



DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES  
AND LITERATURES

# A THUD OR A BANG?

## A Study of the Translation of Onomatopoeia in Manga

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# Abstract

**Title:** A Thud or a Bang?: A Study of the Translation of Onomatopoeia in Manga

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**Abstract:** This bachelor's thesis was written with the aim to analyze how Japanese onomatopoeia in manga are translated from Japanese to English, and if and how the translation changes the meaning in context. This was done by using two Japanese manga as material – Haikyuu!! and Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma. Data was collected through digital copies, and sports-related and cooking-related onomatopoeia were of focus during the data collection. The material was analyzed using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as well as previous research to examine the translation process of onomatopoeia, possible changes in meaning as well as the onomatopoeia's correlation to the visual modes of the image. The results indicate that the translation of a Japanese onomatopoeia is heavily dependent on if the onomatopoeia also exists in English. The results further demonstrate the onomatopoeia's important relation to other parts of the image in manga, as this altered the meaning in the English version at times. Typography was especially relevant as a change in font was shown to alter the interpretation of the sound in the English version.

**Keywords:** Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), manga, onomatopoeia, translation, Japanese

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# 1. Introduction

What is onomatopoeia? Because of their complex nature, one might find it difficult to describe them properly. In simplified terms, onomatopoeia can be described as words that “imitate or represent sounds made by animate or inanimate objects” (Sell, 2011, p. 98). In English as well as other languages, onomatopoeia is a common occurrence in both written and spoken language. However, Japanese is a language that takes the use of onomatopoeia a step further.

In English, we use onomatopoeic words to describe, say, a dog’s barking or a bomb’s explosion. While these are common in Japanese as well, the onomatopoeic words in Japanese can be divided into five categories<sup>1</sup>: *Giseigo* (also known as phonomines) is the category for animate objects while inanimate objects fall under *giongo* – phenomines (Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 474). *Gitaigo* is the category that ‘conveys the sense of a state, abstract quality, or condition’ (Lee and Shaw, 2006, p. 35, cited in Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 474). *Gijougo* onomatopoeia (psychomines) describe feelings while *giyougo* describe movement (Dexter, 2015). This means that through some onomatopoeic words, Japanese speakers reach into a non-auditory domain much more than an English speaker can.

One of the most widely recognized phenomena to come from Japan is *manga* – Japanese comics, one of Japan’s most significant cultural exports today (Ito and Crutcher, 2014, p. 45). It is loved by many both within and outside of Japan alike, regardless of gender, age or occupation. Several comic series have been ongoing for decades, many have been translated into several different languages, and popular comics have led to an animated version made for television – not to name games, movies and concerts. As such, manga has developed into the worldwide pop cultural sensation it is today.

There are many genres within the realm of manga, although dividing them is at times difficult. The distinctions generally point to age and gender of the reader, despite the audience often being of mixed age and gender (Rohan et al., 2018, p. 223). Two prominent categories are *shounen manga* and *shoujo manga*, aimed at young teen males and young teen females respectively. Within these are several subgenres such as horror, comedy or adventure. Shibatani (1990) writes that “onomatopoeic expressions permeate Japanese life” (p. 157),

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<sup>1</sup> In Japanese: 擬声語、擬音語、擬態語、擬情語、擬容語

further stating that they are apparent in spoken Japanese, animated speech and literary works (ibid.), to the point that onomatopoeia is said to be one of the well-known features of manga (Rohan et al., 2018, p. 220). Onomatopoeia is a common occurrence in western comics as well. However, taking into account the Japanese language's many categories of onomatopoeia, it can be concluded that such words are far more common and far more intricate in Japanese comics.

So when Japanese comics are translated into English, what happens? Apart from translating the language while taking the related images into account, onomatopoeic words also require an English equivalent so that nothing is lost in translation. The issue with this is that some of the onomatopoeic words in Japanese do not exist in English, making it a difficult task to create the same feeling as in the original version.

This thesis aims to delve into that specific issue. While difficult onomatopoeia appears in several different mediums, this thesis will analyze the use of such words in manga specifically. This will be done by first presenting previous research on onomatopoeia, manga and the translation process of such words. The thesis will then move on explaining the theory used and applied to this study. After presenting the material and methodology, the data collected from manga will be analyzed using the theory. This then leads to a discussion and conclusion in which the findings will be summarized and future research will be discussed.

## 2. Previous research

As manga has risen to such a high cultural status both within and outside of Japan, analyzing and discussing its content – especially in connection to translation – is now more relevant than ever. Onomatopoeia in Japanese is a subject of frequent study (e.g. Kanero et al. 2014; Connelly et al., 2016; Uchida et al., 2012), whether it be in connection to neuropsychology or popular culture. However, the focus of this essay is how onomatopoeic expressions occur and translate into the English version. This section is therefore divided into two parts. The first section presents previous research on the background and structure of onomatopoeia, while the second section moves onto onomatopoeia in manga specifically, i.e. the occurrence and translation of such words.

### 2.1. The background and structure of onomatopoeia

Regarding the different categories of Japanese onomatopoeia – i.e. giseigo, giongo, gitaigo, gijougo and giyougo – Hamano (1986, p. 13) refers to them as core elements of the sound-symbolic system. The following table shows a few examples of onomatopoeia from the different categories, given by Dexter (2015):

**Table 1: Examples of different Japanese onomatopoeia**

<b>Giseigo</b>	<b>Giongo</b>	<b>Gitaigo</b>	<b>Gijougo</b>	<b>Giyougo</b>
わんわん	ザーザー	むしむし	うっとり	ぐーたら
wanwan	zaazaa	mushimushi	uttori	guutara
<b>A dog's bark</b>	<b>Heavy rain pouring down</b>	<b>Unpleasantly hot</b>	<b>Fascinated by something beautiful/spellbound</b>	<b>Not having the willpower to do anything</b>

In English, sound-mimicking words exist (i.e. giseigo and giongo), but the more abstract categories (gitaigo, giyougo and gijougo) do not. They can all be simply explained as in the introduction, but the complexity behind the different types of onomatopoeia make for a more thorough explanation. Kita (1997) explains that Japanese onomatopoeia are not only referential, but also provide a vivid “at-the-scene feeling” (p. 381), meaning that a sensory input is evoked in native speakers when hearing or reading an onomatopoeia. When the onomatopoeia refers to the sound itself (giseigo and giongo) there is a certain degree of

mimicry, but the majority of onomatopoeia refer to an event or a state (gitaigo), and those events or states do not necessarily produce actual sounds (ibid.). Gitaigo as well as giyougo and gijougo are therefore known as ideophones (Dexter, 2015).

Similar to this thesis, Smajic (2010) has written about the translation of onomatopoeia in manga between Japanese and Swedish, using *One Piece* (written by Eiichiro Oda) and *Detective Conan* (written by Gosho Aoyama) as material. As an explanation to the structure of Japanese onomatopoeia, he goes into detail about the grammatical factors that typically outline an onomatopoetic word in Japanese. To create an onomatopoetic expression in English, English speakers typically use different verbs to describe different ways of, say, to laugh, i.e. chuckle, grin or giggle. Japanese, however, uses the same verb; to change the expression of laughing, an onomatopoetic expression along with a particle is added to the verb. An example of this is *niko-niko-to warau* (to laugh with a smile) (p. 6).

Shibatani (1990, p. 154) mentions that many Japanese onomatopoetic words involve reduplication, and Tajima (2006) states that about 30% of Japanese onomatopoeia are structured this way (p. 194). Hamano (1986) goes into further detail about this by first stating that generally speaking, single form onomatopoeia indicate that the action takes place once, while a reduplicated onomatopoeia typically indicates a repeated action (p. 78). He uses the following examples to showcase the difference, where sentence A uses a single action onomatopoeia and B uses a repeated action onomatopoeia (p. 79):

- A. Tukue no ue o pan to hon de tatai-te kyoo wa kore de osimai to itta.  
*Slapping the book down on the desk, she said "So much for today."*
- B. Tukue no ue o panpan to hon de taitai-te kyoo wa kore de osimai to itta.  
*Slapping the book down on the desk several times, she said "So much for today."*

Furthermore, Shibatani (1990) mentions that many other mimetic words especially within the gitaigo/phenomines group end with a *-ri*, such as *pittari* ('matching perfectly') (p. 153). Syntactically speaking, onomatopoeia function as adverbs with the added particle *to* or *ni*, as noun modifiers when adding *no* or *na*, or as predicates when adding the verb *suru* (to do) or the copula *da* (ibid.). As examples, Shibatani (1990) uses the following:

- A. Yobo-yobo ni naru (become wobbly)
- B. Pika-pika no kutsu (shiny shoes)
- C. Atama ga zuki-zuki-suru (the head aches throbbingly)

Some onomatopoeic words and their structure are correlated to what sound they make. Onomatopoeia ending with the particle *to*, such as *kurut-to* (a turning motion) indicate a sudden stop in action or a quick action, while long vowels indicate prolongation, such as *zudoon* (prolonged bang) (Shibatani, 1990, p. 154). Furthermore, the desired effect of an onomatopoeia changes depending on which sound is used between /h/, /p/ and /b/. Words using /h/, i.e. *hara-hara*, symbolize a light or soft sensation such as leaves falling, while *para-para* is used to describe light raindrops. Lastly, *bara-bara* is indicative of a much heavier sound, such as a heavy object falling (p. 156).

Onomatopoeic words are not necessarily sound-to-word translations but rather words created to describe a sound, meaning they can also differ depending on the linguistic community, i.e. dialects. Shibatani (1990) gives the example of a cow's sound, which is *moo* in Tokyo dialect, but *nboo* in the southern Okinawa regions (p. 157). This also means that an onomatopoeic expression that occurs in one region of Japan might mean nothing or something different in another region. Shibatani's example of this is *kuteen*, used in the Aomori region to describe someone or something running eagerly (ibid.). In other dialects, *kuteen* is not interpreted that way.

## 2.2. Onomatopoeia in manga

Through a medium such as television or literature, the effect of an onomatopoeia does not usually occur alone. While onomatopoeic expressions would otherwise occur simply as a verbal expression, that is not the case for manga. In Japanese manga, onomatopoeic expressions are equally – if not more – a part of aesthetics, which they also demonstrate through their visual presence (Rohan et al., 2018, p. 220). Concerning the visualization of onomatopoeia in manga, Rohan et al. go into further detail about the process; an onomatopoeia can, through image, communicate how an object falls, the slam of a door or the like. Thus, the interplay between the onomatopoeic expression and the image allows for a stronger communication of the meaning, meaning it enhances rhetorical effects of the text (p. 221). Because onomatopoeia in manga carries meaning both linguistically and aesthetically, they become ‘multimodal onomatopoeia’, which are used to emphasize composition or style so that the artist, through such words, can draw the reader's eye to their desired position in an



image (p. 221-222). Developing on this idea further, Huang and Archer (2014) explain the interplay between onomatopoeic expressions and images as ‘modes’, i.e. semiotics resources such as image, written or spoken language (Kress, 2003, cited in Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 471). The visual mode is governed by logic of space and simultaneity, while the written mode is governed by logic of time and sequence, both of which occur in manga and are used to narrate a story.

However, the modes are not clearly distinctive. A significant factor playing into the ability to convey meaning with onomatopoeia is typography, through which writing in manga touches on the visual mode and is therefore also regarded as belonging to the logic of space and simultaneity (Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 474). Thus, typography can be seen as a ‘communicative mode in its own right’ (Van Leeuwen, 2004, p. 14; cited in Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 474). This is also known as ‘homospaciality’ which refers to ‘texts where two different semiotic modes co-occur in one spatially bonded homogenous entity’ (Unsworth, 2006, p. 61). In the case of onomatopoeia, this means that an onomatopoeic word expresses sound through the written mode, while the visual mode of the word is expressed through typography. Thus, a reader without any knowledge of the Japanese language can still grasp the message the onomatopoeic expression is conveying (Huang and Archer, 2014, P. 475). As a further explanation to this, Rohan et al. (2018, p. 228) mention the *showing-saying continuum*, describing the idea as this:

A typical case of *showing* includes pointing at a dark cloud in the sky as a response to the question “Why do you think it will rain soon?” The *saying* equivalent of this is to produce the utterance “Because there is a dark cloud approaching.”

This then means, of course, that rather than looking at *showing* and *saying* as distinctions, there is a continuum that connects them. The argument is that onomatopoeia display both elements, which allows for a flow in understanding the written word with the help of a visual impression.

The translation of a manga can also change the way an onomatopoeia is delivered, meaning a reader reading a translated version of a manga may interpret the meaning of the onomatopoeia differently. Japanese manga is read from right to left while English is the opposite, meaning the manner in which the sound is produced is altered. A sound that goes from loud to soft might go from soft to loud in the English translation. Thus, not only typography but also position and reading play an important part in how the reader interprets the sound in manga (Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 477).

The translated version of a manga also matters in how the two modes correlate to create a similar meaning to the original text. To gain access to translated manga, people in the west can either purchase the official translated version or download fan translations online.

Translators of manga usually stick to one of two policies. *Enculturation* signifies staying true to the original text while the perspective of *localization* is that translation is the process of a transition towards another language in which concepts and structures from Japanese are also imported (Valeri, 2000, cited Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 472). Sell (2011) states that fan translations of manga and anime have had a “strong influence of on the evolution of commercial translation strategies for the medium” (p. 93), but these days fan translators usually utilize enculturation, while official translations make use of localization as they tend to focus on other elements of the material as well (Huang and Archer, 2014, p. 472).

### 3. Research aim

Previous research has, when discussing onomatopoeia in manga, also considered surrounding factors such as typography, the translation process and its connection to visual modes. As such, it can be concluded that onomatopoeia is not something that can be studied on its own, especially not in connection to translation. Furthermore, the popularity and culture manga carry affects translation, and issues such as lack of an English word equivalent may occur. The aim of this thesis is to explore the onomatopoeia and the added layers of effect or meaning by using one chapter from two different manga respectively. The belief is that by analyzing the occurring onomatopoeia in the two manga chapters, this thesis will provide further information on how onomatopoeia occurs in manga as well as how the translation might change the meaning. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- How is onomatopoeia in manga translated from Japanese to English?
- Does the translation of onomatopoeia in manga change the meaning in the context?  
If so, how?

# 4. Theory

The theoretical approach applied to this thesis will be Multimodal Discourse Analysis – hereon MDA for short. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2005) definition of MDA is that “visual design, like language, constitutes an organized system of meaningful choices which can be analyzed with reference to linguistic choices” (cited in Jones, 2012, p. 220). Thus, MDA focuses on the relationship between language and visual factors such as image and analyzes how this relationship creates or changes the meaning or effect.

In his book *Discourse analysis: A resource book for students*, Jones (2012) mentions two approaches to MDA, in which there are similarities as well as differences. Furthermore, both approaches build upon concepts from other theoretical approaches to discourse (p. 220). Therefore, both approaches mentioned by Jones will be explained as to present a fuller view of MDA. The first section presents Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s vision of MDA, while the second section provides the reader with Sigrid Norris’ view of MDA as well as comparisons between the two. The third and last section explains how MDA is applied to the research subject in this thesis, based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s and Norris’ concepts.

## 4.1. Multimodal discourse analysis according to Kress and van Leeuwen

Kress and van Leeuwen (2005) emphasize on the importance of visual communication and the absence of means for discussing and thinking about what is communicated by visual design (p. 17). Barthes (1964, cited in Kress and van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 17) argues that the meaning of images, as well as other modes, is always connected to and dependent on text. By themselves, the meaning behind an image or another mode is not clear, meaning a linguistic element is necessary. Therefore, an image-text relation means that the verbal text *extends* the meaning of the image (or vice versa) which would be the case for speech bubbles in comics, or that the text *elaborates* the image (or vice versa), i.e. the meaning is restated in a more definite and precise way (p. 18). These two concepts are called relay and elaboration.

Elaboration occurs in two different ways, either with the verbal text appearing first so that the image adds an illustration to it, or that the image comes first so that the text contributes with a more precise definition (ibid.).

Despite discourse analysis falling under the category of linguistics, Kress and van Leeuwen (2005) do not see their approach as a linguistic one. While other linguists have imported theories and methodologies from linguistics into the visual domain, Kress and van Leeuwen have chosen not to do so (p. 19), meaning they do not make use of linguistic concepts such as semantics and pragmatics when analyzing the visual aspect. They explain this choice further by stating that “each medium has its own possibilities and limitations of meaning”, meaning that not everything that applies to language applies to image as well, and vice versa (ibid.).

What Kress and van Leeuwen (2005) do make use of from linguistics is the approach that images – just like language – display regularities, i.e. the ‘grammar’ of the visual. As a model, they make use of Michael Halliday’s social semiotic approach, which includes three functions fit for discussing all modes of representation, not just language (p. 20). The concept of the *ideational* metafunction is that any semiotic mode should be able to represent aspects of the world in the way they are experienced by humans, which means that semiotic modes offer different ways of representing relations between objects and processes (p. 42).

The *interpersonal* metafunction focuses on the relation between the producer of a sign and the receiver of said sign, meaning that “any [semiotic] mode has to be able to represent a particular social relation between the producer, the viewer and the object represented” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 42). Just like the ideational metafunction, there are different ways in which the interpersonal aspect can be represented. The example given is a person addressing viewers directly by looking into the camera, which depicts an interaction between two parties. In contrast to this, said person looking away from the camera depicts the absence of an interaction, which “allows the viewer to scrutinize the represented characters as though they were specimens on a display case” (p. 42-43).

Lastly, the *textual* metafunction states that any semiotic mode must be able to form text. Such texts must also be able to function both internally and externally with the context (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 43). The concept of visual grammar previously mentioned takes place here too; compositional arrangements allow for different textual meanings – such as in manga.

## 4.2. Multimodal discourse analysis according to Norris

Sigrid Norris (2004) states that all interactions are multimodal (p. 1), be it a face-to-face interaction or through an e-mail. However, as previously understood by other researchers, communication occurs through other modes as well when it comes to, say, television or the Internet (ibid.), and that images – just like other nonverbal elements – are capable of communicating meaning alone. This questions the idea that any process of communication is dependent on language, as nonverbal elements have previously been viewed as subordinate to the central element – language. Thus, Norris' belief is that positioning language as a central element limits our ability to understand the complexity of interaction (p. 2). She argues that an element such as a gaze may take the central part of an interaction while language is subordinated or omitted completely, or that more than one element takes a central part in an interaction, without any 'hierarchy' between elements.

Different communicative modes are structured in significantly different ways (Norris, 2004, p. 3). Spoken language is sequentially structured, gesture is globally synthetically structured, et cetera. A gesture cannot be changed in the way language can (e.g. an added prefix), and one communicative mode cannot be added on top of an identical one. Furthermore, different communicative modes possess different materiality (ibid.). Spoken language is not visible while gesture is. Print is visible and most often stays that way, and so on. Thus, different communicative modes possess different attributes and many of these modes may occur at the same time. The differences between communicative modes are what makes multimodal studies challenging. Because of this, observing an interaction or analyzing a comic strip requires the analyst to be skilled at differentiating one communicative mode from another (p. 12).

Norris also makes a differentiation between lower-level actions and higher-level actions. Lower-level actions are such actions that are fluidly performed in an interaction through a mode such as gestures or spoken language (2004, p. 14). Higher-level actions, however, are based on a chain of lower-level actions, meaning that the higher-level actions develop and become fluid themselves during an interaction, and is opened by a greeting or coming together, and ended with greetings and/or partings (ibid.).

### 4.3. Operationalizing MDA

Two views of multimodal discourse analysis have been presented thus far. Although Norris (2004) mainly focuses on real-time interaction in her explanation of MDA, her explanations of different communicative modes and lower-level actions vs. higher-level actions are still of relevance to this thesis. Furthermore, Norris mentions that language should not always be viewed as a central element, as other elements may be of equal or a bigger importance. This is of course worth keeping in mind when analyzing a medium in which various elements are utilized; however, the main focus for this thesis is onomatopoeia. As such, language will not be viewed as the only relevant element in the data, but it will be given the most focus.

Norris (2004) provides this thesis with additional concepts and ideas that are of use; however, this thesis will mainly make use of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2005) concept of MDA. This is because of their emphasis on visual communication. Although the opinion on language being a necessary element in image varies between linguists, Barthes' notion that text extends or elaborates an image is of relevance to this study and will therefore be considered during the analysis.

As the translation of onomatopoeic words is the focus of this study, not only the language element but other (possible) affecting factors are vital in the analysis. Halliday's social semiotic approach that includes the ideational, interpersonal and specifically textual metafunctions are therefore also applicable to the analysis of onomatopoeia in manga. Thus, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2005) book on MDA provides this study with a well-rounded, fitting theoretical approach for analyzing how onomatopoeia occur, is translated and affects/is affected by other elements in the comics.

To summarize, this thesis will make use of MDA in accordance with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2005) view of the theory. The ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions will be considered as well as elaboration vs extension when analyzing the data, while also keeping in mind Norris' (2004) points on different communicative modes and how they play together.

# 5. Material and methodology

Since the topic of this study is onomatopoeia in manga, data was collected from two different manga in which onomatopoeia frequently occurs. The first subsection will present the data more thoroughly while the second subsection explains the process of collecting the data as well as challenges and limitations. Finally, the way in which the data will be analyzed is explained.

## 5.1. Material

In order to analyze how onomatopoeia occurs and is translated in manga – in accordance with other elements – the genre *shounen* was selected as most fitting. As previously mentioned, genres in manga are not always easy to define as there are also many subgenres (Rohan et al., 2018, p. 223), but shounen is one of the more prominent ‘categories’ within the manga realm. Shounen manga is aimed towards younger males and typically includes action, adventure and fighting scenes (Eiseinbeis, 2014). Because of action scenes being so common in this type of manga, it is also rich of onomatopoeia, making shounen manga a fitting source for the aim of this thesis.

For the purpose of a well-rounded data collection and analysis, two manga from the shounen genre were selected. While they are from the same genre, the intention is to make sure the two manga provide this thesis with different types of onomatopoeia. The two manga chosen are therefore *Haikyuu!!*, written by Haruichi Furudate, and *Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma*, written by Yuto Tsukuda.

### 5.1.1. Haikyuu!!

*Haikyuu!!* is a manga series focused on sports, specifically volleyball – the sport after which it is named. The series follows high school student Shoyo Hinata as he gains a sudden love for volleyball and joins the school team with the goal of following in the footsteps of a star player on the team. Naturally, *Haikyuu!!* is full of action scenes, and the onomatopoeia are often related to sports or action. Thus, *Haikyuu!!* provides this thesis with a plethora of onomatopoeia to analyze, and onomatopoetic words often used along with sports are



especially significant because of what was previously mentioned – different onomatopoeia for a well-rounded research.

### **5.1.2. Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma**

Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma (Food Wars! for short) is a shounen manga focused on cooking. Set at a culinary school in Tokyo, Japan, the story follows student Soma Yukihiro on his path to becoming a full-time chef while participating in the school's food competitions. Just like Haikyuu!!, Food Wars! is a shounen manga brimming of onomatopoeia, and many of those are of course related to cooking. Food Wars! was chosen because of this reason; while still within to the same genre as Haikyuu!!, this manga series provides the thesis with both similar and different onomatopoeia, while also not being short on the amount of such words. Therefore, the data collection from these two manga series allows for a more developed and versatile analysis and discussion.

## **5.2. Methodology**

As previously mentioned, data was collected from two manga series – Haikyuu!! and Food Wars!. Both manga series include several volumes, meaning the source material is vast, but for the sake of narrowing down the data collection adequately, the first chapter in the first volume from each manga has been chosen. Because all volumes include a vast quantity of onomatopoeia, the first chapter from each manga was chosen as the occurrence of onomatopoeia is so regular, and therefore sufficient enough for the size of this thesis.

Huang and Archer (2014) mentioned the existence of fan translations and official translation, as well as the differences between the two. For the purpose of this thesis, the official translation was used. Aside from simply being the official translation and therefore the most relevant one when analyzing onomatopoeia in manga, Huang and Archer also note that official translations typically make use of localization, meaning the translators take note of other elements of the material as well (p. 472). Thus, the official translation was deemed as the most relevant one.

The data was collected through digital copies of the official Japanese and English versions of both manga, reason being that obtaining a physical copy of both the Japanese version and the English one proved difficult. While reading through the first chapter of

Haikyuu!! and Food Wars!, any onomatopoeia seemingly or knowingly related to sports or cooking were print screened and written down. Because the two manga were chosen for their genre and thus different set of onomatopoeia, the focus was on such onomatopoeic words when collecting the data as the goal is to give the thesis an analysis with different perspectives and a broader sense of onomatopoeia translation. However, other ‘general’ onomatopoeia deemed interesting to the analysis were also saved occasionally.

The translation of an onomatopoeia was observed in the official English version, and the translation was then written down. Following that, an official translation of the onomatopoeia was necessary to firstly understand all onomatopoeia correctly, and secondly to make sure an official translation can be given in the analysis. This part proved challenging; a Japanese onomatopoeia dictionary was hard to come by, and some onomatopoeia in the manga are shortened for the purpose of, for instance, effect. Thus, it was not always clear which onomatopoeia was being used, or for what purpose. To the best extent, all onomatopoeia were checked through *Jisho.org*, a free online English-Japanese dictionary. When *Jisho.org* was unsuccessful, Dexter’s (2015) list of onomatopoeia on the website *Tofugu*<sup>2</sup> was also used. All onomatopoeia used were checked through these two sources.

During the analysis, the two research questions will be considered; how are onomatopoeic words translated, and does the translation change anything in the context? Thus, the analysis will be done by presenting onomatopoeia from the two manga along with the English version’s translation as well as the ‘official’ translation for further explanation. When analyzing the presented onomatopoeia, the Japanese onomatopoeia will first be classified into one of the categories (gitaigo, giongo, giseigo, gijougo and giyougo) and discussed onwards with the category in mind. Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2005) theoretical approach as well as Halliday’s ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions will also be applied to the analysis. Furthermore, I will take into consideration what previous research has studied, i.e. context of the onomatopoeia as well as related elements such as typography and image. In sum, questions to discuss during the analysis of an onomatopoeia is its relation to other elements, the context in which the onomatopoeia occurs and what the onomatopoeia refers to. Through this procedure, the aim is to further understand how a Japanese onomatopoeia is translated and if (and possibly how) the translation changes the context.

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<sup>2</sup> A website filled with resources for those studying Japanese

## 6. Analysis

Because the data collection includes onomatopoeia from two different manga, the analysis will be divided as such. In the first subsection, onomatopoeia found primarily related to sports scenes (i.e. onomatopoeia from Haikyuu!!) will be discussed before moving on to analyzing (mainly) cooking-related onomatopoeia from Food Wars! in the second subsection. When analyzing an onomatopoeia, the image in which they occur will be presented.

Also, Q is used to indicate a sudden stop, for example when a double consonant occurs (Hamano, 1986, p. 86). In Japanese, double consonants are written as either つ or っ. In the onomatopoeia found in the data collection, many of the words occur with a glottal stop at the end. When this happens, Q will indicate it.

### 6.1. Onomatopoeia in Haikyuu!!

Haikyuu!! provided a regular occurrence of onomatopoeia, most often during volleyball scenes but also outside of such scenes. Those that will be discussed are shown in tables, followed by their analysis. All tables are shown in the order of the Japanese onomatopoeia, the English version's translation and lastly the 'official' translation.

**Table 2: Onomatopoeia “zudon” in Haikyuu!!**

ズドッ (zudoQ)	BATAM	thud; bang <sup>3</sup>
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One of the first onomatopoeia in Haikyuu!! is *zudoQ*, shown in figure 1 below. It occurs as a sound effect of the volleyball being slammed by a player and hitting the floor, and therefore classifies as a giongo onomatopoeia, i.e. a sound made by an inanimate object. This means there is a degree of mimicry in the onomatopoeia (Kita, 1997, p. 381).

As can be seen in table 1 above, the onomatopoeia occurs in the form of a glottal stop at the end, which is used to indicate a sudden effect with an abrupt end. The full form of the onomatopoeia is *zudon*, which translates to “thud” or “bang”. Similarly, the English version of Haikyuu!! shows the onomatopoeia translated as *BATAM*, written in capital letters:

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<sup>3</sup> Translation according to Jisho.org, found in the reference list.



**Figure 1: Onomatopoeia “zudon” in both versions of Haikyuu!!**

The translation of the onomatopoeia is close to Jisho’s translation, essentially conveying the same sound – the result of an object being hit forcefully.

Barthes (1964, cited in Kress and van Leeuwen, 2005) mentions relay and elaboration – extension or elaboration of an image (p. 17). The onomatopoeia in fig. 1 is an elaboration of the image; what already exists – i.e. the ball – is elaborated with an onomatopoeia to restate the ball’s sound in a more precise way.

In MDA, the three metafunctions are mentioned as a way of analyzing data. The ideational metafunction, i.e. the one that states semiotic modes must be able to represent aspects of the world in the way they are experienced by humans (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 42) can be considered in this example as a relation between the ball, the onomatopoeia and the reader. The onomatopoeia, as a semiotic mode, offers a “guideline” to experiencing the sound of the ball. Kita (1997, p. 381) mentioned that Japanese onomatopoeia evoke a sense of being at the scene for native speakers; it can be assumed that such is the case in fig. 1. This experience might be lost in translation in the English version and not experienced as strongly for neither a Japanese or non-Japanese reader, but the onomatopoeia still represents the sound of the ball how it is experienced by humans – as a thud or bang.

The interpersonal metafunction, i.e. the semiotic mode’s representation of a situation between the producer, the viewer and the object is presented by the ball’s movement in relation to the onomatopoeia and the reader. The ball moves away from the reader, clearly shown hitting the floor and represented in this way by the onomatopoeia. Depth of perception

is only needed for the ball; the onomatopoeia in both versions do the job of helping the reader understand the sound.

Lastly, the textual metafunction, i.e. different compositional arrangements allowing for different textual meanings is of course evident in manga, such as in fig. 1. In both versions, the word takes up the whole left section of the image, indicating the volume of the sound as well as where in the frame the sound occurs. There is essentially not much of a difference visually nor linguistically between the two versions. The typography is slightly different as the English version has a rounder font. However, the difference is not to the point that it changes the interpretation of the sound.

Worth noting though is once again the fact that English is limited in comparison to Japanese when it comes to onomatopoeia. Furthermore, *zudoQ* is a voiced sound. *BATAM* is voiced in the beginning, but *TAM* is not. This also makes the interpretation of the sound from the ball different, as *BATAM* sounds less impactful. The translation works visually speaking, but linguistically speaking, *BATAM* is not a perfect translation, but perhaps the closest one. Even with that limitation being present in figure 1, the indication that a ‘bang’ occurs is still present, and the context remains the essentially the same.

**Table 3: Onomatopoeia “kyun” in Haikyuu!!**

キユツ ( <i>kyuQ</i> )	<b>TMP</b>	<b>choked up (with emotion)<sup>4</sup></b>
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The second onomatopoeia from Haikyuu!! is *kyuQ*, also consisting of a glottal stop and therefore indicating an abrupt ending. The full form is *kyun*, indicating the sound of being choked up with emotions or a tightening of one’s chest. Therefore, the onomatopoeia falls under the *giongo* category, as the sound imitates an inanimate object. In the English version of Haikyuu!!, the onomatopoeia has been translated as *TMP*, which can be interpreted as the sound of heartbeats. The onomatopoeia refers to the players’ reaction when an impressive volleyball team from another school enters the scene:

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<sup>4</sup> Translation according to Jisho.org, found in the reference list.



**Figure 2: Onomatopoeia “kyun” in both versions of Haikyuu!!**

The previous onomatopoeia was shown as a “guideline” to experiencing the ball’s sound. The ideational metafunction is not as clearly stated in figure 2; in the English version, the onomatopoeia could easily be misinterpreted as the sound of the players walking up to the others. Therefore, the onomatopoeia is also difficult in terms of the interpersonal metafunction. The only clear object that indicates the cause of the sound is the nervous look on the faces of the people in the background. However, the eye is not drawn to that part of the image initially – thus the meaning is initially unclear.

Concerning the textual metafunction, the onomatopoeia occurs more than once, spread out over the image. It indicates a repeated sound, which could once again be interpreted as footsteps. The typography does not give the reader any feeling of dread or nervousness either, meaning there is no clear sign in the onomatopoeia itself that it refers to heartbeats specifically.

Phonetically speaking, the interpretation does not change much as both onomatopoeia are voiceless. In the spoken form, they can both be understood as the sound of a heartbeat. In written form, further information is necessary in the English translation to help the reader understand the origin of the sound. In this case, the problem essentially concerns the visual mode of the onomatopoeia, as a heartbeat sound is not clear in fig. 2.

**Table 4: Onomatopoeia “chirari(to)” in Haikyuu!!**

チラ (chira)	GLANCE	fleeting glimpse, glance, etc. <sup>5</sup>
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<sup>5</sup> Translation according to Jisho.org, found in the reference list.

The onomatopoeia *chira* occurs as a sound effect of one player glancing at the main character. The full form of the onomatopoeia is *chirari(to)*, which translates to a fleeting glimpse or glance according to Jisho. This makes it a gitaigo onomatopoeia, as it indicates a condition or state. Unlike the two previous onomatopoeia there is no glottal stop at the end; instead, there is a -ri ending which conveys a feeling of softness or slowness, i.e. the opposite of a glottal stop (Dexter, 2015).



**Figure 3: Onomatopoeia “chirari(to)” in both versions of Haikyuu!!**

The semiotic mode, i.e. the onomatopoeia, is easily understood here as a glance from the character in the background, meaning the ideational metafunction can be easily applied in this instance; the semiotic mode represents an aspect of the world in the way it is experienced by humans. Thus, the onomatopoeia is also easy to understand in regard to the interpersonal. The ‘source’ of the condition or state is made clear by the character’s literal glance, which connects the producer of it with the viewer. The textual function plays a considerable role in this as the compositional arrangement is vital in understanding who the glance is coming from. In fig. 3 it is aligned with the character quite close to his face, making it obvious who is glancing at who. The onomatopoeia is essentially an elaboration of the image as it gives the reader a better understanding of what type of look he is giving the character in the foreground.

The visual mode stays true to the original version. Thus, the typography does not make much of a difference in terms of how the onomatopoeia is understood. Furthermore, there are no significant differences in phonetics as the onomatopoeia is translated literally and simply describes as a state, meaning the onomatopoeia *chirari(to)* is different from the previous two in that it has a quite straightforward meaning, as it is a gitaigo onomatopoeia. Thus, the translation is also made straightforward, meaning the English version is easy to understand in the case of fig. 3.

## 6.2. Onomatopoeia in Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma

The data collection from Food Wars! consisted mostly of cooking-related onomatopoeia, meaning most of the onomatopoeia are categorized as either giseigo or giongo. They will be presented and analyzed in the same way as those from Haikyuu!!.

**Table 5: Onomatopoeia “sakuri” in Food Wars!**

ザ (za)	CHOP	cutting food with a sharp knife <sup>6</sup>
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The onomatopoeia *za* occurs when the main character is chopping vegetables in a rapid manner. The full form is *sakuri* and is indicative of the sound when cutting food with a sharp knife. Thus, it is a giongo onomatopoeia, just like *zudoQ*. In the English version, it is translated as CHOP:



**Figure 4: Onomatopoeia “sakuri” in both versions of Food Wars!**

In this example, the onomatopoeia works as a semiotic mode used to represent the experience of the occurrence in the way it is experienced in real life, which the onomatopoeia successfully does. The onomatopoeia further represents a particular situation between the object, viewer and producer. The source of the sound is obvious as the only visual aspect present in the image is the character cutting vegetables, and the producer of that sound is also understood as no one else but the character in the image.

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<sup>6</sup> Translation according to Dexter (2015), from Tofugu’s website.



Similar to fig. 3, the textual function also plays a big part in how the image is understood. The onomatopoeia is positioned all over the image in a way that gives the reader a sense of haste. In terms of typography, *za* is written with sharp, long lines, which is most likely a connection to the sharp knife. The translation of the onomatopoeia is efficient as it essentially means the same, but the typography does not give the reader the same feeling as in the Japanese version. The letters are of a round, quite standard font, and even though the onomatopoeia is spread out over the image equally to the Japanese version's, the sense of haste or hurriedness is not as present.

The two onomatopoeia are also different phonetically. *Za* consists of a voiced consonant, thus making the sound of a sharp knife when repeated as in fig. 4. The word *chop*, however, is voiceless. While an English speaker knows that the word *chop* indicates cutting something, presumably with a knife, it does not necessarily indicate sharp cuts. Thus, the translation is perfectly understood in the same way as the Japanese version, but the feeling is different.

**Table 6: Onomatopoeia “juujuu” in Food Wars!**

ジュワアアア (juwaaa)	<b>SIZZLE</b>	<b>sizzling (of cooking meat, fish, etc.)<sup>7</sup></b>
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The onomatopoeia *juujuu* occurs in the form of *juwaa* when the food in the frying pan sizzles, meaning the onomatopoeia is a giongo one. Officially, *juujuu* translates to the sizzle from cooking meat or fish. The translation of the onomatopoeia in the English version is also **SIZZLE**, as shown in figure 5 below:

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<sup>7</sup> Translation according to Jisho.org, found in the reference list.



**Figure 5: Onomatopoeia “juujuu” in both versions of Food Wars!**

This onomatopoeia and the presentation of it offers perhaps the clearest translation of an onomatopoeia between those discussed in this thesis. Ideationally, the onomatopoeia represents the process of a hot, sizzling frying pan in the way it is experienced. Furthermore, the situation between the viewer, object and producer is also represented by the onomatopoetic word becoming smaller the closer to the frying pan the letters are, thus indicating the source of the sound. The sound in this scene is also expressed by the fire coming from the stove, as well as the background smoke. Thus, the onomatopoeia is an elaboration of the scene and aids the reader in understanding the sound experienced in this scene.

More significantly, the textual function is remarkably applicable here; the onomatopoeia is positioned the same way as in the Japanese version. Furthermore, the typography is awfully similar. Essentially, the English version gives the reader the same feeling as the original does, because there is not much of a change visually or linguistically. Although English is limited in comparison to Japanese, an appropriate translation of juujuu does exist, meaning the scene in fig. 5 is quite easy to recreate in English.

**Table 7: Onomatopoeia “potapota” in Food Wars!**

ポタッ (potaQ)	DRIP	dripping; trickling; drop by drop <sup>8</sup>
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The onomatopoeia *potapota* occurs in *Food Wars!* as *potaQ*, with a glottal stop at the end.

The scene in which it occurs is when food is dripping down from an awning and is therefore a giongo onomatopoeia. The translation in the English version is *DRIP*:



**Figure 6: Onomatopoeia “potapota” in both versions of Food Wars!**

In terms of the ideational metafunction, this onomatopoeia represents an occurrence in the way it is experienced by humans, i.e. something wet dripping or trickling down drop by drop. It is thus also understood well in terms of the interpersonal, although this case is different as the object is also the producer of the sound, meaning the character is merely a viewer in this instance. Textually speaking, the typography is essentially similar; in the Japanese version, the onomatopoeia is written in a wobbly font to indicate the dripping effect, and a similar effect is used in the English version’s font. Both versions have also written the onomatopoeia inside a wobbly bubble, further insinuating what kind of sound the object is making. The compositional arrangement is also the same, meaning the English version does well in carrying a similar meaning and context.

Phonetically speaking, DRIP is voiced while potaQ is not; however, this does not change the interpretation of the sound or the scene much as it is already obvious what is happening and

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<sup>8</sup> Translation according to Jisho.org, found in the reference list.

what sound the object is supposed to make, mainly because of the visual elements. Therefore, the translation is as thorough as it can be in fig. 6, and the context remains intact.

# 7. Discussion

This section is divided by the two research questions, as this helps the reader understand the findings from the analysis and how the findings correlate to the questions.

## 7.1. How is onomatopoeia in manga translated from Japanese to English?

The way in which an onomatopoeia in manga was translated differed. This was because of other factors such as typography, compositional arrangements, relation between the onomatopoeia and other modes. In the examples from *Haikyuu!!*, an English word equivalent to the Japanese onomatopoeia was made up two out of three times, as there is no direct translation of neither *zudoQ* nor *kyuQ* in English. While it is not clear if the translator kept phonetics in mind when translating, the English onomatopoeia following a voiced or unvoiced pattern similar to the Japanese version made the translation easier to understand. This was especially evident in fig. 2 as the translation of *kyuQ* could be misinterpreted as something other than the sound of heartbeats. In fig. 1, however, the sound of a thud or a bang from the ball is still evident mainly because of the metafunctions.

Fig. 3 showed an instance of a *gitaigo* onomatopoeia. Because the onomatopoeia represents a condition or state, it was perhaps also easier for the translator to translate it appropriately. Even if the Japanese onomatopoeia itself might have been enough information for the translator, the onomatopoeia was still translated and positioned in accordance with the context of a character glancing at another.

In *Food Wars!*, the English onomatopoeia was positioned almost the exact same as the Japanese one, which also made the image as a whole easier to understand. Looking at the ‘official’ translation and the English version’s translation of all three onomatopoeia, it is also clear that the onomatopoeia were translated as well as they could be; the English equivalent of cutting food with a sharp knife is *chop*, English equivalent of the sound coming a hot frying pan when cooking is *sizzle*, and the onomatopoeia of something dripping is *drip*. Thus, the translations from *Food Wars!* shown in this thesis stayed quite true to the original, both visually and linguistically.

## 7.2. Does the translation of onomatopoeia in manga change the meaning in the context? If so, how?

One of the major factors considered when analyzing the onomatopoeia and its position in the context was typography. In *Haikyuu!!*, the typography changed considerably in fig. 1 and fig. 2, which further altered how both the onomatopoeia and the scene were interpreted. This was especially evident in fig. 2, where the simple font in the English version also omitted any feeling of dread or nervousness – a feeling that was only understood after seeing the faces of the characters in the background. In fig. 3, however, there is almost no change in typography, most likely because there does not need to be; the scene is already understood as a simple glance, while the onomatopoeia is merely an elaboration of the scene.

In *Food Wars!*, the typography mimicked the original completely in fig. 5, thus further simplifying the understanding of the scene. Also, the context was never unclear in any of the figures from *Food Wars!*. While the typography in fig. 4 altered the general feeling of the image, the context was at least clear thanks to an unambiguous translation of the onomatopoeia.

How the image or the scene was perceived depended not only on typography, but also phonetics. The clearest examples of this are fig. 1 and fig. 4, i.e. *BATAM* and *CHOP*. *BATAM* was not voiced in the same way as *zudoQ*, thus being perceived as less impactful. *CHOP* is also a voiceless word, whereas the Japanese onomatopoeia used in fig. 4 is voiced. Thus, there was no clear indication of *sharp* cuts in the scene, which led to the onomatopoeia changing the meaning in the context somewhat. In instances such as fig. 3 or fig. 5, the English onomatopoeia that should be used was much clearer to the translators, thus maintaining the interpretation of the scene as authentic and true to the original.

## 8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to study how Japanese onomatopoeia are translated in manga, and if/how the translation changes the meaning in the context. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2005) general approach to MDA was used as an approach to analyze the data, while Michael Halliday's three metafunctions were used as the theoretical framework. Furthermore, previous research was also utilized during the analysis, especially in concern with typography and other visual modes of the two manga.

Data was collected from two manga, i.e. *Haikyuu!!* and *Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma*. *Haikyuu!!* provided this thesis with sports-related onomatopoeia, two of which were chosen for the thesis while the last one, a *gitaigo* onomatopoeia, was included for the purpose of a more well-rounded research. The data from *Haikyuu!!* displayed an occasional unclear translation of the onomatopoeia, most prominently in an instance where other visual modes of the image were unclear. In another instance, the translation of the onomatopoeia was unambiguous and merely served as an elaboration of what was already in the image.

*Food Wars!* provided data of instances where an onomatopoeia was consistently clear in terms of translation, but not always in terms of typography. While the change in typography did not make the meaning unclear, it did alter the meaning in the context as the English onomatopoeia was understood differently from the Japanese one. In terms of the visual, compositional arrangements stayed the same throughout the analysis, which was of further help in interpreting the onomatopoeia in a similar way to the onomatopoeia in the Japanese version.

During the analysis of the data, it became clear that onomatopoeia not categorized as *giseigo* or *giongo* were hard to come by and would require further data collection. Thus, the data collected for this thesis was not as well-rounded as it aimed to be since only one different onomatopoeia was analyzed. Furthermore, the English onomatopoeia was quite literal in several cases. This is positive, but more versatile translation would also have made the analysis more well-rounded and the discussion more intricate.

In terms of future research, a more extensive and thorough data collection would be interesting and of further relevance to studying how onomatopoeic words in manga are translated. It would be especially interesting to read an analysis of *gijougo* onomatopoeia, as such onomatopoeia are more difficult to come by than *giseigo* or *giongo* ones. Furthermore, a

comparison of the fan translation and the official translation of a manga would also be interesting to see, as this would showcase the difference between localization and enculturation and how the two different concepts lead to differences in the visual and the linguistic modes.



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