

Formation of Wakamono Kotoba in Shangri-La Frontier Manga

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ABSTRACT

Wakamono kotoba refers to a type of Japanese language often used by young people in casual conversations. This language is marked by creative word-making processes such as shortening words, borrowing from other languages, changing sounds, and altering meanings. Wakamono kotoba appears often in Japanese pop culture, including anime, social media, and manga. Manga, in particular, often shows regular speech among young characters, making it a useful source for studying Japanese slang. This study seeks to examine how wakamono kotoba is formed in the manga Shangri-La Frontier. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method. The data includes wakamono kotoba expressions found in the dialogue of Shangri-La Frontier Volume 1. Data were gathered through observation and note-taking. The analysis follows Yonekawa's classification of wakamono kotoba formation, which covers processes like shortening, borrowing, combining, and other creative ways of forming words. The results indicate that in the manga, wakamono kotoba expressions are frequently created by shortening loanwords and combining them. These formations show the linguistic creativity of Japanese youth and the ongoing evolution of informal Japanese language in today's popular culture.

Keywords: *Wakamono Kotoba, Japanese Slang, Word Formation, Manga Linguistics, Shangri-La Frontier*

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in human communication and interaction in society. In our day-to-day life, language is used not only for the conveyance of information, but it is also used to reveal the social identity of the speaker as well as the speaker's cultural background. Chaer (2012) stated that language can reveal the social relationship as well as the identity of the speaker.

It is observed that with the development of human society, the use of language is also changing in accordance with the development of technology, globalization, and the exchange of cultures, leading to the development of new forms of language. For example, in the case of the Japanese language, wakamono kotoba is the language used by young people in casual communication with others. According to Yonekawa (1997), wakamono kotoba is a dynamic language used by young people in Japan, which is used in a creative manner with new words, abbreviations, as well as changes in meaning in accordance with the context in which the language is used. This language is widely used by young people in communication, including in the use of digital media as well as in games (Alfarizy & Arianingsih, 2023).

Wakamono kotoba is often used in conversations between young people and may also be included in media such as anime, television dramas, and social media, as well as in manga. According to Schulz (2011), it is noted that "manga may be used as a linguistic resource in that the dialogues often resemble actual spoken Japanese." One such manga that may be used as linguistic data is Shangri-La Frontier. The story revolves around virtual reality gaming and

conversations between young people in a virtual gaming world. Conversations between characters in this story may include informal language that may reflect actual communication between young people in Japan.

Previous studies have been conducted on *wakamono kotoba* in various types of media such as anime, manga, and online communication. For instance, Ramli and Sopaheluwakan (2023) have studied the use of *wakamono kotoba* nouns in the manga “Dekiru Neko Ha Kyou Mo Yuutsu.” It is noted that various expressions are created using word shortening, blending, and acronym formation in this type of language use. In a study by Ngarbingan and Djaya (2019), it is noted that *wakamono kotoba* is often used in conversations between young people in the anime “K-On!” Other studies also discuss language variation among Japanese youth in media. Azizi and Sopaheluwakan (2025) found that *wakamono kotoba* expressions in the manga *Fuufu Ijou Koibito Miman* are often formed through word shortening, borrowing, blending, and initialization. In addition, Suhendar and Ali (2024) explain that the creativity of youth language is also influenced by subcultural language variations such as *gyarugo*, which contributes to the development of *wakamono kotoba* through abbreviation and borrowing.

Although these studies provide useful information about the characteristics of *wakamono kotoba* in Japanese media, research that specifically focuses on the morphological formation of *wakamono kotoba* in gaming-themed manga is still limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how *wakamono kotoba* expressions are formed in the manga *Shangri-La Frontier*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wakamono Kotaba

Wakamono kotaba is an expression that literally means “youth language.” It refers to the language used by Japanese youth for informal communication. Danendra (2021) states that the term *wakamono kotaba* is derived from the combination of three Japanese terms: *wakai* meaning “young,” *mono* meaning “person,” and *kotaba* meaning “language.”

Yonekawa (1997) states that *wakamono kotaba* is characterized by the creativity of the Japanese language. This creativity is demonstrated by the use of newly coined words, abbreviations, borrowed words, and changes in the meaning of the word. These newly coined words are mostly used by the Japanese youth for informal communication with friends.

Forms of Wakamono Kotaba

Yonekawa (1997) states that *wakamono kotaba* has several forms. These forms are based on the way the words are coined. The forms of *wakamono kotaba* show the creativity and flexibility of the Japanese language as used by the Japanese youth for informal communication. *Wakamono kotaba* is not just the use of newly coined words; it also involves the use of different forms of changing the existing word or using a combination of several words.

The processes that are often involved in the development of *wakamono kotoba* include word shortening, borrowing of words from other languages, and the development of new words. Through this form of development, the youth are able to convey their identity and emotions as well as group relationships in an informal way. The following are the major types of *wakamono kotoba* as proposed by Yonekawa.

1) Ryakugo (略語) – Abbreviation

The term “ryakugo” refers to the practice of abbreviating longer words or phrases into shorter and more useful terms. This type of abbreviation is mostly used by young people for more effective communication. Long terms are considered inconvenient and formal in day-to-day communication. For this reason, people try to shorten the terms for easier pronunciation and efficient communication.

The term “ryakugo” has several forms in the Japanese youth language. For instance, the term may involve the elimination of some syllables from the beginning and the end of the term. Another form of “ryakugo” may involve the combination of the shortened forms of several terms. For instance, the term “gēmu” (ゲーム) may be abbreviated as “ge” (ゲ). This is an example of the application of the term “ryakugo” in the Japanese youth language (Yonekawa, 1997). The term “ryakugo” is considered the most effective term in the formation of the Japanese youth language.

2) Shingo (新語) – Newly Created Words

Shingo is a form of vocabulary that has been coined as a result of social change, technological development, and cultural trends. It is a form of vocabulary that is normally coined by younger generations to describe various cultural phenomena that may not have already been expressed in standard Japanese.

The development of vocabulary that is referred to as shingo is closely associated with popular culture, which may include television, anime, manga, and communication technologies such as the Internet. This form of vocabulary is normally dynamic in that it may be subject to change as a result of trends and may spread quickly among younger generations but may also be subject to change or decline after a certain period.

3) Gairaigo (外来語) – Loanwords

The term "gairaigo" is used to refer to words that have been borrowed from foreign languages, especially English, but have been adapted into the Japanese system of phonology and morphology. The influence of globalization and cultural exchange in the world has increased the number of words used in Japanese language, especially in young language. In wakamono kotoba, "gairaigo" is used in an adapted form that may include further modifications such as clipping, sound change, or a combination with Japanese words. This ensures that foreign words are adapted smoothly into the Japanese word while still retaining their original meaning or acquiring further meaning in context. The use of "gairaigo" is an indication of the openness of Japanese youth culture.

4) Zōgo (造語) – Creative Word Formation

The term Zōgo refers to the development of completely new words by employing creative linguistic processes. Contrary to the concept of shingo, the concept of zōgo highlights the creative aspect of the speaker in developing completely new words. This concept of developing completely new words may include the combination of existing words in an unconventional manner or by employing changes in the phonology of the words. It may also include the development of completely new words that convey emotions and evaluations. The concept of zōgo highlights the creative aspect of the youth in developing completely new words. This concept also highlights the creative aspect of the youth in developing completely new words that may eventually become popular among the youth.

5) On Henka (音変化) – Sound Change

On Henka: The term on henka relates to the phonological changes in language, whereby the pronunciation of the word is modified in order to create a casual, expressive, or playful variant of the word. Sound changes are common in spoken language, and the changes may be reflected in written language, as in the case of manga communication.

In wakamono kotoba, sound changes relate to vowel reduction, substitution of consonant sounds, or other changes in the pronunciation of the word, which are aimed at facilitating the pronunciation of the word or expressing the speaker's emotions.

The different forms of wakamono kotoba reveal the dynamic nature of youth language in Japanese society. The language used by young people in Japan is constantly evolving, as reflected in the use of abbreviation, borrowing, sound changes, and the creation of new words, which are aimed at facilitating communication among the young in Japan.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method. according to Creswell (2014), Qualitative research is an investigation of linguistic data through interpretation rather than statistical measurement.

The source of data in this study is a manga book titled Shangri-La Frontier Volume 1, authored by Katarina 2021. The data gathered in this study includes words that fall under the category of wakamono kotiba, which are presented in dialogue form in the book.

Data collection in this study involved observation, where the researcher analyzed the book to identify words that fall under the category of wakamono kotiba, the data analysis was conducted through several stages:

1) Identifying wakamono kotoba expressions

- 2) Classifying their morphological formation processes
- 3) Analyzing their formation based on Yonekawa's theory
- 4) Interpreting the linguistic patterns of youth language

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of wakamono kotoba expressions found in the manga *Shangri-La Frontier*, several forms of word formation can be identified according to Yonekawa (1997) classification. The expressions analyzed in this study include 神ゲー (**kami ge**) and クソゲー (**kuso ge**). These expressions are commonly used among Japanese gamers to evaluate the quality of video games.

Table 1. Morphological Formation of Wakamono Kotoba

No	Data	Base Form	Wakamono Kotoba Form (Yonekawa)	Contextual Meaning
1	神ゲー (kami ge)	神 (kami) + ゲーム (gēmu)	Ryakugo + Gairaigo + Fukugōgo	Extremely good game
2	クソゲー (kuso ge)	クソ (kuso) + ゲーム (gēmu)	Ryakugo + Gairaigo + Fukugōgo	Extremely bad game
3	ヤバイ レベル (yabai reberu)	ヤバイ (yabai) + レベル (reberu)	Shingo + Gairaigo + Fukugōgo	Extremely intense / insane level

Table 1 shows that wakamono kotoba in this study are made by using methods like abbreviation (ryakugo), loanwords (gairaigo), and compounding (fukugōgo).

1) 神ゲー (kami ge)



Figure 1. Usage of 神ゲー (kami ge) in Shangri-La Frontier

The expression 神ゲー (kami ge) is a common expression in Japanese gaming communities to refer to a game that is extremely good. As shown in figure 1 above. According to Yonekawa's categorization, this expression involves a series of processes of forming wakamono kotoba.

Firstly, this expression involves a series of 略語 (ryakugo), which is a word-shortening expression. This expression is common in youth language as it allows for words to become shorter and easier to use in a normal conversation.

Secondly, this expression involves a series of 外来語 (gairaigo), which are words that are borrowed from a foreign language. This expression is borrowed from a language as it is derived from a word called "game," which is an English word borrowed into a Japanese sound system.

Lastly, this expression can also be classified as a 複合語 (fukugōgo), which involves a series of compound words. This expression involves a series of words where a word called 神 (kami), which means "god," is compounded to form a new expression of lexical words to mean "god-tier" as a way of expressing high praise for a given game. From a semantic perspective, the word kami undergoes 意味の拡張 (imi no kakuchō) or semantic extension.

When compared with the findings in the study by Angelina and Novella (2022), this expression reflects a broader characteristic of wakamono kotoba, namely the combination of word formation processes and semantic change. The study explains that wakamono kotoba is not only formed through processes such as compounding, clipping, and borrowing, but is also frequently accompanied by meaning expansion or shift depending on usage context. In this case, the use of 神 (kami) in 神ゲー demonstrates a semantic expansion from its original meaning "god" to an evaluative meaning indicating something of extremely high quality. This aligns with the finding that wakamono kotoba often develops connotative meanings that differ from their original lexical meanings. Furthermore, the study also highlights that not all wakamono kotoba undergo meaning change, but when they do, the change often serves expressive or evaluative purposes, which is clearly reflected in the use of 神ゲー as a form of exaggerated praise in gaming culture.

2) クソゲー (kuso ge)



Figure 2. Usage of クソゲー (kuso ge) in Shangri-La Frontier

The second expression under analysis is クソゲー (kuso ge), which is mostly used by gamers to refer to a game that is of low quality or is frustrating to play. As illustrated in figure 2. Like in the previous case, the formation of kuso ge is based on 略語 (ryakugo). The word ゲーム (gēmu) is shortened to ゲー (ge) in casual conversations. The use of such a shortened form is based on the tendency of young people to use simplified forms in casual conversations.

The word ゲーム (gēmu) is also classified as 外来語 (gairaigo) as it is a combination of the English word “game.” The use of such a word in wakamono kotoba is a result of the significant impact of global culture and technology on youth language in Japan. Moreover, the expression kuso ge is classified as 複合語 (fukugōgo) as it is a combination of two words: クソ (kuso) and ゲー (ge). The word kuso, which originally means “excrement,” is used as a negative evaluative modifier in such expressions. From a semantic point of view, there is a concept of semantic shift, which is called 意味の変化 (Imi no Henka). In other words, there is a shift in the meaning of the word kuso, as it originally refers to excrement but then comes to mean a strong expression of dissatisfaction or discontent. When it is joined with ge, it forms a common slang expression in gaming culture to mean a “terrible game.” (Suhendar, 2024).

When compared with the findings of Kazuyuki Matsumoto et al. (2012), the expression クソゲー also reflects one of the key characteristics of wakamono kotoba, namely its strong association with emotional expression. Matsumoto et al. (2012) explain that wakamono kotoba often functions as a linguistic tool to convey emotions such as anger and dissatisfaction, and is frequently used in informal communication, particularly in online contexts. In this case, the use of クソ (kuso) as a negative evaluative element aligns with their finding that many wakamono kotoba expressions are closely related to emotional categories such as “anger.” Furthermore, their study also highlights that wakamono kotoba tends to have varied forms and is often treated as non-standard language, which supports the idea that expressions like クソゲー are both structurally creative and semantically expressive in conveying strong negative evaluations.

3) ヤバイレベルだから (yabai reperu)



Figure 3. Usage of ヤバイレベル (yabai reperu) in Shangri-La Frontier

The expression ヤバイレベル (yabai reperu) is commonly used among Japanese youth to describe something that is extremely intense, shocking, or beyond normal expectations. As shown in figure 3, this reflects the tendency of youth language to prioritize expressiveness and emotional intensity in informal communication.

Firstly, this expression involves 新語 (shingo). The word ヤバイ (yabai), which originally means “dangerous,” has undergone semantic expansion and is widely used among young people to express something impressive, extreme, or surprising. This semantic flexibility aligns with findings by Stephanie Coates (2010), who explains that youth language often adapts meanings creatively to convey emotional nuance and interpersonal closeness in communication.

Secondly, this expression includes 外来語 (gairaigo). The word レベル (reberu) is borrowed from the English word “level,” reflecting the influence of globalization and media culture on Japanese youth language. This supports Yonekawa (1997), who states that loanwords are frequently integrated and modified within wakamono kotoba.

Lastly, this expression is categorized as 複合語 (fukugōgo), as it combines ヤバイ (yabai) and レベル (reberu) into a compound form. From a semantic perspective, ヤバイ undergoes 意味の拡張 (imi no kakuchō), shifting from a negative meaning (“dangerous”) to a broader evaluative meaning that can be either positive or negative depending on context.

When compared with the findings of Stephanie Coates (2010), it can be seen that the use of ヤバイレベル reflects a similar tendency in Japanese youth language to enhance emotional expression through linguistic creativity. Coates (2010) emphasizes that youth communication, especially in digital media, often incorporates unconventional and expressive forms to replicate spoken interaction and convey subtle emotional cues. In contrast to the orthographic and symbolic strategies found in keitai shousetsu—such as emoticons, unconventional punctuation, and script variation—ヤバイレベル demonstrates that similar expressive functions can also be achieved through lexical and semantic innovation. This suggests that while the medium may differ, both forms of youth language share the same underlying goal of enhancing expressiveness and reinforcing social intimacy. Therefore, the expression ヤバイレベル supports the broader argument that wakamono kotoba is not only shaped by structural processes, but also by communicative needs that prioritize emotional nuance and identity expression in youth culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The goal of this study is to examine the morphological development of wakamono kotoba in the manga Shangri-La Frontier based on Yonekawa’s categorization in 1997. The study revealed that the wakamono kotoba expressions in this study were primarily created by a set of linguistic mechanisms such as ryakugo, gairaigo, and fukugōgo.

神ゲー and クソゲー are two expressions that will be used to illustrate how these mechanisms are used in youth language in general and in gaming language in particular. In both expressions, ゲーム (gēmu), which is a loanword

from English and means “game,” undergoes a linguistic mechanism called ryakugo, which is a process of abbreviation in which a word is shortened by removing one or more sounds from it, resulting in ゲー (ge). Then, it is combined with another word to form a compound word. 神ゲー is a combination of 神 (kami) and ゲー to refer to a game that is extremely good, while クソゲー is a combination of クソ (kuso) and ゲー to refer to a game that is extremely bad or disappointing.

From a semantic perspective, the analysis also points to the phenomenon of semantic change. The term "kami" is seen to have undergone a process of semantic extension or "imi no kakuchō," in which the meaning extends beyond "god" to mean "outstanding." At the same time, the term "kuso" is seen to have undergone a process of semantic shift or "imi no henka," in which the meaning is shifted from literal to negative evaluative meaning.

The analysis points to the fact that "wakamono kotoba" is indeed an embodiment of the creativity and dynamism of Japanese youth language. Moreover, the fact that these terms are used in manga dialogue points to the fact that manga is indeed an important source for the analysis of contemporary informal Japanese. Further studies are recommended in this regard in order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of "wakamono kotoba" in contemporary Japanese society.

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