

The Use of Translation Notes in Manga Scanlation

Matteo Fabretti
Cardiff University

Scanlation (a combination of the words “scan” and “translation”) is the term used to refer to the current practice of unauthorised translation of graphic narratives.¹ The practice of scanlation includes a number of activities such as editing, translating and typesetting; each of these activities may be carried out by different people working as a group or, less often, by an individual scanlator carrying out all the tasks by him/herself. While any type of graphic narrative can be scanlated, by far the most common form of scanlation online is the translation of Japanese graphic narratives (known as *manga*) into English.

This is by no means the first academic account of scanlation. The existing literature on scanlation however has mainly focused either on the broader community (Lee), or on the specifics of translational competences (Inose), without seeking to relate one aspect to the other. The aim of this article is to account for the translational practices of manga scanlators that have emerged among the English language communities. More specifically this article will describe the particular structure of participation of the English-language manga scanlation communities and explain some of the translation practices common in manga scanlation.

During the process of translation from Japanese to English, the presence of highly culture-specific items in manga texts may result in translation problems – situations where references to certain cultural or linguistic items may require particular translation strategies. In the field of comics translation, a variety of strategies are available to translators, and the same is true in manga scanlation. In particular, this article investigates the use of translation notes (henceforth T/N) to deal with translation problems. In Translation Studies, the presence of T/N in a translation is considered particularly significant because they clearly indicate what features of the source text the translator considered important for the comprehension of the text and therefore necessary to retain or explain. In the field of comics in translation, the use of T/N is rather uncommon, and can be considered the main translation strategy that distinguishes scanlation from other types of translations.

In the first part of this article, the structure of the English-language manga scanlation communities is examined; the way culture-specific items are dealt with by manga scanlators is analysed; and finally, an explanatory hypothesis linking the broader structure of participation to individual translation strategies is presented. The argument put forward in this article is that T/N are used in scanlation both to solve translation problems and as a way for scanlators to communicate directly with their readers, thereby foregrounding their mediating presence directly on the pages of scanlated manga.

¹ Another term also used in an earlier period was “scanslation.” However, nowadays the term “scanlation” is more common.

Researching Scanlation

The practice of manga scanlation into English, at least in its current form, arguably has its origin in the early 2000s. As detailed on the website *Insidescanlation*,² manga scanlation first emerged as a practice distinct from the already established U.S. community of fans dedicated to the unauthorised subtitling of Japanese animation into English³ (a practice known as “fansubbing”). With the globalisation of the Internet, participation in English-language scanlation community practices became increasingly international (Lee 8). Nowadays, the available data suggests that a large share of the readership of manga scanlated into English (if not the majority) is located in Asian and European countries (Fabbretti).

In the process of scanlation, texts are first converted into digital images, edited, translated, and finally uploaded on the Internet, where they can be accessed for free. Scanlation is commonly carried out by fans of particular graphic narratives working together as a group; occasionally, a single individual may carry out all the activities involved in scanlation independently, but more commonly each member of a scanlation group assumes a particular role. For example, a cleaner edits digital images with the aid of editing software such as Photoshop, a translator translates the foreign text, and a typesetter inserts the translated text back onto the page. While there are scanlation groups translating from and into a variety of languages, by far the most common form of scanlation encountered online is the translation of Japanese manga into English.

Scanlation groups generally place recruitment advertisements on the front page of their releases, so that readers are aware that the group needs help to continue scanlating a particular series or perhaps to start a new project. Should a group be unable to fill a vacancy for a particular position, it may delay their release schedule, or perhaps even force the group to drop a project or to stop scanlating altogether. Groups face a challenge in recruiting new members because, generally speaking, scanlated manga are made available to read online for free, rather than sold. Groups may accept donations to pay for purchasing new Japanese volumes or for the cost of hosting their website; however, groups make it clear to potential candidates that scanlation is a hobby, not a job, and fans should not expect remuneration in exchange for carrying out any particular activity.⁴

The voluntary nature of scanlation therefore means that members are not generally able to sustain full participation over long periods of time. As old groups retire, new groups constantly emerge. According to the scanlator database at *Mangaupdates*,⁵ there are currently

² *Insidescanlation* is a fan-made website created by Doria Shawn under the pseudonym of ‘Gum.’ The site is a collection of material about the history of the English-language scanlation community. See also Leavitt.

³ Doria, Shawn [a.k.a. Gum]. “The First Modern Scanlation Group.”

⁴ The recruitment page of the scanlation group ‘Yaoi is life’ for example states: “Important: we do not make profit out of our scanlations since this is for fans, by fans. That said, if you apply, you are volunteering for a hobby, not an actual job. We do not get paid in any way, we do this because we like it” (Join Us!).

⁵ *Mangaupdates* (henceforth MU) is a new releases aggregator. MU does not host or link directly to scanlated manga; rather, its function is to keep readers updated on the latest releases of scanlation groups. English-language scanlation groups can notify the administrators of MU about the manga series they have selected for scanlation and the release schedule of their group. The purpose of doing this is for different groups to avoid scanlating the same manga series, and for readers to be able to keep track of what is being scanlated and when. For the purpose of research, MU presents two distinct benefits: first, it hosts a searchable database of English scanlation groups, including each

about a thousand active scanlation groups out of a total of more than five thousand. The transitory nature of scanlation means that scanlation groups, aside from producing scanlated manga, are also constantly involved in recruiting and training new readers to join the ‘core’ of the group – the small group of people that actively carries out the various scanlation activities. In this sense, the relationship between core members and readers is one of mutual interest: a group needs to foster readers’ participation in order to keep scanlating, while on the other hand readers need scanlators in order to be able to enjoy their favourite manga series. There are also a number of ways in which readers participate in the activities of a scanlation group without being core members. For example, groups may periodically ask their readers to suggest what manga series they would like to have scanlated in the future; readers are also able to leave comments on the group’s website or blog, either simply to say “thank you” or to point out mistakes and offer their help.

Scanlation groups come in many shapes. Some groups, like Easy Going Scans,⁶ are larger and more established. Others, like TDX⁷ or HOX,⁸ are composed of only one or two members. Larger groups can take on a variety of projects at the same time, with each manga series assigned to a different team of scanlators. Smaller groups on the other hand are constrained by the amount of free time they can dedicate to scanlation,⁹ so taking on more than one or two series at the same time is not sustainable over longer periods of time.

Given that the majority of groups tend to fall in between these two extremes, the average scanlation group usually carries out the scanlation of three or four manga series at a time. As groups are constrained in the number of series they can realistically take on and release regularly, scanlation groups often tend to focus on a specific manga author, genre or target demographic. So, for example, some groups, like Mangastream¹⁰ focus on very popular manga series for a younger male readership (known in Japan as *shōnen* manga) such as *One Piece*, *Naruto* and *Bleach*. Other groups, like Illuminati Manga, work on manga series for an older readership (known in Japan as *seinen* manga) such as *Real*, *I am a hero* and *Shamo* (Projects). A number of groups are also dedicated to scanlating manga for young female readers (known in Japan as *shōjo* manga), such as Damn Feels!,¹¹ a group mainly dedicated to scanlating the works of shōjo manga authors such as Yamamori Mika. There are also groups, like Hachimitsu Scans,¹² that scanlate manga series for older female readers (known in Japan as *josei* manga) such as *Kaku Kaku Shika Jika*.

In addition to these main target demographics, a number of groups select specific themes for their scanlation project. So for example, groups like Death Toll Scanlations¹³ mainly scanlate

group’s releases. Secondly, it functions as a portal for the English-language scanlation community; for example, MU regularly hosts users’ polls on its front page. These polls, while limited in their reach, represent a blunt, yet useful, thermometer for the English-language community at large.

⁶ Available online at: <http://egscans.com/>

⁷ Available online at: <https://tdxtreme.wordpress.com/>.

⁸ Available online at: <http://hoxtranslations.blogspot.co.uk/>.

⁹ The scanlation of a chapter of manga reportedly takes about 30 hours of work in total, between editing, translating, typesetting and proofreading.

¹⁰ Available online at: <http://mangastream.com/>

¹¹ Available online at <http://damn-feels.com/>

¹² Available online at: <http://hachimitsu-scans.blogspot.uk>

¹³ Available online at: <http://deathtollscans.net/>

mystery and psychological manga series, while others like *Hoshi-kuzuu Scans*¹⁴ are mainly focused on scanlating *yaoi* manga (a genre of manga focusing on romantic or sexual relationships between male characters; in Japan, yaoi manga are generally created by female authors and target a female readership) or *yuri* manga (a genre focusing on romantic relationships between female characters) such as *Yuri Project*¹⁵ or *Binbou Scanlation*.¹⁶ In other words, the heterogeneity of scanlation groups can be said to reflect that of Japanese manga genres.

Given the diversity that has been observed above, any broad claim as to “how scanlators scanlate manga” would need to be supported by a thorough empirical analysis of translation practices observable for each group, and for each project within a group. That is to say, every scanlation project should be taken on its own merit as a case study of a particular scanlation situation, rather than as necessarily representative of the phenomenon as a whole. In other words, scanlation is not a homogeneous field.

Rather than attempting a large-scale study of the English-language scanlation community, this article focuses on a specific aspect of scanlated manga: the use of T/N. More specifically, the aim of this article is to take the structure of participation in scanlation groups as a point of departure to shed light on the use of T/N in scanlation. In the following section, a sample of the usage of T/N taken from two manga series will be used to illustrate how translation problems that emerge from translating cultural and linguistic items specific to the manga medium can be dealt with.

Culture-specific Items in Manga

The focus in this section is on Culture-specific Items (henceforth, CSI) in manga. According to Javier Franco Aixelá, “[...] a CSI does not exist of itself, but as the result of a conflict arising from any linguistically represented reference in a source text which, when transferred to a target language, poses a translation problem due to the nonexistence or to the different value (whether determined by ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) of the given item in the target language culture” (Aixelá 57). In other words, CSI are items present in the source text that may pose a problem in translation because the referred items are not lexicalised, or otherwise hold different values, in the target language or culture. This loose definition reflects the fact that any cultural or linguistic item that may once have belonged exclusively to a particular culture can, and often does, lose its cultural specificity - and hence become transcultural, in the sense that it has become part of the common encyclopedic knowledge held by both the source and target readers (Pedersen, *Subtitling Norms* 10-11) – through the very act of translation. This is to say that CSI are not fixed entities; words like “samurai,” or “karaoke,” or “sushi,” just to give some examples, which were once specific to Japanese culture have now been accepted into the English lexicon. Therefore, in order for a CSI to qualify as such, it has to pose a problem, or be otherwise opaque, to the intended readers of the translation. What items qualify as such in manga texts? Elaborating on the categories developed by Delia Chiaro (208) for her analysis of translated audiovisual texts, I have divided the items that required the presence of T/N in scanlated manga into the following categories:

¹⁴ Available online at: <http://hoshi-kuzuu.livejournal.com/>

¹⁵ Available online at: <https://yuriproject.net/>

¹⁶ Available online at: <http://binbouscan.blogspot.co.uk/?zx=55514ac6d1f3678f/>

1. Extralinguistic references: References to cultural items, institutions, sports and pastimes, food and drink, events, festivities, famous people, personalities, etc.
2. Intralinguistic references: Language variation (idioms, proverbs, slang and dialect), forms of address and endearment, taboo language, etc.
3. Borderline features: Features that cross-cut both category 1 and 2: metaphors, idioms, allusions, songs, rhymes, poetry, gestures, etc.
4. Visual feature: Purely visual elements that are highly culture-specific.

Before giving examples, it is necessary to delve briefly into the question of translation strategies. According to the definition presented above, CSI inherently pose a problem for the translator; this is to say that “they stand out from run-of-the-mill translation and require extra special care and the active and conscious employment of [translation] strategies” (Pedersen, *Subtitling Norms* 41). According to the descriptive methodology developed by Gideon Toury, before attempting the reconstruction of “translation decisions and the constraints under which they were made” (116), the translation scholar must choose suitable units of source and target text for comparative analysis. The question, however, is to decide if the units for analysis are of prospective relevance, or in other words if their importance is decided prospectively by the researcher on the basis of their position in the internal hierarchy of the source text; or if they are of retrospective relevance, that is to say, important because the translator has selected some features of the source text and retained them in the translation (Toury 116-117). This article adopts the retrospective method, insofar as the presence of T/N is taken to be symptomatic of significant problems encountered in the process of translating the source text.

To put it another way, translation always requires the generation of possible translations and the selection of a definite rendition – an operation that, according to Anthony Pym, demands a certain degree of theorising (Pym 1). This theorising often remains private and internal, and only “becomes public when translators discuss what they do” (Pym 1). This is to say that the translation of CSI in manga scanlation is not always resolved through the use of T/N. Rather, it would be more correct to say that while a variety of translation strategies are observable in scanlation, the use of T/N as a strategy is particularly interesting from the point of view of research because it involves the kind of “out-loud” theorising suggested by Pym.

A typology of translation procedures specific to comics in translation has been developed by Klaus Kaindl in a pioneering essay on the topic¹⁷ (275). Kaindl’s typology however needs to be fine-tuned to deal with scanlated texts: in scanlation the removal or deletion of text or pictures is widely considered as censorship, and is strongly frowned upon by fans. The same can be said for reading directions, as I have yet to encounter a scanlated manga that has been altered to read from left to right (a process that should be simple, thanks to modern digital editing

¹⁷ Kaindl (275-283) identified the following strategies to deal with the linguistic and pictorial elements of comics: Repetitio: source language, typography or picture elements are taken over in their identical form; Adiectio: operations in which linguistic/pictorial material which was not there in the original is added in the translation to replace or supplement the source material; Transmutatio: a change in the order of source language or source pictorial elements; Substitutio: includes those translation procedures in which the original linguistic/typographic/pictorial material is replaced by more or less equivalent material; Deletio: the removal of text or pictures; Detractio: parts of linguistic/ pictorial/ typographic elements are cut in the translation.

software). On the other hand, the addition of linguistic or pictorial material to supplement the source material is common in scanlation (for example, T/N at the margin of panels, or at the back of the volume) as is the replacement of linguistic material with “more or less equivalent material” (Kaindl 283). The problem is that the substitution of the source text with “more or less equivalent” material is too broad a definition to be useful in the present context.

A more detailed classification of translation strategies is the one proposed by Jan Pedersen to deal with what he calls “extralinguistic culture-bound references” in TV program subtitles¹⁸ (Pedersen, *How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?* 2). While all the strategies outlined by Pedersen can be observed in manga scanlation, here my interest is in the use of a particular set of strategies, which, following Pedersen’s model, can be defined as a mixture of “retention,” “specification” and “direct translation.” In other words, the focus of my analysis is on those instances where textual or visual CSI in manga texts were retained either as transliterated Japanese words or otherwise translated, and/or specified (in the sense that additional information not present in the source text was inserted in the form of a T/N).

Examples

The examples presented in this section are drawn from two manga series: *Saint Oniisan* (聖☆おにいさん; lit. *Saint Young Men*) and *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi* (僕だけがいない街, lit. *The Town Where Only I am Missing*). *Saint Oniisan* (2006 – ongoing), written and illustrated by Hikaru Nakamura and published in Japan by Kodansha, is a seinen manga series in which Jesus Christ and Gautama Buddha are living in modern day Tokyo. The manga is a “slice of life” comedy manga, as it describes the everyday lives of Jesus and Buddha as they struggle to make ends meet in the modern world. *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi* (2012 - 2016), written and illustrated by Kei Sanbe and serialised in Japan by Kadokawa, is a thriller seinen manga series set in Japan in which the main character (Satoru, a twenty-nine-year-old aspiring manga author) possesses a supernatural ability that sends him back in time before a fatal accident has happened in order to prevent the victim’s death. Eventually, Satoru is sent back in time 18 years to the year 1988, in order to prevent a serial killer from murdering his classmates (in Satoru’s past, set in Hokkaido) and, eventually, his mother (in the present, set in Tokyo). Both manga series present a number of CSI as they are set in realistic (albeit fictionalised) locations and deal with real historical events. Furthermore, both series have been translated by various scanlation groups that made use of T/N to solve particular translation problems.

Extralinguistic References

Extralinguistic references are understood here as references to material cultural items of various kinds that are expressed through the textual elements of manga.

The example below is taken from *Saint Oniisan*. In the manga page, a delivery van is parked outside Buddha’s and Jesus’s flat. The delivery man has brought a package for Jesus, but

¹⁸ Pedersen distinguished between two broad categories: strategies that are source-language (SL) oriented and strategies that are target-language (TL) oriented. Under the umbrella of SL oriented strategies, Pedersen identifies “retention,” “specification” and “direct translation.” Under the TL oriented umbrella, he identifies “generalisation,” “substitution” and “omission” (Pedersen, *Subtitling Norms* 4).

Buddha answers the door first. The delivery man informs Buddha that the goods have to be paid on delivery (that is, Jesus did not pay for them in advance – in the manga, Buddha handles the living expenses and is more careful with money than Jesus; Buddha agrees to pay upfront for Jesus. After receiving the payment, the delivery man asks:

Postman: **ではここに受取印を。。。**

(Gloss translation¹⁹: well, [please place] the receipt stamp here)

Buddha: **サインでいいですか？**

(Gloss translation: is it possible to sign?)

Translation by Book-Book²⁰:

Postman: Right, could you stamp* here?

Buddha: Is it ok if I sign instead?

*T/N: In Japan, you have “hanko”. Stamps that work as your signature.

Explanation: the term *uketori-in* (受取印; lit. receipt stamp or receiving stamp) refers to the use of a stamp or *hankeo* (判子; lit. stamp, seal) to authenticate legal documents. In Japan, the use of *hankeo* was legally codified in the early 1870s and can be considered a symbol of the emergence of bureaucracy in modern Japan (A. Nakamura). Japanese law requires citizens to register their *hankeo* to be used on important documents. In current practice, however the use of a *hankeo* is mandatory only on certain occasions, for instance when opening a bank account or when registering a marriage or childbirth at a public office. In other instances, individuals can choose between using a *hankeo* or a signature to acknowledge the receipt of a parcel or to verify expenses, as in the present example.

¹⁹ Gloss translations in all the examples belong to the author.

²⁰ Available online at: <http://bato.to/reader#85121e0538c1a02d/>



Figure 1: *Saint Oniisan* (ch.7, p.1).

Extralinguistic culture-specific items are considered here as references to material (rather than abstract) cultural items located in the linguistic, or textual, element of manga, rather than the pictorial. In the manga, the delivery man is indicating the space on the form that, in Japan, is designated for a *hanko* stamp. In other words, the use of a *hanko* is implied by the context, rather than made explicit. The source text therefore can be said to indirectly refer to an “extralinguistic entity or process” (Pedersen, *Subtitling Norms* 2), which the T/N makes explicit for the foreign reader by supplementing the source text with a transliteration of the Japanese term, and by adding a brief explanation of its intended function (“Stamps that work as your signature”).

Intralinguistic References

Intralinguistic references are here understood as references to language variation, slang, dialects, etc. The example below is taken from *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi*. In the present chapter, Satoru decides to tail Nakanishi Aya, one of the three children killed in the original timeline, in order to become her friend and keep an eye on her before and after she goes to cram school in the afternoon, as that is the time when Aya is most likely to be alone. On page 16, Satoru and his friend Ken'ya follow Aya to her cram school, where Ken'ya notes that Satoru is taking his role as a detective seriously. The day after, Ken'ya asks Satoru about his plan for the day:

Ken'ya: どうする？

今日は「マル対」に接触してみるか？

(Gloss translation: what do we do? Shall we approach the “marutai” today?)

Satoru: マル対（対象者）って。。。

うん それはありかも

(Gloss translation: marutai (target)!? Ok, that is possible)

Translation by Café con Lenin²¹:

Ken'ya: What now?

Are you going to contact your “marutai” today?

Satoru: He called her “marutai”*, (a target)...?

Yep, maybe I should

*TL note: Ken'ya jokingly used police slang from yakuza movies.

Explanation: The T/N here highlights the style shift in the original text, as Ken'ya used a “secret language” (known in Japanese as *ingo*²² 隠語; lit. secret language, jargon) term in relation to Aya. The term *marutai* (マル対) could be considered as a microcultural item, according to Pedersen's definition of microcultural references as those cultural items “too specialized or too local to be known even by the majority of the relevant ST [source text] audience” (Pedersen, *Subtitling Norms* 11).

²¹ Available online at: http://bato.to/reader#e82a022a402b8cbe_27

²² According to Niamh Kelly, “Ingo can be described as a secret or play language that systematically distorts the words of the vernacular in a way that is transparent only to those who possess the key. The special lexicon is used entirely with Standard Japanese syntax and consists of words that have been deliberately transformed or disguised using a number of techniques in order to render them opaque to the uninitiated listener and thereby to avoid detection” (Kelly 214).



Figure 2: *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi* (ch27, p.27).

As can be observed in the image in Figure 2 above, in Satoru's speech bubble – “He called her ‘Marutai’ (a target)...?” – accompanied by two other circular bubbles leading to Satoru – “Maybe I should./ Yep,” – indicating that Satoru is thinking, rather than speaking aloud, the term “Marutai” is followed by the expression *taishōsha* (対象者, lit. target person). In other words, Satoru has mentally translated the specialised expression into a more commonly known

term for the benefit of the readers. This is an example of how subtle language variation may be used in manga as a narrative device. As the son of a criminal lawyer, Ken'ya demonstrates familiarity with the special lexicon used by the police as a marker of his membership in the community of crime-fighters. Knowledge of the secret language also identifies Satoru as a member of this community, thereby strengthening the bond between Ken'ya and Satoru. In the example above, rather than omitting the microcultural references, the translator has opted for a transliteration of the term and has added a note (although it may be debatable whether Ken'ya has learned the term from watching police movies or from his family background).

Borderline Features

Borderline features are understood here as culture-specific references that cross-cut both extralinguistic and intralinguistic categories. In other words, these are references where the cultural and the linguistic go hand in hand.

The following example is taken from *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi* (ch.20, p. 12). In the present chapter, Satoru has been sent back to 1988 for a second time, as he failed to prevent the murder of his classmate Kayo Hinazuki the first time around. In this chapter, he is confronted by his childhood friend, Ken'ya, who has noticed a change in Satoru's behaviour. In the manga, Ken'ya is depicted as a quiet, well-mannered child with a capacity for observation well beyond his age. Ken'ya has noticed a change in Satoru – Satoru, in the original timeline, did not pay much attention to Hinazuki, but now he is determined to become friends with her in order to protect her. Ken'ya believes that Satoru's change is related to the fact that he has noticed the scars on Hinazuki's leg, as the girl is frequently subjected to physical violence by her mother, and he is now determined to save the girl from further abuse. Ken'ya, of course, is unaware of the murder that is going to take place.

Ken'ya: 悟は雛月のこと嫌いなんだと思ったよ
同族嫌悪っていうかさ

(Gloss translation: I thought Satoru hated Hinazuki - 'dō-zōku-ken-o', as it is said)

Satoru: うん嫌いだったよ
でも逆に惹かれるトコもあった

(Gloss translation: Yes, I hated her – but conversely there was also something attracting)

Translation by Oyasumi translations²³:

Ken'ya: I thought you hated Hinazuki, Satoru.

They say “two hedgehogs in a hole, together”.*

Satoru: Yep, I hated her.

But I was also drawn to her.

*TN: A Japanese saying meaning two people too much alike hurt each other when they try to get close.

²³ Available online at: http://bato.to/reader#47c98a390c2382ab_12

In Japanese, the popular saying *dō-zoku-ken-o* (同族嫌悪 ; 同族: *dōzoku*, lit. same family. 嫌: *ken*, lit. dislike, hate. 悪: *aku*, *o*, lit. bad, evil) is used to express the idea of hating (or disliking) people with the same hobbies or characteristics, because they reflect your own shortcomings. In the context of the chapter in which the present example occurs, Ken'ya uses this saying to explain why he thought that Satoru may have disliked Hinazuki – because her introverted character may have reminded Satoru of his own shortcomings. In this sense, the translation note can be said to represent only a partial explanation of the saying.

On the other hand, the translation “two hedgehogs in a hole, together” is strengthened by Satoru's reply to Ken'ya, in which he admits being attracted to Hinazuki. The sentence refers to the ‘hedgehog's dilemma’ – a metaphor about the challenges of social relationships: as hedgehogs get close to one another during cold weather in order to keep warm, they cannot avoid hurting each other with their sharp spines. The metaphor suggests that people, like hedgehogs, avoid people with similar disagreeable qualities in order to avoid being hurt or rejected.

Purely Visual Cultural References

The example in figure 3 below²⁴ is drawn from the manga *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi* (ch.1, p.11). At the very beginning of the manga, Satoru is a twenty-eight-year-old struggling manga artist living in Tokyo. To make ends meet, Satoru also works as a pizza delivery boy. As he drives past a zebra crossing, we see a schoolboy picking up a flag from a basket fixed on a pole on the side of the street, and in the next panel we see the same boy waiting to cross the road while holding the flag. The same scene will be depicted again on pages 14 and 17, as Satoru's power sends him back in time in order to prevent an accident from occurring. Eventually, on page 19, he will stop the boy from crossing the road so as to prevent a truck from running him over.

²⁴ Scanned by anonymous scans. Available online at: http://bato.to/reader#16f1f693faf3dc41_11 [accessed July 14, 2016].



Note: In some areas of Japan, elementary school students use flags to cross the road. Ex: <http://flic.kr/p/bC127P>

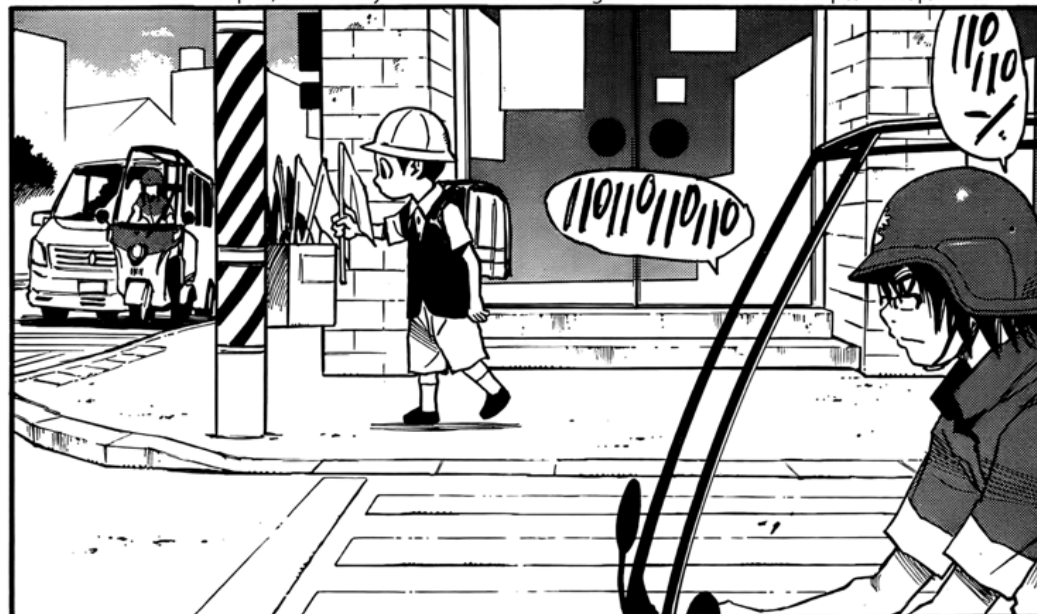


Figure 3: *Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi* (ch.1, p.11)

The translator has inserted a note, explaining that “in some areas of Japan, elementary school students use flags to cross the road. Ex: <http://flic.kr/p/bC127P>”. By following the link, the image in figure 4 below can be viewed:



Figure 4: “Crossing Flags,” a photograph by Eric Flexyourhead, *Flickr*, 2011. Web. 21 July 2016.

Research on the visual language of manga has highlighted some of the ways in which the medium has developed culturally specific “non-conventional visual symbols and metaphors” (Cohn 156) as for example the use of “gigantic sweat drops conveying embarrassment or nervousness, glowing eyes for glaring, bloody noses depicting lust” (Cohn 158). These kinds of visual metaphors however do not generally represent a translation problem in scanlation. This is to say that although their meaning may be opaque for somebody not familiar with manga, in the context of scanlation these items can be said to have lost their cultural specificity and have now become “transcultural” (Pedersen, *Subtitling Norms* 10).

The example above demonstrates how other strictly visual elements of manga can present themselves as translation problems, even in the context of scanlation. School-crossing guards in Japan are known as *midori no obasan* (緑のおばさん, lit. “green ladies”); these are more common in urban areas where the large volume of traffic prompted mothers to volunteer to protect school children from car accidents (Ishikawa 156). In smaller cities where volunteers are not available, as in the example above, a cut-out of a crossing guard may be used instead, with yellow flags made available to children to increase visibility as they cross the road²⁵ (Shibata 203).

²⁵ According to Alexander Prasol, “every child knows that, at a pedestrian crossing, he must first look around, take a bright-yellow flag in his hand, raise it above his head and start walking. The flags are kept in special cases on both sides of the street on the main roads. If no flags are available, the child should cross the road with his or her arm either raised or extended forward. This habit has been so deeply engrained that, in small cities, elderly pedestrians still cross the road with their arms raised even if no vehicle is in sight” (Prasol 47). I can confirm from my personal experience that this is a common habit.

Conclusion: Translation Problems or Translation Opportunities?

As we have seen in the examples above, it is common for scanlators to make strategic use of T/N in order to deal with particular aspects of Japanese culture in translation. This final part of the article will address the question of why T/N are considered a suitable translation solution in scanlation, and what consequences result from the use of this strategy.

As we have seen in the first part of this article, scanlation is considered a hobby: scanlators volunteer because they consider these activities fun and fulfilling (rather than as a means to economic reward). In light of this fact, the presence of T/N foregrounds the cultural and linguistic alterity of manga, and therefore the important work of mediation that translators carry out when translating from Japanese. The presence of T/N furthermore allows translators to communicate directly with their readers; translators spend a great deal of time and effort researching cultural references, and it makes sense for them to want to share their hobby with others. As Pym put it, T/N can be said to represent an opportunity for speaking about translation out loud.

The following quote from the *Damn Feels!* website illustrates this point. In a message posted in December 2015 (“You Guys Are the Best”), a reader by the name of Huaimiaooo explained:

There’s part of the work that I specially love. It’s the explanation work done up behind every chapter (if there is a need) and even a small texts at the corners of pages. I especially like them because they allow me to know a bit more about the various culture, customs and such. If the team have been wondering if anyone reads them, please tell them YES we read them diligently.

To which Mery.paige, the translator at *Damn Feels!* replied:

As the translator this makes me so, so happy! It’s funny, because most of the things that end up in the translator’s notes aren’t actually that important to the plot [...] but in the end they’re what I end up spending the most time on. I love translating because I’m always learning something new, and doing research for the translator’s notes is one of my favourite parts of the scanlation process

(You Guys Are the Best)

In this sense, T/N can be said to play an advertising role, insofar as they call attention to the nature of scanlated manga as mediated texts. As we have seen, scanlation groups depend on readers’ participation to ensure the continuing survival of the practice. As scanlation groups need to continually foster readers’ participation, the presence of T/N in the pages of manga is instrumental for scanlators to remind their readers that what they are reading is the product of translation; T/N therefore are the most explicit way to signal the status of scanlations as texts that required mediation, and therefore the presence of a mediating agency. Even casual readers or those who may have stumbled on scanlations online by chance can understand that these texts are translations, not original creations of the scanlating group.

To conclude, I want to argue that the majority of readers of scanlated manga doesn't simply tolerate the presence of T/N, but actually favours them. As a way of testing this hypothesis, in May 2013 I was able to pose a question on the front page of Mangaupdates. In response to the question "Which aspect of a translation is more important to you?" the overwhelming majority of users expressed a preference for translations strategies that foregrounded, rather than minimised, some characteristics of Japanese culture and language (Lambchopsil). Furthermore, in response to a poll carried out in March 2015 that asked the question "do you know Japanese?" a large number of Mangaupdates users also acknowledged the fact that, despite not being fluent speakers, they could understand bits and pieces of the language by reading manga (and watching anime) (Lambchopsil). Finally, in response to a poll carried out in November 2015 that asked the question "What subject or topic mentioned in a manga has most prompted you to do more research (Google, Wikipedia, library, etc.) about it?" the two most popular answers were "historical events" and "cultural aspects"²⁶(Lambchopsil).

I would suggest that Japanese culture-specific items in manga do not simply represent translation 'problems' that need to be efficiently dispatched; rather, they are also translation 'opportunities,' in the sense that they offer the opportunity for scanlators to foreground the mediating presence of scanlators directly in the pages of manga, as well as to satisfy the curiosity of their readers in regard to Japanese culture and language.

²⁶ Although it must be said that the third most popular choice was "manga never encouraged me to do more research" (Lambchopsil).

REFERENCES

- Aixelá, Javier Franco. "Culture-Specific Items in Translation." *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Ed.R. Alvarez and M. Carmen-Africa Vidal. Clevedon, Philadelphia, Adelaide: Multilingual Matters, 1996. 52-78. Print.
- Binbou Scanlation*. N.p., n.d.
Web. <http://binbouscan.blogspot.ca/?zx=c9fc6fcd2923297e/>. 21 July, 2016.
- "Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi, Chapter 1 Page 11." *Batoto*. N.p., n.d. Web.
http://bato.to/reader#16f1f693faf3dc41_11/. 21 July, 2016.
- "Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi, Chapter 20 Page 12." *Batoto*. N.p., n.d. Web.
http://bato.to/reader#47c98a390c2382ab_12/. 21 July, 2016.
- "Boku Dake Ga Inai Machi, Chapter 27 Page 27." *Batoto*. N.p., n.d. Web.
http://bato.to/reader#e82a022a402b8cbe_27/. 21 July, 2016.
- Chiaro, Delia. "The Eyes and Ears of the Beholder? Translation, Humor, and Perception." *Media and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Ed D. Abend-David. New York, London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 197-220. Print.
- Cohn, Neil. *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images*. London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print
- Damn Feels!* N.p., n.d. Web. <http://damn-feels.com>. 21 July, 2016.
- Doria, Shawn [a.k.a. gum]. "Inside Scanlation: Inside the World of Scanlation." Web. 14 July 2016. <http://www.insidescanlation.com/>.
- Doria, Shawn. "First Generation: The Classical Era." *Insidescanlation*. N.p., n.d. Web.
<http://www.insidescanlation.com/history/history-1-1.html>. 21 July, 2016.
- Easy Going Scans*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 July 2016. <http://egscans.com/>.
- Fabbretti, Matteo. *A Study of Contemporary Manga Scanlation into English*. Diss. Cardiff University, 2014. *Dissertations & Theses*. Web. 14 July 2016.
- Flexyourhead, Eric. "Crossing Flags." *Flickr*, 2011.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ericflexyourhead/6970965295/>. Accessed 21 July, 2016.
- "Groups." *Mangaupdates*. N.p., n.d. Web. <https://www.mangaupdates.com/groups.html>. 21 July, 2016.
- Hachimitsu Scans*. N.p., n.d. Web. <https://hachimitsu-scans.blogspot.ca/>. 21 July 2016.
- Hoshi-kuzuu*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://hoshi-kuzuu.livejournal.com/>. 21 July 2016
- Hox Translations*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://hoxtranslations.blogspot.ca/>. 21 July 2016.

- Inose, Hiroko. "Scanlation – What Fan Translators of Manga Learn in the Informal Learning Environment." *International Symposium on Language and Communication: Research Trends and Challenges, IICS (Institute of Language and Communication Studies), Izmir University, 10th-13th June, Izmir (Turkey)*. 2012. Web.
- Ishikawa, Satomi. *Seeking the Self: Individualism and Popular Culture in Japan (Vol. 8)*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007. Print.
- "Join Us!" *Yaoislife*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 July 2016. <http://yaoislife.shounen-ai.net/join-us>.
- Kaindl, Klaus. "Thump, Whizz, Poom: A Framework for the Study of Comics Under Translation." *Target* 11-2 (1999): 263-288. Web.
- Kelly, Niamh. "The Special Lexicon of the Secret Language of Thieves in Japan between the Edo and Showa Periods." *Japanese Studies* 34-2 (2014): 213-236. Web.
- Lambchopsil. "Previous Poll Results." *Mangaupdates*. N.p., 21 Nov. 2015. Web. <https://www.mangaupdates.com/news.html?id=51545>. 21 July 2016.
- . "Previous Poll Results." *Mangaupdates*. N.p., 28 Mar. 2015. Web. <https://www.mangaupdates.com/news.html?id=49631>. 21 July 2016.
- . "Previous Poll Results." *Mangaupdates*. N.p., 4 May 2013. Web. <https://www.mangaupdates.com/news.html?id=40584>. 21 July 2016.
- Leavitt, Alex. "Inside Scanlation [Web site review]." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 5 (2010). Web. 14 July 2016.
- Lee, Hye-Kyung. "Cultural Consumers As 'New Cultural Intermediaries': Manga Scanlators." *Arts Marketing: An International Journal* 2-2 (2012): 231-143. Web.
- Mangastream*. N.p., n.d. Web. <http://mangastream.com/>. 21 July 2016.
- Nakamura, Akemi. "'Hanko' Fate Sealed by Test of Time." *The Japan Times* (2007). Web. 14 July 2016.
- Nakamura, Hikaru. *聖☆おにいさん Vol.1*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 2008. Print.
- Pedersen, Jan. "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?" *MuTra 2005—Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings*, 2007. Web.
- . *Subtitling Norms for Television: An Exploration Focussing on Extralinguistic Cultural References*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2011. Print.

Prasol, Aleksandr Fedorovich. *Modern Japan: Origins of the Mind: Japanese Traditions and Approaches to Contemporary Life*. Singapore: World Scientific, 2010. Print.

"Projects." *Illuminati-manga*. N.p., n.d. Web. http://www.illuminati-manga.com/?page_id=1913. 21 July 2016.

"Saint Young Men, Chapter 7 Page 1." *Batoto*. N.p., 21 July 2016. Web. <http://bato.to/reader#85121e0538c1a02d> 21 July 2016.

Pym, Antony. *Exploring Translation Studies, Second Edition*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Sanbe, Kei. *僕だけがいない街* Vol. 1-7. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2016. Print.

Shibata, Takeshi. *Sociolinguistics in Japanese Contexts (Vol. 81)*. Berlin, New York: Mouton deGruyter, 1999. Print.

Singleton, James. "The Tightly Regulated "Independence" of Japanese Children." 2015. Web. 14 July 2016.

Tdxtreme. N.p., n.d. Web. <https://tdxtreme.wordpress.com/>. 21 July 2016.

Toury, Gideon. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond, Revised Edition*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012. Print.

"You Guys Are The Best." *Damn Feels!* 2015. Web. <http://damn-feels.com/post/134822995982/you-guys-are-the-best>. 21 July 2016.

Yuri Project. N.p., n.d. Web. <https://yuriproject.net/>. 21 July 2016.