakuwarigo, texte multimodale, pragmatică

We live in an era of technological progress which translates into new ways of communication, increased speed and potential of sending of the intended message. We are provided with easy access to multimodal forms of communication that include graphical symbols, gestures, vocalizations, facial expressions and more. From a translation perspective, the source texts are increasingly multimodal. Modern technology gives authors the opportunity to diversify and enrich the extralinguistic resources of expression (cf. Dicerto 2018, 2).

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Such a multi-modal medium of expression is the Japanese comics, usually referred to as *manga*. They are products of pop culture that have helped bridge the gap between the Japanese culture and foreign cultures across the world. Thanks to the great variety of subjects and genres, *manga* have gained popularity among both the young and the older public. In Japan, as a form of contemporary mass culture, comics has grown to be more accessible than modern Japanese literature. As any other type of comics, written texts as well as images are used to create a coherent message that is more easily conveyed to the public than that of a classical type novel.

Despite the international success that *manga*, as well as other types of comics, have had globally, their translation has only recently become of interest in the academic field. As editor of "Comics in Translation", Federico Zanetti, states in the introductory part of the book that there is a need "to address this gap in the literature and offer the first and most comprehensive account of various aspects of a diverse range of social practices subsumed under the label 'comics'" (Zanetti 2014,6).

A History of *Manga* and Its Multimodal Relevance

Manga is a Japanese noun written with two *kanji* characters – 漫 (whimsical) and 画 (picture) – so it can be translated as 'whimsical pictures' (Hernandez-Perez 2019, 7). The Japanese use this word to refer to any type of comic books, but international fans only ever use it to refer to the comics edited and printed in Japan. No matter how one decides to call them, Japanese comics have roots that can be dated back to Heian Era (794-1185). The first forms of artistic expression that used the interaction of words and images are the *yamato-e*, Chinese inspired pictures that date back to Tang Dynasty (see Soper 1942, 351-379). Nowadays, *manga* are complex visual conventions, similar to American and European comic books, that combine written text with images in a sequential form. From a linguistic perspective, *manga* are multimodal texts.

There is a vast debate on the possible translation of multimodal texts in literature. Semiotics are the starting point in the study of the meaning of such texts. This type of science is "concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign" (Eco 1976, 7), i.e. dealing with analysing how signs are organized, their similarities and differences, and their ability to provide meaning. A multimodal text creates a relation between several semiotic systems: linguistic, visual, audio, gesture, and spatial. Pragmatics has recently joined this academic debate, being considered a discipline aimed at contributing to the understanding of multimodal text in context. In terms of the translation process, difficulties arise

because visual and audio elements (sounds, noises) contribute to the formation of the message (cf. Dicerto 2018, 16). In the case of monomodal texts, the semiotic system that provides meaning is linguistic, whether expressed in writing or orally. Multimodal texts are, however, units of sense created by combining different mediums which are used as complementary components of a unified message, although they have independent meaning. Roland Barthes is one of the academics who studied the linguistic characteristics of multimodal productions, considering images and sounds (visual signs and non-verbal audio signs) as being most often used as complementary elements for language (verbal signs). Barthes classified multimodal texts in the following categories: texts containing verbal and visual signs (such as advertising posters), texts containing verbal and auditory signs (radio programs), texts containing visual and auditory signs (such as a dance shows), and last but not least texts containing all three elements (films) (see Barthes 1977, 32–51). Because language, images and sounds can be used to create independent meaningful texts, they are recognized as distinct semiotic systems relevant to the understanding of multimodal texts (cf. Dicerto 2018, 17). These signs and symbols that compose a multimodal text have a polysemantic nature. Therefore, their interpretation is a subjective one, depending on the receiver of the message and its cultural context. In order to be able to interpret a textual context, we need to resort to pragmatic processes which play an essential role in understanding multimodal texts (cf. Dicerto 2018, 38). A pragmatic analysis approaches the text reader based on the common context, eliminating the problem of temporal and/or spatial disproportionality between the author and the reader. However, a text only makes sense in relation to the author, the context, the purpose, and the reader. Since the text is the only way of communicating between the author and the reader, the transmission of a multimodal message can be an advantage. The diversification of the semiotic signs used can streamline the transmission of the message and its interpretation. This pragmatic strategy guides the target audience more easily towards the desired interpretation (see Dicerto 2018, 41–42).

A Deeper Understanding of Pragmatics and Its Role in the Interpretation of Texts

The main task of pragmatics is to describe the full interpretation of the statement, starting from the partial interpretation of the phrase provided by linguistics understood in the narrow sense – phonology, syntax, semantics. It aims both to shed light on the statements and eliminate ambiguity by selecting interpretations in cases where linguistic analysis produces more, and to assign references to different terms. Thus, pragmatics comes to complete the partial

interpretation offered by linguistics. The processes related to the linguistic code itself are not sufficient for a pragmatic analysis, as it is necessary to resort to extralinguistic processes, which will allow the identification of the appropriate referent from the set of possible references (see Guia 2005, 203–204). As mentioned before, those elements of language that are dependent on the context in which they are used fall into the umbrella of pragmatics. Therefore, pragmatic analysis is particularly concerned with the context. Françoise Armengaud (1985, 60–61) proposed a classification of four types of contexts: the circumstantial, factual, existential or referential context (the identity of the interlocutors, the physical circumstances, the place and the time of the discourse); situational or pragmatic context (cultural context mediated); the interactional context (formed by the stringing of language acts in an interdiscursive sequence, a chain that is regulated by certain mechanisms of the language); and the presuppositional context (consisting of everything the interlocutors suppose, especially their beliefs, expectations and intentions).

A subdomain of linguistics, pragmatics is a discipline whose object is the language, regarded not as a system of signs, but as an action and communicative interaction. The term was first introduced by Charles Morris, in 1938, in "Foundations of the Theory of Signs", to designate one of the levels of the semiotic process: the relationship between signs and those who interpret them. The setting-up of pragmatics as a specific research field is the result of the action of several factors and in particular the perspective shifts produced in linguistics and language philosophy. Pragmatics appeared as a reaction to both Chomskyan linguistics and to logical positivism. Its first version is represented by the "theory of language acts", formulated by J.L. Austin and developed by J.R. Searle. Morris proposes that the study of language be carried out at three levels: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. It distinguishes the three branches within the semiotics: syntactic (defined as the formal relationship between signs), semantics (the relationship between the sign and the object it determines) and pragmatics (the relationship between the sign and its interpreter) (cf. Levinson 1983, 1).

Pragmatics studies those units of language dependent on the context in which they are used, such as deictic, conversational implication, assumption, language acts, speech structure, etc. (cf. Costăchescu 2019, 2). The field of research of pragmatics has known a continuous development and diversification, which resulted in conflicting views on the status of this discipline. Nowadays, pragmatics is understood as either a component of a general integrated theory of language – alongside syntax, phonology and semantics – or as a way of analysing and interpreting any linguistic data, regardless of the level of structure they belong to. The significance of a statement is the result of negotiation processes between the sender and the receiver, as verbal communication implies reflective intentions and is not possible outside the exact recognition of

them by the partners of discussion. The literature makes no clear distinction between semantic and pragmatic, but the two areas of research should not be confused. Semantics studies the inherent significance of a word or sentence, while pragmatics studies the meaning of a unit determined according to the specific context, the speakers and the communicative situation (cf. Frâncu 1997, 142). The relationship of complementarity between pragmatic and semantic, assessed by defining the object of pragmatics as "meaning without semantics" (cf. Levinson 1983, 28), is a complex correlation, both because none of the two domains is autonomous in relation to the other, and because pragmatics studies the meanings in a broader framework of intertwined statements by particular mechanisms (see Crystal 2008, 379–380).

The main task of the pragmatics is to describe the complete interpretation of the statement, starting from the partial interpretation of the phrase from a linguistic perspective (phonology, syntax, semantic). It follows both making the statements less ambiguous by selecting interpretations in cases where linguistic analysis produces more than one meaning and assigning references to the different terms. Thus, pragmatics complements the partial interpretation provided by linguistics. Processes related to the language itself are not sufficient for a pragmatic analysis. It is therefore necessary to resort to extralinguistic processes, allowing identification of the corresponding reference in the possible reference ensemble (see Guia 2005, 203–204).

Pragmatic analysis cannot be achieved in the absence of a well-defined context. American Anthropologist Edward T. Hall proposes a differentiation of cultures depending on the dependence of the communication on the context in which it takes place. Some cultures are more strongly dependent on the context (*high-context cultures*) while others are much less dependent (*low context cultures*) (see Hall 1989, 90–91). Applying this theory to the subject of this study means there will be a recognition of the Japanese language and culture as being highly dependent on context, while the Romanian language and culture are less context dependent. We can thus predict the difficulty of the translation act between the two languages. With a default communication style, one of the main features of the Japanese language is the necessity to adjust the language to show the proper amount of respect for the conversational partner, according to the social circumstances and the characteristics of the interlocutor: age, gender, occupation, region of provenience, etc.

The Role of Translation and Introduction of *Yakuwarigo*

Translation is a process of communication and mediation involving three participants: the author of the source text, the translator and the reader

of the target text. Since they are exposed to distinct cultural backgrounds, their perception of the world differs. Therefore, the target text reader will spend more time and will make a greater effort to process the translated text compared to the source reader. The target text offers a reduced contextual effect compared to the source text which means that its relevance will also be reduced. Linguistic and cultural obstacles constrict the interpretability of the target text. To mitigate this negative effect of translation, the translator must be familiar with the pragmatic and socio-pragmatic aspects of the source text language. This way they will be able to provide the necessary contextual information by explaining the contextual implications, decreasing the discrepancy between the author's intent and the reader's expectations (cf. Rafieyan 2016, 99).

Another linguistic concept pertinent to this research paper is *Yakuwarigo*. Starting from 2000, the Japanese linguists – and not only them – started focusing their attention on research relating to the association between different typologies of pop culture characters and the unique characteristics of the language they use. The theoretical basis of these language studies is the concept proposed and defined by the Japanese linguist Kinsui Satoshi (金水 敏), which bears the name of *Yakuwarigo*. This term has been translated into English as *role language*, *character language* or *stereotypical speech*. Semantically, the term *Yakuwarigo* (役 割 語) is composed of '役' (*yaku*) - *role*, '割' (*wari*) – *assignment* and '語' (*go*) - *word*, so it could be translated by 'words assigned to a certain role'.

Variations that appear in the spoken language of an individual speaker, such as the styles or registers used in daily life, are the subject of research conducted in the field of traditional linguistics. Throughout history, such studies have relied on both the corpus in which the real, customary language is reflected, and the fictionalized language. Needless to mention, this has attracted many critics. Thus, the concept proposed by Kinsui complements traditional theories. Kinsui proposes the separate analysis of the elements related to the function of *role language* (2003), in the context of a communication between the creator and the intended audience. This communication becomes possible thanks to knowledge of shared, common information, but the message may be intentionally distorted by the author (cf. Teshigawara & Kinsui 2012, 7). The Japanese fiction array and pop culture offer a wide variety of language usage and grammatical rules to create a link between the physical characteristics of the character (age, gender, social status, occupation, region of origin, physical appearance, personality, etc.) and their language characteristics.

In his works published from 2000 onwards, Kinsui Satoshi offers several definitions of the concept of *Yakuwarigo*, but the following one is the most complete and concise:

> When a certain language usage (vocabulary, grammar, expressions, intonation, etc.) can make the listener or reader upon hearing it call to mind a certain character image (age, gender, occupation, social class, time period, appearance, personality, etc.), and likewise when a certain character image can make the observer when presented with it call to mind a certain language usage that the character is likely to use, we call that language usage *Yakuwarigo*.
>
> (Kinsui 2003, 205)

According to this definition, *Yakuwarigo* advances the research of the relationship between the character language and the image projected in the mind of the reader or listener. These patterns of expression are built on linguistic, social and cultural stereotypes, already existing in the Japanese society, including elements of vocabulary, grammar, phonetic features, fixed expressions, etc. that bring to mind certain attributes of the speaker such as gender, age, social status, region of provenience, race and others (see Teshigawara & Kinsui 2011, 37–58).

In "The Concise Dictionary of Role Language" (2014), Kinsui classifies the varieties of *Yakuwarigo* into six categories based on social and cultural subgroups according to: gender, age or generation, social class or occupation, region of origin, nationality or ethnicity, language actuality (the pre-modern language, used in the Edo era) and the authenticity of the language (the language of fictional creatures: aliens, gods, demons, ghosts, etc.). Therefore, the manner of expression attributed to a character is associated with certain linguistic characteristics of a certain social category that are easily recognizable in the Japanese cultural environment, even if they are not in accordance with the reality of today's society (cf. Teshigawara & Kinsui 2012, 1).

As mentioned above, there are three translations for the concept of *Yakuwarigo* in literature: *role language*, *character language* and *stereotypical speech*. The use of these three alternatives is not yet well defined. A tendency may be observed for the employ of one of the terms according to the authors' preferences. Kinsui considers that in the short period of research on *Yakuwarigo*, there was no clear distinction between *role language* and *character language*. However, he proposes a few characteristics which make a difference between the two concepts. *Character language* can be a speech style that is associated with a particular social or cultural group, but which is not sufficiently recognized in the linguistic community to be able to become *role language*. Also, if a certain style of expression is attributed to a character that is not part of the specific group or social category, then we cannot speak of *role language*. And finally, if the language used is either associated to a character's personality or is an artificial style that does not correspond to the group the character belongs to, it can be classified as *character language* (cf. Kinsui & Yamakido 2015, 32).

Yakuwarigo is a relatively pioneering idea with still underdeveloped research progress, therefore it draws the attention of many researchers, having applicability in various spheres of interest, such as linguistics or translation studies, but not only. It must be acknowledged that *Yakuwarigo* is used as a universal mean of outlining a character's personality and it is not specific to Japanese culture only. However, the Japanese language stands out from other languages by the multitude of lexemes and morphemes used, which allow a great diversity of role language. As it can be seen from the definition provided by Kinsui Satoshi, *role language* implies the use of certain distinctive markers such as: final particles (終助詞 – *shūjoshi*), the feminine language used by men (オネエ言葉 *onē kotoba* = 'the language of the older sister' – often used to delimit a homosexual character), forms specific to written discourses – 書き言葉 *kakikotoba* – used in oral discourses (for example, the use of the *degozaru* form – でござる to mark the archaic language of samurais) (see Kinsui 2011, 38–39).

Pop culture is a prosperous environment for diversifying and popularizing this kind of language, especially through *anime* (cartoons), *manga*, music, advertising sites and so on. Therefore, the study case of this paper focuses on onomatopoeic sounds used as markings of an expression of the personality of a *manga* character in a certain situation. *Yakuwarigo* allows the direct highlighting of certain key attributes of the character, without the need for a detailed description. When the language used is in sync with the exterior aspect of the character, the scene becomes more convincing. And a mismatch between the visual and the verbal features leaves a more lasting impression in the public's memory. At the same time, role language is based on linguistic stereotypes that exist in the Japanese culture so it can promote prejudices and discrimination of certain social groups (see Kinsui 2003, 30–52).

Best reflected by the characters from *anime* and *manga*, the *Yakuwarigo* concept demonstrates the complexity and expressiveness of the Japanese language and culture. Viewed from a translation perspective, it poses issues of adaptation and compromise, as translating into another language can lead to a loss of pragmatic sense. Finding points of equivalence between the Romanian language and the Japanese language, as well as identifying the theoretical concepts that are best suited for such an issue could be a viable solution for the proper translation of *Yakuwarigo*, but also of cultural terms and concepts. Any translation from one language to another involves conveying the message, suitable both from a linguistic and a cultural point of view, for the target audience. Translating markers of *Yakuwarigo* presents additional difficulties in the adequacy of character language specificity to the audience, language and target culture without suffering any loss of pragmatic meaning. In order to optimize the

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translation process, a linguistic analysis of the target text and possible translation alternatives is required. The linguistic analysis is an important method of discovery, systematization and generalization.

> Heterogeneous and multifaceted scientific study, as its specific object of research is language, dialect or speech in the broadest interpretation, linguistics is the science of language (including psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics), the science that explores its mechanisms through the study of several natural languages.
>
> ("General Dictionary of Language Sciences" 1997, 202)

Yakuwarigo and the Use of Onomatopoeic and Mimetic Words in *Manga*

Onomatopoeic and mimetic words can be used as *Yakuwarigo* markers in order to highlight a specific reaction of a character in a well-defined context. The instances of onomatopoeia are highly context-dependent so they can be easily understood together with the relevant image in a comic strip or animation. The term 'onomatopoeia' comes from Greek and it is formed from 'onoma, onomat', meaning 'name', and 'poios', meaning 'making'. It refers to words that imitate sounds as one perceives them, or it can refer to objects and actions (cf. Lasserre 2018, 9). Onomatopoeic words exist in all languages around the world, but they can be considered culture specific terms. There is no common pattern across languages, instead they are influenced and shaped by the phonetic system of the language, the culture and the individual speaker. Within a certain culture and language, the usage of such words follows certain accepted conventions, and they have become part of a shared vocabulary and are interpreted according to commonly agreed meanings (cf. Lasserre 2018, 20). They go through the "first language filter" (Lasserre 2018, 13) and are often influenced by the characteristics of the speaker, like age or gender (cf. Lasserre 2018, 15). They don't have a well-defined independent meaning, so it is necessary to interpret them in context. Their main role is to add flavour to the discourse, offering that extra detail that can complete the message. Linguists often neglect onomatopoeic words, considering them to be "iconisms" or "sound symbolisms" (Lasserre 2018, 12).

The Japanese language is rich in onomatopoeic words and it is said to have more than 2000 such words. They play an important role in everyday conversation and in works of literature as well, being used in all levels of the language. A traditional classification of Japanese onomatopoeic words is:

giongo 擬音語– 'phonomimic' words (sound of animate and inanimate beings),

gitaigo 擬態語– 'phenomimes' (visual, tactile, and other non-auditory sensitive

impressions) and *gijōgo* 擬情語– 'psychomimes' (bodily sensational, emotional) (Iwasaki, Sells & Akita 2016, 21).

Translating onomatopoeia can prove to be a challenge. Each translator is influenced by their own idiolects in translating such sounds. One must first find the correct interpretation of the sound word and then produce the same meaning in the target language text as intended by the original author. In this paper, a concise analysis of the possible ways to render the Japanese onomatopoeic words expressing laughter identified in the first volume of the *manga* titled "Kamisama Hajimemashita" into Romanian, from a pragmatic perspective, is offered.

"Kamisama Hajimemashita" (神様はじめました, lit. 'I Became a God') is a Japanese *manga* series, containing 25 volumes, written and illustrated by Julietta Suzuki and serialized by Hakusensha in the *shōjo manga* magazine "Hana to Yume". The main characters are Nanami Momozono, an average high school girl who, through a strange turn of events, becomes an Earth Deity of a shrine, and Tomoe, a fox *yokai* who serves as the familiar of the land god Mikage. While reading the first volume of the comic book, the use of onomatopoeic words stood out, especially those employed in the background, that highlighted the feelings behind the laughter of a character.

Japanese onomatopoeic words marking laughter are classified as *gitaigo*, and the variety is overwhelming, each expressing a different pragmatic meaning (cf. Yamamoto 2002, 16):
- *niko niko* – happiness, joy, fun
- *niya niya* – grinning while thinking or remembering something bad, indecent
- *kusu kusu* – giggle; to chuckle
- *gera gera* – roaring with laughter; laughing heartily
- *hahaha* – healthy, happy laughter (boyish image)
- *hihihi* – an unpleasant laughter (an evil man image)
- *fufufu* – cute laughter (girly image)
- *hehehe* – an embarrassed laughter (childish image)
- *hohoho* – a woman's way of laughing (an elegant and pretentious image)

Onomatopoeic word should be interpreted in context, so let us take a look at the following panels from the first volume of "Kamisama Hajimemashita":
- the first panel presents a scene in which a classmate of Nanami's is making fun of her plain looking lunch box which only contains rice and a pickled plum, making it resemble the Japanese flag. The boy's laughter is marked with the onomatopoeia *gera gera*, expressing a whole-hearted laugh, that is appropriate for a young high school boy.

Fig. 1. ゲラゲラ, panel of pg. 4, 1st vol. of "Kamisama Hajimemashita"

- the second panel illustrates a scene in which Tomoe is making fun of Nanami who is in a pinch: she is being attacked by a *yokai* and Tomoe refuses to help her without her begging him for help. He feels he has the upper hand, so he laughs sarcastically, which is marked with *fufufu*. The cute laughter is meant to irritate Nanami, and probably the readers.

Fig. 2. フフフ, panel of pg. 91, 1st vol. of "Kamisama Hajimemashita"

- the third panel presents an embarrassed Nanami, who tried to use a spell to transform water into sake but failed. The onomatopoeic *ho* marks a woman's way of laughing so we can assume Nanami is trying to hide her shame behind her girly appearance.

Fig. 3. ほ, panel of pg. 113, 1st vol. of "Kamisama Hajimemashita"

- the boyish laughter from the fourth panel expressed as *hahaha*, seems to paint a happy-go-lucky atmosphere between the two male characters. And that is exactly how the two pretend to be.

Fig. 4. ハハハ, panel of pg. 128, 1st vol. of "Kamisama Hajimemashita"

- The author of this *manga* seems to use *fufufu* to mark Tomoe's ironic laugh, more than a cute, girly laugh. In the fifth panel we find an angry Tomoe trying to panfry a *yokai* fish.

Fig. 5: フフフ, panel of pg. 139, 1st vol. of "Kamisama Hajimemashita"

As one can notice from the examples given above, the onomatopoeias used are adapted to the character and to the context. The great variety of such words in Japanese allows the author to play with them, creating vibrant and expressive scenes, completing the intended message to the reader. The challenge is translating these onomatopoeic words into Romanian, while conserving the intended pragmatic message.

In order to make Japanese comic books accessible to the international public, translation is needed. After the 1990's, fan made translations called 'scanlations' have become widespread on the internet. 'Scanlation' was made by combining the words 'scan' and 'translation' and is used to refer to any type of fan made translation that does not comply with the rules and constraints of an official translation. This means that a 'scanlator' can decide not to translate the onomatopoeia, but instead keep the Japanese word, which would confer authenticity and preserve the original atmosphere of the scene. In case the reader is familiarised with the Japanese language and culture, such a solution might have the desired effect and the intended message may be properly conveyed. However, it would be hard for the uninitiated to identify and understand such pragmatic markers left untranslated.

In the case of an official translation, all meaningful words, including onomatopoeia, should be translated. If we think of Romanian onomatopoeic words for laughter, two come to mind: *hahaha* and *hihihi*. *Hahaha* is a classical method of expressing laugh, not only used in Romanian, Japanese and English, but in other languages as well. *Hihihi* could add a sense of irony or simply childishness. But these two words are insufficient to be used as equivalents for all the Japanese variety of 'laughs'. A solution may be not only to translate, but to explain the linguistically encoded information in order to communicate the intended pragmatic message. This would help the reader gain access to the original message but would pose a problem of special constraints. The amount of space a translator can work with is very limited in case of *manga* panels. The text has to fit in the speech bubble or in the free space around it. This means there is not enough room for explanations. Also, using footnotes is not a common practice in comic books, so unless it is mandatory, one should avoid inserting such lines. In conclusion, the best solution would be to use an equivalent onomatopoetic word, such as *hahaha* or *hihihi*. From the point of view of semantics, a written linguistic term was replaced by another, that has the same grammatical function, however there is a loss of pragmatic sense. But *manga* are multimodal texts that "communicate by more than 'just' words" (Dicerto 2018, 2). Images are a universal language, that can be interpreted and understood by all readers of the comic book, no matter the cultural and language background. This means that the pragmatic interpretation is triggered by the interaction between different semiotic sources of meaning. In other words, the loss of pragmatic meaning of the written component will be compensated by the visual component.

Conclusions

Using onomatopoeic words as role language makers offers colour and diversity to the scene created. However, it poses a great deal of challenges to the translation process. If the written text would be the sole semantic component of the intended message, then the loss of pragmatic sense might be inevitable. The advantage of translating a *manga*, or any other type of comic books, is that such a multimodal text combines images with written signs to create a unitary, coherent message. So, the translator should keep in mind the image component of the multimodal text that helps convey the message and leaves room for more solutions or compromises. Since the target text is the only way of communicating between the author and the reader, the transmission of a multimodal message can be an advantage for the pragmatic interpretation.

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