Shifting Translation Strategies of Japanese Onomatopoeia: A Comparative Study of Attack on Titan Manga Editions

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Abstract
This research investigates strategies for translating Japanese onomatopoeia in two Indonesian editions of the manga Attack on Titan Volume 5: the Regular Edition (2013) and the Bind-up Edition (2024). Using the translation strategy classification established by Torikai (2024), this research adopts a qualitative methodology to systematically analyse a comparative corpus comprising 208 data units from the Regular Edition and 215 data units from the Bind-up Edition. The results show that sense translation is the overwhelmingly dominant strategy across both editions, followed by a marginal distribution of free and literal translation, while word-for-word translation is entirely unused. These results show a pronounced target-oriented propensity among the translators, who consciously prioritise meaning and contextual communicative effects over preserving the source text's formal phonological architecture. Ultimately, the study concludes that sense translation is the most effective strategy for optimising narrative clarity, reading naturalness, and the dramatic expressive functionality of Japanese sound effects in manga for target readers.

Key words: *Translation Strategy, Japanese Onomatopoeia, Manga Translation, Attack on Titan, Target-Oriented Propensity.*

Onomatopoeia is a distinctive linguistic element in Japanese (Dingemanse & Akita, 2016), with multifaceted roles far beyond simply imitating sound (Takamaru et al., 2015; Hirata-Mogi et al., 2015; Takeuchi et al., 2018). Japanese has about 4,500 onomatopoeic words (Ono, 2016; Hiraishi, 2021) that can describe not only sounds but also movement, textures, emotional states, and even atmospheric conditions (McLean, 2020; Fitriana et al., 2021). According to Kindaichi and Asano in Purwani et al. (2020), Japanese onomatopoeia are classified into five categories according to their diverse forms and meanings: giongo refers to words that imitate sounds produced by inanimate objects or natural phenomena such as the sound of rain or

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metallic clinking; giseigo imitate sounds made by living beings, including human and animal voices; gitaigo describe conditions or states such as texture, temperature, or physical sensations without representing an actual sound; giyougo express the appearance, behavior, and physical movement of humans; and gijougo express human emotions and psychological states. These categories reveal that Japanese onomatopoeia represents deep cultural conceptualisations of reality, making it a direct reflection of how Japanese society perceives and interacts with both the physical and psychological environment.

In manga, onomatopoeia generally appears in the visualised or typographic form (Rohan et al., 2018), both outside and inside speech bubbles (Holt & Fukuda, 2022; Tumanov, 2026), and plays an important role in bringing scenes to life and enriching readers' visual narrative experience (Dey & Bokil, 2020; Wallner, 2020). Natsume (in Ali, 2020) explains that onomatopoeia in comics can play a visual role, enhancing the sense of reality (such as realism or liveliness) of comics and influencing readers' eye movements.

Onomatopoeia is very complicated to translate (Inose, 2013). Its phonological patterns, meanings, and sound-symbolic nuances often have no direct equivalent in the target language, such as Indonesian (Ali, 2020; Rini et al., 2021). As Molina & Albir (2002) explain, translation techniques are very important for analysing and classifying how translation equivalence works. Therefore, translating onomatopoeia requires a deep understanding of the source text's meaning and relevant translation strategies to convey the message in the target language.

Translating Japanese popular culture into Indonesian serves as a critical site for intercultural mediation and cultural filtering (Fatin & Cholsey, 2022). Translating such complex onomatopoeia is not merely a technical linguistic substitution but a deliberate act of negotiating intertextual spaces between Japan's evolving subcultural trends and Indonesia as the target linguistic ecosystem. This academic endeavour aligns closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, specifically Target 4.7, which emphasises promoting global citizenship and the active appreciation of cultural diversity through media and education. Translated popular literature, such as manga, serves as a powerful instrument for informal cross-cultural literacy and global education (Chakma, 2024; Hamza & Nicolas, 2025). By exploring how translators act as cultural bridges by domesticating foreign onomatopoeia into natural target expressions, this research highlights how popular narratives can enhance intercultural empathy and global citizenship awareness without causing linguistic alienation for local readers.

Many studies have examined the translation of onomatopoeia between Japanese and Indonesian. Ali (2020) examined the translation of onomatopoeia in an Indonesian comic translated into Japanese, focusing on the strategies employed to achieve semantic and functional equivalence. The study identified four primary translation strategies: equivalent, derivative, katakana (ka), and coinage. The most frequently used approach was equivalence, perhaps because translators prioritise semantic adequacy when an equivalent counterpart exists. Furthermore, Hayrani (2021) analysed the translation strategies applied to giongo and giseigo in the

Indonesian version of the manga Jujutsu Kaisen. The study found that translators tend to render Japanese onomatopoeia as more familiar, or even broader, expressions in Indonesian to maintain readability and narrative flow.

Despite these insightful contributions, previous scholarship has largely focused on static, single-edition analyses, leaving a noticeable gap in understanding how translation strategies might adapt when the same work is republished across different time periods or formats. To address this gap, the current study provides a diachronic comparative perspective by investigating how strategic choices evolve over time within the same literary object. This research focuses on analysing shifting translation strategies for Japanese onomatopoeia across two distinct Indonesian editions of Hajime Isayama's dark fantasy manga, Attack on Titan Volume 5, published by PT Elex Media Komputindo: the initial Regular edition and the subsequent compiled Bind-up edition. Given that Attack on Titan is characterised by intense action sequences, high psychological stakes, and profound anti-war themes, its soundscape is uniquely rich and expressive. By examining how translation strategies shifted across these two publication timelines, this study not only charts the linguistic evolution of manga translation in Indonesia but also shows how changing editorial guidelines and reader demographics shape the negotiation of cultural intertextuality. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of popular literature's role in advancing cross-cultural literacy and supporting the sustainable preservation of global cultural diversity.

The Nature of Translation

Translation is basically the act of transferring a message from one language to another while preserving its meaning. Newmark (1988) defines translation as the attempt to replace the message in the source language with a message that is as close as possible to it in the target language, both in terms of meaning and equivalence. This definition emphasises that translation prioritises semantic accuracy while also considering the target language's structure and linguistic relevance.

In addition, equivalence is also very important in translation. Nida & Taber (1974) distinguish between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses on fidelity to the source-language form, while dynamic equivalence focuses on equivalent meaning for the target-language reader. In manga translation, the dynamic equivalence approach is more relevant because it aims to preserve meaning and emotional nuance.

Japanese Onomatopoeia

Japanese onomatopoeia is very difficult to translate, especially in manga, because it does not merely imitate sounds but also involves phonological patterns and semantic nuances (Hamano, 1986). Japanese onomatopoeias are categorised as giongo (imitations of non-human sounds), giseigo (imitations of the sounds of living creatures), and gitaigo (expressions of states and conditions) (Kita, 1997). Such forms tend to include repetition or systematic phonological patterns that convey differences of intensity, duration, movement, or mental states.

Furthermore, translating Japanese onomatopoeia has additional complexity. Onomatopoeic expressions function not only lexically but also graphically in comic panels. As Cohn (2013) explains, visual-verbal integration in comics creates meaning through the interaction between text and images. Translating onomatopoeia requires consideration of semantic meaning, expressive power, and panel imagery. The relationship between the source text's form and the naturalness of the target text is crucial to analysing translation choices.

Torikai's (2024) Translation Strategies Framework

This research used Torikai's (2024) classification of translation strategies to categorise translation choices. Translation strategies are procedures translators use to resolve problems arising from linguistic and cultural differences. As Molina & Albir (2002) state, translation techniques are procedures to analyse and classify how translation equivalence works and directly influence the final form of the translated text.

1. Chikugoyaku (逐語訳/Word-for-word translation)

   This strategy uses the direct lexical meaning of the source text. This strategy is usually applied when the words in the source text can be translated word for word with minor grammatical adjustments.

2. Chokuyaku (直訳/ Literal translation)

   Literal translation preserves the semantic content while adjusting the grammar to fit the target language. Although structurally adapted, the translator maintains close alignment with the source meaning.

3. Iyaku (意訳/ Sense translation)

   Sense translation prioritises intended meaning over formal structure. Structural flexibility is allowed to achieve naturalness and readability in the target language.

4. Jiyuuyaku (自由訳/ Free translation)

   Free translation focuses on communicative effect and may involve changes, modifications, or expansion. This strategy is used to achieve stronger target-language naturalness at the expense of formal equivalence.

In this research, these four categories function as operational classification criteria. The classification enables systematic comparison between the two Indonesian editions in terms of whether their translation is source-oriented or target-oriented.

Cultural Intertextuality and SDG Target 4.7 in Manga Translation

Translating contemporary popular literary texts such as the manga Attack on Titan carries a socio-cultural responsibility aligned with the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Target 4.7. This target explicitly emphasises internalising sustainable development principles through a deep understanding of global citizenship and fostering respect and appreciation for

cultural diversity. As a global creative industry product widely consumed by younger generations across countries, manga serves as an effective intercultural medium for introducing humanistic values, pluralistic thinking, and the social dynamics of foreign societies. Therefore, comic text translation should not be viewed merely as a commercial activity but as a transnational cultural pedagogical instrument that contributes to creating an inclusive and tolerant world order.

By applying accommodative translation strategies such as iyaku (sense translation) and jiyuuyaku (free translation), communicators can effectively overcome barriers stemming from radical language system differences. When the rich and complex Japanese onomatopoeia system is mediated into familiar, contextual Indonesian forms, local readers can develop intercultural empathy without experiencing cognitive alienation. The appreciation of cultural diversity mandated by SDG Target 4.7 is realised when readers can capture universal messages about humanity, struggle, and justice behind the dystopian narrative of Attack on Titan through translations that are clear, fluid, and aesthetically rich. Thus, the quality of graphic narrative translation directly co-constructs contemporary readers' mindset to become tolerant, responsive global citizens who respect diverse cultural expressions on the international stage.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative method to analyse the translation strategies used to translate Japanese onomatopoeia in Attack on Titan volume 5 across two Indonesian editions published by Elex Media Komputindo: the regular edition and the bind-up edition. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative research examines phenomena in their natural context, with the researcher serving as the key instrument. In addition, Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups give to a social or human problem. This approach allows for in-depth analysis of text data and contextual interpretation.

Object and Corpus of the Research

The object of this study is the manga Shingeki no Kyojin (Attack on Titan) volume 5 written and illustrated by Hajime Isayama. This manga is a popular Japanese dark fantasy work that depicts a dystopian world where humanity lives within massive walls to protect themselves from giant humanoid creatures known as Titans. Volume 5 continues the intense narrative of the Trost District battle, focusing on Eren Yeager and the Survey Corps as they confront the Titans and uncover deeper truths about Eren's transformative abilities. This volume contains numerous action sequences characterised by dynamic onomatopoeia, making it well suited for analysing translation strategies for Japanese onomatopoeic expressions.

Data Collection Technique

The data consists of Japanese onomatopoeia expressions that appear outside the speech balloons in volume 5 and their translation in both Indonesian editions. These expressions are mostly sound effects and visual narrative elements within the panels. All instances of onomatopoeia were coded and listed in a comparison table

in which the Japanese expressions appear alongside their Indonesian equivalents in both editions, following these steps:

1. We performed a close reading of the original Japanese source text to identify and record every form of onomatopoeia appearing outside the speech balloons.
2. We tracked and matched the corresponding onomatopoeic expressions within the exact same comic panels in both the Indonesian regular edition and the bind-up edition.
3. All discovered data were systematically compiled through a codification process and entered into an intertextual comparative table. This comparative matrix aligns the original Japanese onomatopoeia with its adaptive equivalents in both Indonesian editions to support rigorous comparative analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis used Torikai's (2024) classification of translation strategies: chikugoyaku, chokuyaku, iyaku, and jiyuuyaku. The frequency and distribution of strategies were then described to identify patterns and differences between the two editions. Although numerical counts supported the comparison, the interpretation remained qualitative, focusing on explaining strategic tendencies in translating the onomatopoeia in the panels. The data analysis followed these steps:

1. The tabulated onomatopoeic data were objectively classified into the four translation strategy categories based on the parameters established by Torikai's (2024) theory.
2. The researchers calculated the frequency of occurrence for each translation strategy to map out the distribution patterns of strategic preferences in both the Regular and Bind-up editions.
3. The quantitative calculation results served as supporting instruments to identify trends, operational patterns, similarities, and differences in translation orientation (source-oriented versus target-oriented) between the two editions.

Results and Discussion

In Volume 5 of Attack on Titan, a total of 215 onomatopoeic expressions were identified in the bind-up edition and 208 expressions in the regular edition. Based on Torikai's (2024) classification, the translation strategies found in this manga are divided into the following types:

Table 1: Translation Strategy Distribution in Volume 5

No	Translation Strategy	Regular Edition	Bind-up Edition
1	Word-for-word Translation	0	0
2	Literal Translation	11	9

3	Sense Translation	180	186
4	Free Translation	17	20
	Total Data	208	215

In Volume 5 of Attack on Titan, the analysis of translation strategies reveals the dominance of sense translation in both Indonesian editions. In the regular edition, 180 out of 208 data are categorized as sense translation, while in the bind-up edition, 186 out of 215 are sense translation. This strong dominance indicates that the translators consistently prioritise meaning and functional effect over the original linguistic form of Japanese onomatopoeia.

1. Word-for-word Translation

The results show that neither edition of Volume 5 uses word-for-word translation. According to Kumiko (2024), word-for-word translation directly transfers each lexical item, without grammatical or semantic adjustments, from the source to the target language. For onomatopoeia, this would mean keeping the original Japanese form (through transliteration or minimal phonological change).

However, the analysis shows that this approach is not used in translating Japanese onomatopoeic expressions. Forms such as ドシン, バクッ, or ビクッ are not retained as doshin, baku, or biku in the Indonesian editions. Instead, these sounds are adapted into forms that better fit the Indonesian phonetic system. This absence indicates that the translators chose not to preserve the original Japanese lexical structure, but instead prioritised forms that are more natural in the target language.

The non-use of direct transliteration in translating onomatopoeia indicates a rejection of a strictly source-oriented approach. Japanese onomatopoeia is deeply embedded in the language's phonological and morphological systems, making direct transfer into Indonesian difficult. Such direct transfer could reduce readability and potentially disrupt the text's narrative flow.

2. Literal Translation

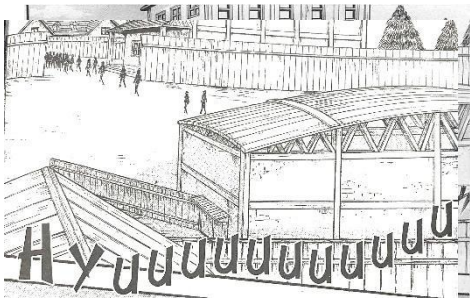


Figure 1: ヒュウウウ in the source language (left) and HYUUUU in the Indonesian translation regular edition (right)
(Attack on Titan Vol. 5, Page 128)

Literal translation occurs 11 times in the regular edition and 9 times in the bind-up edition. The example above shows the literal translation of an onomatopoeia for whistling or rushing wind as HYUUUU (Attack on Titan Vol. 5, page 128). Here, the translator reproduces the sound of the Japanese word with only a slight adjustment to fit Indonesian. The long vowel is kept to convey a continuous sound, preserving both its auditory effect and its visual impact within the panel.



Figure 2: オオオオオ (OOOOOO) in the Indonesian translation, bind-up edition (Attack on Titan Vol. 5, Page.137)

Above is an onomatopoeic expression from the bind-up edition that literally translates the original. The Japanese オオオオオ, rendered as OOOOOO, often describes an elongated shout, a loud yell, or a big exclamation (Ono, 2016). In this case, the translator keeps the original's phonological structure almost intact, matching not only the repeated vowel sounds but also an elaborate form that visually and acoustically conveys a drawn-out yell or roar. Although オオオオオ becomes OOOOOO and the katakana letters are replaced with the Latin alphabet, the sound patterning and repetition are preserved in both languages. This visual elongation in the source, which communicates both intensity and duration, is preserved as well.

In this strategy, the focus lies on the source text, as the translation remains closely aligned with the original, with minimal reinterpretation into culturally adapted Indonesian forms, reflecting Torikai's (2024) view that literal translation maintains the original structure while allowing only limited adjustment. The original expressive force is rendered as directly as possible without becoming opaque to Indonesian readers. Because the vowel "O" functions similarly in the phonological systems of Japanese and Indonesian, retaining the literal form poses no reading difficulty.

3. Sense Translation



Figure 3: ドスッ in the source language (left) and DUAK in the Indonesian translation, regular edition (right)
(Attack on Titan Vol. 5, Page.56)

The most dominant strategy in both Indonesian editions is sense translation, with 180 instances in the regular edition and 186 in the bind-up edition. The sample above (Attack on Titan Vol. 5, page 56) illustrates how sound words are adapted to local onomatopoeia: ドスッ is translated as DUAK. In Japanese, ドスッ (dosu) describes the sound of a blunt impact, such as stabbing or piercing something (Ono, 2016).

In the Indonesian version, the sound is rendered DUAK, an onomatopoeic form that represents a heavy collision. Although its phonological structure differs greatly from the Japanese, the functional meaning and dramatic effect are retained, so the expression feels natural.

This strategy is a sense translation, according to Torikai (2024), because the translator prioritises semantic and functional equivalence over formal similarity. The core signified, which relates to the heavy and sudden impact, is retained, but an equivalent sound form was adapted to affect readers in a similar way.



Figure 4: ガチャ (CKLEK) in the Indonesian translation, bind-up edition (Attack on Titan Vol. 5, Page.33)

For instance, the above sense translation of ガチャ is CKLEK. The Japanese term ガチャ (gacha) usually describes a mechanical clicking sound, for example, the turning of a doorknob, the locking of a phone or device, or the interlocking of a metal mechanism (Ono, 2016).

In the Indonesian version, the translator rendered this sound as CKLEK, which is widely used in Indonesian comics to represent a clicking or locking sound. Although the phonological form is quite dissimilar to its Japanese counterpart, its core sense and auditory use remain intact. The translation does not reproduce the original syllabic structure; instead, it reconstructs the sound in an analogous form that evokes a similar soundscape for Indonesian readers.

4. Free Translation



Figure 5: ザワザワ in the source language (left) and WAA WAA in the Indonesian translation, regular edition (right) (Attack on Titan Vol. 5, Page.98)

Free translation occurs 17 times in the regular edition and 20 times in the bind-up edition. The sample above shows the free translation of the onomatopoeic

expression ザワザワ as WAA WAA in the Indonesian edition. ザワザワ (zawa zawa) in Japanese is the sound of murmuring, rustling or an atmosphere filled with low and indistinct noise. It tends to express a collective mood beyond individual control (Ono, 2016), e.g. crowd anxiety, whispering or rising tension.

The Indonesian WAA WAA does not closely resemble the original phonological form of ザワザワ. Instead of the "zawa" sound pattern, the translator substitutes a different vocal expression that evokes collective noise. This is not merely a phonological change, but also an acoustic one. While ザワザワ depicts a quiet murmur or rustling, WAA WAA tends to depict a louder and more expressive crowd reaction.

According to Torikai (2024), this case can be categorised as free translation because the structural and phonetic features of the source text are not preserved. Rather than reconstructing the sound into a similar phonological form, the translator chooses a target-language expression that conveys the overall situational effect.



Figure 6: ブルブル (BRR BRR) in the Indonesian translation, bind-up edition (Attack on Titan Vol. 5, Page.133)

The sample above is an example of the free translation of the onomatopoeic expression ブルブル, translated as BRR BRR in the Indonesian edition. In Japanese, ブルブル (buru buru) typically describes trembling or shivering. It does not always represent a sound; rather, it often conveys a physical or emotional state such as coldness, fear, or nervous tension (Ono, 2016).

The Indonesian BRR BRR has a slightly different expressive nuance. In Indonesian comics, "BRR" is generally associated with coldness rather than a general state of trembling. While this translation preserves the repetition, it does not reproduce the original phonological structure (buru buru) nor its full semantic range. The translator made a more general and culturally recognisable choice that evokes the desired effect of the panel's image. The translation can therefore be categorised as free translation, since the translator introduces interpretive flexibility instead of structural similarity.

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that sense translation is the most dominant strategy in both editions, followed by free translation and literal translation, while word-for-word translation is not used. This pattern indicates that translators prioritise conveying the text's contextual meaning: rather than maintaining formal equivalence, they place greater importance on preserving the narrative effect in the target text. The dominance of sense translation thus reflects a target-oriented approach that prioritizes clarity, readability, and functional impact. These findings support Torikai's (2024) translation theory, showing that sense translation is the most feasible strategy for translating onomatopoeia in manga. Future studies should examine a wider range of volumes or genres and explore reader reception to deepen understanding of onomatopoeia translation.

AI Usage Declaration

In full compliance with the principles of academic integrity, scientific transparency, and international publication ethics standards, the authors declare that Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies based on Large Language Models (LLMs) were utilised during the drafting process of this manuscript, namely QuillBot and Gemini. The application of these AI instruments was strictly restricted to the post-analysis stage. AI technology was used exclusively as a language-polishing tool to optimise readability, refine sentence syntax, and translate the working draft into high-level academic English in accordance with international scholarly standards. All substantive and intellectual research activities, including the initial conceptualisation of ideas, the determination of the methodological design, the empirical data collection, the data coding based on theoretical taxonomies, and the derivation of scientific conclusions, were performed entirely and manually by the researchers without any automation or generative intervention from AI.

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