

Ioana Ruxandra Toșu\_Abstract

Babeș-Boyai University

Faculty of Letters

Doctoral School of Linguistic and Literary Studies

PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRANSLATION OF JAPANESE  
COMICS (*MANGA*) INTO ROMANIAN: PRAGMATIC  
TRANSFER IN *YAKUWARIGO* ELEMENTS

**ABSTRACT**

Doctoral Supervisor: Prof. Univ. Dr. Habil. Rodica Frent

Doctoral Candidate: Ioana Ruxandra Toșu

Cluj-Napoca

2024

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
0.1. Hypotheses, Objectives, Approaches.....	5
0.2. Methodology.....	6
0.3. Structure of the Thesis.....	8
0.4. Significance of the Study.....	9
<b>CHAPTER I. Context cultural</b> .....	12
I.1. <i>Popular Culture</i> or Pop Culture.....	15
I.1.1. Japanese Culture Between Tradition and Modernity.....	19
I.1.2. Pop Culture in the Japanese Context.....	23
I.1.3. <i>Cool Japan</i> – A Strategy for Promoting Japanese Culture.....	25
I.1.4. Japanese Pop Culture in the Romanian Context.....	28
I.1.5. The NEZUMI By NEMIRA Phenomenon.....	32
I.2. Japanese Comics – <i>Manga</i> . Definitions. Brief History.....	34
I.2.1. Comic Books Defined as “Popular Literature”.....	37
I.2.2. <i>Manga</i> – From Origins to the Present.....	39
I.2.3. Defining Characteristics of <i>Manga</i> .....	44
<b>CHAPTER II. Theoretical Framework – Defining Linguistic Concepts</b> .....	50
II.1. Linguistic Pragmatics in the Analysis of Comics ( <i>Manga</i> ).....	51
II.1.1. Speech Act Theory and the Principle of Expressibility.....	56
II.1.2. Relevance Theory and the Principle of Pertinence.....	60
II.2. The Multimodal Text.....	62
II.2.1. Comics as Multimodal Texts.....	64
II.2.2. The Importance of Context in Decoding the Message of a Multimodal Text.....	68
II.2.3. Translating Multimodal Texts – <i>Skopós</i> Theory.....	76
II.2.3.1. The Purpose of Translation – Pragmatic Equivalence.....	80
II.3. The Linguistic Concept of <i>Yakuwarigo</i> (‘Lexemes Assigned to a Particular Role’).....	83
II.3.1. Role language.....	90
II.3.2. Character Language.....	92

II.3.3. Stereotypical Speech.....	93
<b>CHAPTER III. Practical Analysis – Linguistic Analysis of <i>Yakuwarigo</i> (,Lexemes Assigned to a Particular Role’) in <i>Manga Discourse</i>.....</b>	<b>96</b>
III.1. Role Language.....	99
III.1.1. Heian Era Language in <i>Genji Monogatari</i> 源氏物語 ( <i>The Tale of Genji</i> ).....	100
III.1.2. Yakuza Language in <i>Nisekoi</i> ニセコイ ( <i>False Love</i> ).....	119
III.1.3. <i>Onē</i> Language (,Older Sister’s Language’) in <i>Kuroshitsuji</i> 黒執事 ( <i>Black Butler</i> ).....	140
III.1.4. Honorific Suffixes in <i>Kuroko no basuke Replace Plus</i> 黒子のバスケ Replace PLUS ( <i>Kuroko's Basketball: Replace Plus</i> ).....	153
III.1.5. Dialects in <i>Barakamon</i> ばらかもん ( <i>Cheerful Spirit</i> ).....	163
III.1.6. Mimetic Language in <i>Kamisama Hajimemashita</i> 神様はじめました ( <i>Kamisama Kiss</i> ).....	172
III.2. Stereotypical Speech.....	184
III.2.1. Samurai Language in <i>Rurōni Kenshin -Meiji Kenkaku Roman Tan-</i> るろうに剣心 - 明治 剣 客 浪 漫 譚 - ( <i>Rătăcitorul Kenshin – Romantic Tales of the Meiji Swordsman</i> ).....	186
III.2.2. <i>Aruyo</i> Language in <i>Gintama</i> 銀魂 ( <i>Silver Soul</i> ).....	213
III.2.3. Scientist’s Language in <i>Bleach</i> ブリーチ ( <i>BLEACH</i> ).....	225
III.2.4. Military Leader’s Language in <i>Shingeki no kyōjin</i> 進撃の巨人 ( <i>Attack on Titan</i> ).....	245
III.3. Character Language.....	261
III.3.1. Uzumaki Naruto’s Language in <i>Naruto</i> - ナルト - ( <i>NARUTO</i> ).....	262
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>273</b>

<b>INDEX</b> .....	289
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms.....	289
Appendix 2: Analyzed Comics ( <i>Manga</i> ).....	292
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	362

## Ioana Ruxandra Toșu\_Abstract

This doctoral thesis, titled *Perspectives on the Translation of Japanese Comics (Manga) into Romanian: Pragmatic Transfer in Yakuwarigo Elements*, addresses a significant issue in the field of translation studies and linguistic pragmatics, focusing on the cultural and linguistic translation of *yakuwarigo* (‘lexemes assigned to a particular role’) from Japanese into Romanian. The research aims to investigate how these linguistic elements, deeply rooted in Japanese culture, can be adapted in order to preserve both semantic fidelity and the pragmatic and cultural nuances in Romanian.

The significance of the linguistic medium as an intrinsic element of a comic book has recently drawn the attention of researchers, particularly with regard to *manga* (Japanese comics). This growing interest became evident following linguistic studies initiated around the year 2000, when Kinsui Satoshi identified the presence of a distinct language used by fictional characters, which he defined under the term *yakuwarigo* (‘lexemes assigned to a particular role’). Based on the long-standing debate surrounding the possibility and/or impossibility of translating cultural elements – discussions that have been central to specialists in the field over time (Nida 1964; Venuti 1995/2008; Eco 2001; Lungu Badea 2004) – I have posited that the term *yakuwarigo* is not limited exclusively to linguistic units with cultural connotations, but rather extends to a much broader range of pragmatic markers used to shape the characteristics that define a particular character.

This study engages in a pragmalinguistic analysis of an underexplored medium – manga – highlighting the significance of the language assigned to characters in comic books. The analysis goes beyond a simple interpretation of the narrative, focusing on how linguistic registers function as essential elements in shaping the personalities of the characters. A key focal point of the research is the pragmatic message intended by the author and conveyed through the original language, as well as the changes that occur in this message during the translation process. Thus, the study makes an important contribution to the complex understanding of the interaction between language and its meaning within the multimodal context of comic books.

The corpus of this study was selected based on the typology of the characters, in order to exemplify the broadest possible range of ways in which *yakuwarigo* elements are used. The textual materials were divided into a tripartite scheme, according to the function of the words assigned to the characters, and further subdivided into categories corresponding to specific character types.

## Ioana Ruxandra Toșu\_Abstract

Particular attention was given to the pragmatic markers that define the distinct linguistic universe of each character, with these markers being analyzed and translated within a constrained context.

This paper lies at the intersection of several disciplines: cultural studies, linguistics, and translation studies. The research is grounded in theories from linguistic pragmatics and translation studies, fields closely linked to the study of culture and civilization. It begins with a rigorous analysis of the intended pragmatic message, based on the original Japanese text. The aim is to provide a translation that preserves the fidelity of the original semantic meaning while identifying and applying appropriate pragmatic equivalences between the source language and culture (Japanese) and the target language and culture (Romanian). This approach involves not only a linguistic transfer but also a cultural adaptation, ensuring that cultural and pragmatic nuances are accurately reflected in the translation. The research also examines the degree of relevance of the translated (target) text in terms of the interaction between character and reader, analyzing how translation influences the reception and interpretation of the text by readers within the target culture. This evaluation provides an insightful perspective on the effectiveness of the translation in conveying the pragmatic message and its impact on the reader's experience.

The translations included in this study are my own and are not intended to verify or test existing theories in the field of translation studies. Instead, the primary objective is to analyze the extent to which the pragmatic equivalences achieved through the transposition of the text from Japanese into Romanian are relevant and effective. The proposed approach aims to provide a detailed perspective on the complexities and challenges involved in the process of intercultural translation, with a particular focus on adapting the pragmatic message within the specific context of the target language and culture.

Through this academic research, I have rigorously investigated the inherent complexity of translating Japanese comics (*manga*) into Romanian, with a particular focus on the analysis of pragmatic message transfer, especially that embedded in *yakuwarigo* (‘lexemes assigned to a particular role’). The structure of the thesis is logically and coherently organized, following a clear trajectory from the cultural and theoretical context to the practical analysis and study of translation. It is divided into three main chapters, each subdivided into sections that address various thematic aspects relevant to the study.

The first chapter, titled *Cultural Context*, provides a necessary foundation for understanding Japanese pop culture and its global influence. I explored the relationship between

## Ioana Ruxandra Toșu\_Abstract

Japanese culture and its dimensions of tradition and modernity, as well as the *Cool Japan* strategy as a means of international promotion. Additionally, I examined the influence of Japanese pop culture within the Romanian cultural space and the evolution of Japanese comics (*manga*), offering a definition of the concept, a brief history, and an analysis of its defining characteristics. *Manga* is also discussed in the context of “popular literature”, exploring how this genre has evolved from its origins to the present. Lastly, I addressed the recent emergence of the first Romanian-language *manga* imprint, which was translated and published through Nemira's NEZUMI project.

The second chapter, *Theoretical Framework – Defining Linguistic Concepts*, focused on the theoretical foundations necessary for understanding the linguistic phenomena in *manga*. I introduced concepts from linguistic pragmatics, such as “speech act theory” and “the principle of expressibility”, alongside “relevance theory” and “the principle of pertinence”, which are applied in the analysis of comic books. The multimodal text was then analyzed, with emphasis placed on the integration of written text with images in comics and the importance of context in decoding the message. “*Skopós* theory” was discussed in the context of translating multimodal texts, with a special focus on the purpose of translation and pragmatic equivalence. This chapter also explored the linguistic concept of *yakuwarigo*, referring to lexemes assigned to a particular role, along with other aspects such as stereotypical language and character-specific language.

In the third chapter, *Practical Analysis – Linguistic Analysis of Yakuwarigo (Lexemes Assigned to a Particular Role) in Manga Discourse*, I applied the theoretical concepts presented in the previous chapter by analyzing the language registers specific to various *manga* characters. I examined the pragmatic markers attributed to certain roles, such as the language from the Heian period 平安時代 (794-1185), *yakuza* language, or suffixes used according to different levels of politeness. Additionally, I analyzed forms of stereotypical language, such as the language of samurai or military leaders, which contribute to shaping the personalities and roles of the characters. The study further explored the distinctive speech patterns of individual figures, such as the discourse of Uzumaki Naruto, offering a deeper understanding of how language reflects the defining traits of each character.

The structure of the thesis ensures a balanced approach between theory and practical application, highlighting the complexity of the cultural and linguistic adaptation of *yakuwarigo* (lexemes assigned to a particular role) in the translation of *manga*. In defining the linguistic concept of *yakuwarigo*, I have framed it as a pragmalinguistic strategy of significant complexity,

## Ioana Ruxandra Toșu\_Abstract

which involves a deliberate and carefully directed selection of linguistic elements from natural language, aimed at achieving a specific purpose. This approach entails the intentional use of linguistic resources to confer discursive and stylistic identity, depending on the communicative context and narrative requirements. The selection process occurs despite spatiotemporal constraints, with the goal of constructing a particularized and relevant linguistic universe for a given character, whether main or secondary.

The fundamental goal of the described pragmalinguistic strategy is to give the character uniqueness and memorability through a distinct and meaningful use of language. This approach requires a deep understanding of the relationship between language and character development, emphasizing how linguistic specificity can influence and shape the reader's perception of a character. In this sense, *yakuwarigo* (,lexemes assigned to a particular role') functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a means of constructing the identity and depth of characters within a narrative. Thus, these role-attributed lexemes contribute to a richer and more engaging narrative experience, allowing fictional entities to manifest and interact in ways that both reflect and reinforce their roles in the story.

The conclusions of this research emphasize the importance of *yakuwarigo* as an essential tool in character development within *manga*, as well as the challenges involved in the translation process. The translator must not only convey the semantic meaning but also capture the cultural and pragmatic subtleties, thus ensuring an authentic experience for Romanian readers. The thesis contributes to understanding how fictional language can be transferred across cultures, highlighting the translator's role as a cultural and pragmatic mediator between the source and target languages and cultures. In this way, the study offers a significant contribution to the fields of translation studies and linguistic pragmatics, providing an innovative perspective on how the translation of *yakuwarigo* can preserve the cultural and pragmatic complexity of the original text. This research opens new horizons for understanding the internal dynamics of intercultural translations, laying a solid foundation for future studies on multimodal texts and the translation of Japanese comics.

**Keywords:** pop culture, pragmalinguistic analysis, *yakuwarigo*, multimodal text, *manga*, pragmatic equivalence, translation