

Katarzyna Sonnenberg-Musiał
ORCID: 0000-0002-0722-5021

The Importance of Style in Sōseki's *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru*

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/sijp.2021.64-65.5>

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the mosaic of styles in Natsume Sōseki's *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru* (*I Am a Cat*, 1905-1906). It focuses on the meaning and connotations of the first-person pronoun in the title, analyses the characteristics of the narrator's expression and its development in the novel, and traces the elements of parody in the manner other cat characters echo human speech. It suggests that in discussing the complex linguistic structure of Sōseki's novel it may be more effective to use the concept of style and stylization rather than that of *yakuwarigo*.

KEYWORDS: *Wagahai-wa neko de aru*, Sōseki, stylization, parody, humour

Introduction: On Style in Fiction

The language of fictional characters is one means of showing what the fictional world is about and readers usually build up their expectations with regards to who speaks how in a novel, although it cannot be measured against any real-life situation. In fictional speech, the creative and the mimetic are thus blended together but hardly ever do we, readers, expect the language to be a one-to-one reflection of reality. Nor is it the first wish of novelists to make the characters in their novels repeat the exact words which are expected in a given situation outside of the fictional world. Even realistic novels are creative in their use of language and “often a considered judgment on distinguished literary renderings of the spoken word (e.g. in the work of great nineteenth-century novelists) is that they aspire not so much to realism as to a superior expressiveness of the kind which we do not ordinarily achieve in real life” (Leech and Short 2007: 134). Hence the expressiveness even in the nineteenth-century realistic novels mentioned in the quotation remains tenable, or at least admissible.

The fictional speech may be appealing precisely because it is more vivid and memorable than reality while remaining relatable for its readers. It may “aspire to a special kind of realism, a special kind of authenticity, in representing the kind of language which a reader can recognise, by observation, as being characteristic of a particular situation.” (ibid. 129)

Often writers resort to stylisation when exploring the characteristics of languages and variants commonly associated with a certain period in history, a given region, social or ethnic community, a literary movement, or another writer's style (mostly in the form of a pastiche). They do not refrain from creating idiolects for their characters either.

The stylisation may, to a certain degree, be associated with what has been termed as “role languages” or *yakuwarigo*, i.e. assortments of linguistic characteristics on the levels of phonetics, prosody, vocabulary or grammar that can be linked with a certain type of stereotypical linguistic behaviour or role (Kinsui 2003: 105). The interest of *yakuwarigo*, however, lies primarily in associating particular linguistic features of a character's speech with stereotypical social roles. The most distinctive features of *yakuwarigo* include: first-person pronoun (*washi*, *atashi*, *ore*), aspect form (*te oru*, *te iru*, *teru*), and final particle (i.e. *zo*, *wa*, *ze*) (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015: 30). Contrary to the main focus of *yakuwarigo*, stylisation explores its inherent dialogism which consists in different types of speech contrasted with and reinterpreting one another (Głowiński et al. 1976: 427-428). Therefore, although Natsume Sōseki's much-debated *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru* 吾輩は猫である (*I Am a Cat*, 1905-1906) may be read in the context of *yakuwarigo*, in this paper, it is suggested that the notions of style (as defined in the previously mentioned work by Głowiński et al.) and genres give more justice to the creativity, interrelatedness and parodic quality of the languages used by the characters in the novel.

Mosaic of Styles in *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru*

Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) was well aware of the existence of various traditions in fiction writing, both in and outside Japan. His novel – *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru* (*I Am a Cat*, 1905-1906) – which is said to have triggered his literary career¹ – was first published in instalments in “Hototogisu” ホトトギス (‘The Cuckoo’), a literary journal associated with *haiku* and *shasei* sketching. Before the novel appeared Sōseki also wrote poetry and sketches in Chinese and Japanese. He also published in “Hototogisu” his observations and sketches revolving around his two-year stay in England from 1900 till 1902: *Rondon Shōsoku* 倫敦消息 (*Letters from London*, 1901) – originally addressed to Masaoka Shiki, Sōseki's friend, *haiku* poet and editor (together with Takahama Kyoshi) of “Hototogisu”, and *Jitensha Nikki* 自転車日記 (*Bicycle Diary*, 1903), the

¹ It is even claimed that with the very first sentence of the novel Sōseki – the writer was born. See: Izu 1988: 57.

humorous account of Sōseki's attempt to learn how to ride a bicycle. *I Am a Cat* was written after Kyoshi had asked Sōseki to present something similar in style.

Sōseki, a graduate of English literature studies at Imperial University in Tokyo and an avid reader throughout his lifetime, was extremely well-read in Chinese, Japanese and English literatures, and very well acquainted with the Victorian novel. In his *Bungakuron* 文学論 ('Theory of Literature', 1907), he referred to William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens and George Eliot, among others. He appreciated Jane Austen, and he also discussed in lectures and essays the eighteenth-century novels by Daniel Defoe and Laurence Sterne. All of this proves his avid interest in the genre. In *I Am a Cat* Sōseki explores the techniques of *shaseibun* 写生文 depiction and of *rakugo* 落語, the popular art of comic storytelling performed on stage. It is commonly known that originally the text was meant as a short humorous sketch, but the readers' positive response triggered a much longer narration consisting of eleven long chapters. Sōseki's novel, while reflecting the Japanese narrative traditions, also echoes the tradition of the English satire, with Jonathan Swift as its prominent representative, and the voice of the cat narrator brings associations with E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*. Just like Katt Murr, the nameless cat in Sōseki's novel observes the world of people and describes it in human language. The first title suggested by Sōseki to Kyoshi was *Neko Den* 猫伝 *A Cat's Story*, but it was later changed and became a simple sentence: *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru*, which is also the opening sentence of the novel (Nakano 2007: 71).

I Am a Cat

Sōseki began his novel with two simple sentences, of which the first became the famous title:

Wagahai-wa neko de aru. Namae-wa mada nai.

吾輩は猫である。名前はまだ無い。(Sōseki 2006: 7)

I am a cat. As yet I have no name. (Sōseki 2002: 15)

The juxtaposition of a common animal with a rather unexpected first-person singular pronoun attracts the readers' attention from the beginning².

² Many writers imitated Sōseki's formula, including Hosaka Kiichi in *Wagahai-no Mitaru Amerika* (*The America the Cat Saw*, 1918) and Uchida Hyakken's *Gansaku Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru* (*Counterfeit: I Am a Cat*, 1949). See: Nagayama 1998: 212; Kawana 2010:1.

Yoko Matsuoka McClain emphasises that it was usually politicians, bureaucrats or scholars who referred to themselves as “wagahai” and the pronoun combined arrogance “with a certain affectation” (Matsuoka McClain 2006: 19). The pronoun appears in Tsubouchi Shōyō’s *Tōsei Shosei Katagi* 当世書生氣質 (*The Character of Today’s Students*, 1885-1886), where it is used by students who view themselves as representatives of the country’s intellectual elite, as well as in Futabatei Shimei’s *Ukigumo* 浮雲 (*Drifting Clouds*, 1887), where it is also used by the characters who think highly of themselves. Mikołaj Melanowicz indicates that the pronoun was also used as plural “by men from the haikai poetry circles” (Melanowicz 2006: 22).

Interestingly, Sōseki also used the pronoun with reference to himself in *Rondon Shōsoku*:

吾輩は日本においても交際はいだ。まして西洋へ来て無弁
舌なる英語でもって窮窟^{きゅうくつ}な交際をやるのはもつとも厭^{きら}いだ。
(Sōseki 2011b: 654)

I am someone who does not like socializing even when in Japan. Coming to the West and attempting to socialize awkwardly in broken English is something I positively loathe. (Sōseki 2005: 57)

In *Jitensha Nikki* a similarly self-ironic use of “wagahai” may be found:

かようなとっさの際には命が大事だから退却にしようか落
車にしようかなどの分別は、さすがの吾輩にも出なかった
と見えて、おやと思ったら身体はもう落ちておった (Sōseki
2011a: 694)

At such instant preserving one’s life is the main thing and, without contemplating whether to retreat or fall off, my body has already let out an ‘eek!’ and fallen. (Sōseki 2005: 87)

In the case of *Jitensha Nikki*, the use of “wagahai” is without doubt stylistically motivated as these are the only instances where this pronoun appears. Throughout the text, Sōseki uses more common *yo* 余:

忘月忘日 例の自転車を抱いて坂の上に控えたる余は徐^{おもむ}ろ
に眼を放^めつて遥^{ほう}かあなたの下を見廻^{はる}す (Sōseki 2011a: 686)

A certifiable day in a certifiable month. Holding my bicycle, I wait at the top of the slope and slowly let my eyes roam around a far distance below. (Sōseki 2005: 80)

In *I Am a Cat*, the use of “wagahai” also has a comic effect. Self-applied by a little nameless cat, it highlights the discrepancy between the nature of the first-person narrator and the language he uses, which is not only human but also tinged with a sense of aloofness. Matsuoka McClain summarises his situation as follows: “And here’s a cat, abandoned by his original owner, exhausted and starving but finally adopted because of his persistence, still referring to himself as »wagahai«” (Matsuoka McClain 2006: 19). The distance of superiority towards the depicted reality, which is thus expressed by the cat-narrator, helps the readers find even the most rigid criticism laughable.

The proud and distanced character of cat’s narration is additionally strengthened by the fact that his master uses in his diaries *yo* 余 – the first-person pronoun which is still rather formal, used traditionally by men, but is definitely less haughty: 余は年来の胃弱を直すために出来得る限りの方法を講じて見たがすべて駄目である, Sōseki 2006: 36 (‘I have tried every possible means to cure my ancient ailment, but all of them are useless’ Sōseki 2002: 40). The narrator’s first-person pronoun is also used to distinguish him from the other cats in the neighbourhood.

The frequently self-ironic use of “wagahai” in Sōseki’s sketches published before his famous novel encourages a connection between his own voice and the voice of the cat he created. Izu also emphasises this correspondence:

If one changes the perspective, the sentence “Wagahai-wa neko de aru” may refer also to the author who wears a high-collar shirt and a frock-coat, grows his moustache and proudly calls himself a high-school teacher or a university lecturer, but if one digs deep down, it is possible to read it as Sōseki’s saying that there is no difference between the wretched stray cat and himself, that he is the cat. (Izu 1988: 57)

Melanowicz (2006) also notices that “the narrator often seems not to be sure, whether he speaks as The Cat, the author or maybe as one of the participants of the party, such as Meitei” (26). The perspective of an eavesdropper or that of an observer is often enriched and enlarged by additional knowledge, accessible only to particular characters in the novel. Moreover, the cat is frequently very emotional in reporting what he hears and sees, which may lead to a conclusion that “[i]n no other novel has Sōseki been so frank and so critical in his statements on family, individualism and on the society in general, as he was in *Wagahai-wa neko de aru*” (ibid.). This illustrates how closely related the perspectives of the author and that of a fictional narrator are. Izu even claims that it is the author who imitates a cat’s voice, and as a consequence, what the readers are presented with is neither a cat’s perspective nor an entirely human one: “The narrator is neither a cat nor a man – it is a strange surreal creation caught between the two worlds” (Izu 1988: 59).

The Cat’s Language and Perspective

The cat who stays with the family of Mr. Sneeze (Kushami 苦沙弥), a teacher of English and an amateur composer of *haiku* and *shintaiishi*, has the opportunity to listen to diverse conversations his master has with a number of his guests: Waverhouse (Meitei 迷亭), Beauchamp (Tōfū 東風), Coldmoon (Kangetsu 寒月). Each of them has a different personality, which is reflected in the manner they speak and in the themes they touch upon. The manner in which those conversations are rendered illustrates what Leech and Short call the “ear for conversation”, that is the “ability to render in writing the characteristics of spoken conversational language,” which, however, “if it is well tuned for literary purposes, will tend to distance itself from the raw realities of spoken discourse” (Leech and Short 2007: 130).

The cat’s perspective created by Sōseki in his novel is one of the factors which make it remarkable and memorable. This is a first-person narrative from the fictional point of view which, as has frequently been pointed out, often corresponds with Sōseki’s worldview. Of course, there are numerous fairy tales in which animals are equipped with the capacity of speaking human language. More often than not, however, their stories are told by humans. Here, the situation is quite the reverse. It is the cat who describes the human world. Even if the anonymous animal uses human language and his reasoning is understandable and relatable to the readers, he cannot communicate with human characters in the novel. Izu illustrates this inability by referring to the episode in which the cat observes the thief but

cannot find any way to wake up his master (1988: 59). “I tried miaowing at them. – the cat says – Indeed I tried. At least twice, but somehow my throat just failed to function and no sound emerged. When at long last, and by enormous self-discipline I did manage to emit a single feeble mew, I was quickly shocked back into silence” (Sōseki 2002: 167). All these attempts are unsuccessful, which makes the cat comment: “Contrary even to their own idea of themselves, human beings are a careless and unwary lot. I myself feel quite worn out by the night’s excitements” (ibid. 176).

As Inukai notices, the story of *I Am a Cat* is told in human language by an anonymous subject who renounces human nature (2001: 172). The first paragraph displays the narrative voice Sōseki chose for his novel:

吾輩は猫である。名前はまだ無い。どこで生れたかとうと見当がつかぬ。何でも薄暗いじめじめした所でニャーニャー泣いていた事だけは記憶している。吾輩はここで始めて人間というものを見た。しかもあとで聞くとそれは書生という人間中で一番獰悪な種族であったそうだ。この書生というのは時々我々を捕えて煮て食うという話である。しかしその当時は何という考もなかったから別段恐しいとも思わなかった。(Sōseki 2006: 7)

I am a cat. As yet I have no name. I’ve no idea where I was born. All I remember is that I was miaowing in a dampish dark place when, for the first time, I saw a human being. This human being, I heard afterwards, was a member of the most ferocious human species; a shosei, one of those students who, in return for board and lodging, perform small chores about the house. I hear that, on occasion, this species catches, boils, and eats us. However, as at that time I lacked all knowledge of such creatures, I did not feel particularly frightened. (Sōseki 2002: 3)

The opening sentence sounds like a carefree invitation to what may be termed as “kaigyaku shōsetsu” 諧謔小説 (a humorous novel) full of incredible adventures (Izu 1988: 58). This nameless cat of unknown origin describes the world while relying on his senses – sight (薄暗い), touch and smell (じめじめした), and hearing (ニャーニャー). Interestingly, he

describes his own miaowing in human terms (ニャーニャー泣いていた). The cat's story is told in retrospect, which – to some extent – explains why he is able to name properly various elements of human reality. Although assertive, in formulating his opinions he very much depends on hearsay or rumours, which is evidenced both in the grammar and lexis he uses. Throughout the narrative, the cat becomes the readers' ears, introducing them to stories he hears in his master's house. When speaking about Sōseki's cat-narrator, Yoshimoto Takaaki even uses the expression “moving ears and eyes” (*idō suru mimi-to me* 移動する耳と眼) (Yoshimoto 2017: 9). Mikołaj Melanowicz (2006) explores this metaphor, agreeing with Yoshimoto that the narrator changes around the sixth chapter from “ears” to “eyes,” becoming an observer rather than an eavesdropper, and sometimes even disappearing altogether as a mediator (22-29). The discrepancy between the feline and the human worlds is a most frequent theme in the cat's musings. Some of his comments reach a high level of generalisation:

世の中を冷笑しているのか、世の中へ交りたいのだから、
 だらぬ事ことに肝癩かんしゃくを起おこしているのか、物外ぶつがいに超然ちょうぜんとしてい
 るのだからさっぱり見当けんとうが付つかぬ。猫などはそこへ行くと単
 純なものだ。(Sōseki 2006: 34)

One just can't tell whether he's mocking the world or yearning to be accepted into its frivolous company; whether he is getting furious over some piddling little matter or holding himself aloof from worldly things. Compared with such complexities, cats are truly simple. (Sōseki 2002: 37)

The narrator ridicules the inconclusive actions of his master and attributes them to the ambiguity of his motives, which is juxtaposed with the purported simplicity of cats. The verbosity of the cat, however, frequently undermines his self-professed clarity. It is to some extent explained by the pride he takes in his growing popularity: 吾輩は新年来多少有名になったので、猫ながらちょっと鼻が高く感ぜらるるのありがたい (Sōseki 2006: 25)³. The language and the perspective used

³ 'Since New Year's Day I have acquired a certain modest celebrity: so that, though only a cat, I am feeling quietly proud of myself. Which is not unpleasing.' (Sōseki 2002: 31)

here are a creative projection of what a man in a cat's position might have heard, seen, felt and spoke.

The cat's language is altogether created, "colloquially based", in "an orational style – a hybrid language inscribed with conventions of orality and scripted form" (Fujii 1993: 111). It echoes what the cat hears in his master's house, and often it is a mosaic of the styles of other characters, which James A. Fujii summarises as follows: "The playful pedantry of Meitei, the lively Edo-ko bluster of Kuro the cat, Mikeko the female cat's refined *yamanote* elocutions interlaced with affectations of young girls' speech, Kaneda's duplicitous language of the coarse *nouveau riche*, snatches of popular songs and rhymes, and many other distinctive voices" (ibid. 113). This is also noted by Matsuoka McClain (2006): "Each cat reflects his or her owner. An uneducated, rough, and ill-mannered gigantic black cat resides at a rickshaman's household; a white cat living across from Wagahai's house belongs to a military family who are heartless enough to throw away all the four newborn kittens; an argumentative cat that lives next door is owned by an attorney, and a gentle tortoiseshell cat is tenderly cared for by a koto teacher" (19). The mosaic of styles and registers reflects the complexity of the swirling times to which *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru* provides a vivid commentary (Yoshimoto 2017: 33). Here is one example of how the cat's language is influenced by various styles he encounters in his master's house:

この餅も主人と同じようにどうしても割り切れない。噛んでも噛んでも、三で十を割るごとく尽未来際方のつくはあ
るまいと思われた。この煩悶はんもんの際吾輩さいわがはいは覚えおぼず第二だいにの真理しんり
に逢着ほうちやくした。「すべての動物は直覚どうぶつ的に事物ちよつかくてきの適不適てきふてきを
予知す」真理はすでに二つまで発明したが、餅がくっ付い
ているので毫ごうも愉快を感じない。(Sōseki 2006: 39)

This rice-cake too, like my master, is aliquant. It looked to me that, however much I continued biting, nothing could ever result: the process could go on and on eternally like the division of ten by three. In the middle of this anguish I found my second truth: that all animals can tell by instinct what is or is not good for them. Although I have now discovered two great truths, I remain unhappy by reason of the adherent rice-cake. (Sōseki 2002: 44)

In this episode, the cat choked on a rice cake from a *zōni* soup, and his great struggle is witnessed by many people, including the wife, the children and the maid, who do not even try to help him. He hardly comments on the human cruelty but rather describes his struggle in pseudo-scientific terms, nearly treating himself as a subject of an experiment. Even when he tries to escape the dire situation by moving his tail and ears, the instinctive reaction is followed by logical reasoning, as if he were an observer rather than someone involved in the struggle: “Come to think of it, my ears and tail have nothing to do with the rice-cake. In short, I had indulged in a waste of wagging, a waste of ear-erection, and a waste of ear-flattening” (Sōseki 2002: 44). As Itahana points out, there are echoes of the styles of Meitei and Kangetsu in how the cat presents his reasoning (Itahana 1982: 6). Kangetsu’s manner of speaking may be represented by the passage below:

御承知の通りをかむ^{とき}時は、是非^{ぜひはな}鼻^つを掴みます、鼻^{はな}を^つ掴んで、
 ことにこの局部^{きよくぶ}だけに刺激^{しげき}を与^{あた}えますと、進化論^{しんかろん}の大原則^{だいげんそく}
 によって、この局部^{きよくぶ}はこの刺激^{しげき}に^あ応^おずるがため他に比例^ひし
 て不相^あ当^あな^あ発^あ達^あを^あ致^あします。皮^{かた}も自然^し堅^じくなり^あます、肉^にも
 次第^しに^あ硬^じくなり^あます。ついに凝^こって骨^ことなり^あます (Sōseki
 2006: 127)

As you will know, the act of blowing the nose involves the coarctation of that organ. Such stenosis of the nose, such astrictive and, one might even venture to say, pleonastic stimulation of so localized an area results, by response to that stimulus and in accordance with the well-established principles of Lamarckian evolutionary theory, in the development of that specific area to a degree disproportionate to the development of other areas. The epidermis of the affected area inevitably indurates and the subcutaneous material so coagulates as eventually to ossify. (Sōseki 2002: 123)

The cat speaks about discovering his “second truth” (*dai ni-no shinri* 第二の真理) in the way Kangetsu discusses “the act of nose-blowing” (the characters 鼻汁 indicate more specifically liquid nasal mucus) within the context of “the well-established principles of evolutionary theory” (*shinka*

ron-no daigensoku 進化論の大原則). Incorporating other characters' styles into the cat's speech makes it polyphonic, and, as a consequence, the readers encounter the "intratextual oppositions of elements with different stylistic and semantic quality, which – due to the juxtaposition – acquire particular distinctiveness and gain new hues of meaning" (Głowiński et al. 1976: 427-428).

The Parody of Human Language

The cat's perspective presented in *Wagahai-wa neko de aru* invites the readers' laughter, even if they laugh at their own vices and foolishness. It is partly because the cat remains serious in the face of all absurdities he vividly describes, thus creating what might be termed as "mock reality" with various elements which "arrange themselves into patterns or structures representative of human experience in an abstract, archetypal way" (Leech and Short 2007: 139).

The narrative voice is so important in sustaining the humour in the novel that Izu (1988) even declares: "If the story had not been told by the »cat«, the story would not be the least bit funny. Precisely because it is the »cat's« story even the boring episodes are comical" (58). However, although the narrative perspective is crucial, the humour in *Wagahai-wa neko de aru* is far more complex a phenomenon. Itahana indicates three levels of humour in Sōseki's novel, all stemming from juxtapositions and incongruity: the juxtaposition of life attitudes, the juxtaposition of ideologies, the juxtaposition of styles (Itahana 1982: 2-3). The array of loosely connected episodes with characters not limited to humans only and strings of self-references in the novel bring associations with *rakugo* storytelling. As in *rakugo*, in *Wagahai-wa neko de aru* there is also an attempt at distinguishing between the characters' styles. As has been indicated earlier, the cat combines some of the stylistic characteristics of his master's guests, which gives rise to the parodic effect of the novel.

Interestingly, the language and manners of other cat characters also reflect the social backgrounds of their masters. Here is the beginning of the conversation between the anonymous narrator and Kuro, the Rickshaw Blacky, included in the first chapter:

彼は大に軽蔑せる調子で「何、猫だ？猫が聞いてあきれら
あ。全てえ何こに住んでるんだ」随分傍若無人である。
「吾輩はこの教師の家にいるのだ」「どうせそんな事だ

ろうと思った。いやに瘠せてるじゃねえか」と大王だけに
気焰を吹きかける。(Sōseki 2006: 16)

In a tone of enormous scorn, the Emperor observed, “You. . . a cat? Well, I’m damned. Anyway, where the devil do you hang out?” I thought this cat excessively blunt-spoken. “I live here, in the teacher’s house.” “Huh, I thought as much. ‘Orrible scrawny, aren’t you.” Like a true Emperor, he spoke with great vehemence. (Sōseki 2002: 23)

The language of Kuro echoes how men would speak in the downtown area of Tokyo (previously Edo). This Edokko style, with its characteristic intonation, was often used onstage in *rakugo* performances. The use of “akireraa” (呆れらあ) instead of „akireru-yo” (呆れるよ), “ja nē-ka” (じゃねえか) instead of „ja nai-ka” (じゃないか), as well as the appearance of “zentē” (全てえ), the abbreviated form of “ittai zentai” (一体全体), may be considered the stylistic markers of the Edokko speech in the text. The anonymous narrator uses, as always, the first-person pronoun “wagahai”, which becomes his idiosyncratic marker, but although his answer echoes the grammatical pattern of the question: “Doko-ni sunde iru-n da” (何かに住んでいるんだ), he uses more formal “no” (の) instead of colloquial “n” (ん). This proves Yoko McClain’s statement that “»Wagahai«, himself lives at an English teacher’s house, and is therefore quite sophisticated” (Matsuoka McClain 2006: 19).

As the conversation develops, the stylistic markers (underlined below) of Kuro’s speech become even more visible.

「一体車屋と教師とはどっちがえらいだろう」
「車屋の方が強いに極っていらあな。御めえのうちの主人
を見ねえ、まるで骨と皮ばかりだぜ」
「君も車屋の猫だけに大分強そうだ。車屋にいると御馳走
が食えると見えるね」
「におれなんざ、どこの国へ行つたって食い物に不自由は
しねえつもりだ。御めえなんかも茶^{ちや}臼^ばばかりぐるぐる廻^{まわ}つ

ていねえで、ちっと己おれの後あとへくっつ付きいて来て見きねえ。一と月とたたねえうちに見違えるように太れるぜ」

「追きってそう願ぼうう事くにしよう。しかし家きやうしは教ほ師うの方が車屋くるまやより大おおきいのに住すんでいおるよもうに思おもわれる」
「籠べらぼう棒ぼうめ、うちなんかいおおくら大おおきくたたって腹はらの足たしになるもんか」 (Sōseki 2006: 17)

“Which do you think is superior, a rickshaw-owner or a teacher?”

“Why, a rickshaw-owner, of course. He’s the stronger. Just look at your master, almost skin and bones.”

“You, being the cat of a rickshaw-owner, naturally look very tough. I can see that one eats well at your establishment.”

“Ah well, as far as I’m concerned, I never want for decent grub wherever I go. You too, instead of creeping around in a tea-plantation, why not follow along with me? Within a month, you’d get so fat nobody’d recognize you.”

“In due course I might come and ask to join you. But it seems that the teacher’s house is larger than your boss’s.”

“You dimwit! A house, however big it is, won’t help fill an empty belly.” (Sōseki 2002: 24)

Apart from the phenomena indicated before, there use of postpositional “ze” (ぜ) and the choice of derogatory words such as “berabōme” (籠棒め) enrich Kuro’s expression stylistically. The narrator’s style is contrasted with this splendid example of the dialect of Edo’s downtown (“Edo kotoba”) – it remains neutral and polite, possibly echoing the language of the narrator’s master. The contrast is vividly rendered also in the English translation in which Kuro uses the abbreviated, simple forms and adequately disdainful expressions (“berabōme” as “dimwit”). The derogatory comments Kuro makes, however, are not left altogether unanswered. The narrator’s speech is polite, it is true, but his comments expose Kuro’s rudeness by highlighting the discrepancy between “the enormous scorn” of Kuro’s attitude and his title of the Emperor. As Itahana aptly indicates, Kuro ridicules the “Cat”, but the “Cat” also treats Kuro with scorn (Itahana 1982: 2). The pompous title and the lack of content to justify it become one of the sources of humour in *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru*.

Conclusion: The Cat's Perspective and Varieties of Laughter

The style of conversations in *Wagahai-wa neko de aru*, as has been mentioned before, resembles *rakugo* dramatized monologues, and explores the colloquial style of Japanese at the time. The perspective of a cat seems to encourage such explorations, as is aptly put by Fujii: “A persona with no history and nameless to the end, this narrator deviates from both the effaced narration characteristic of *genbun'itchi* prose and the Japanese traditional storyteller, who even while commenting did not insert himself in the narrative” (Fujii 1993: 113).

As the narration progresses, however, the perspective of the cat comes closer and closer to the style of subjective confession, and the humour takes the shape of self-derision and severe criticism of civilisation (Melanowicz 2006: 27). The convention of *rakugo* thus gives way to the style of satirical writings, such as *Gulliver's Travells* by Jonathan Swift, of which Sōseki was an avid and perceptive reader. The cat's linguistic idiosyncrasies also tend to become less visible, as he frequently adopts the points of views of other characters. With time the irony turns grimmer as the cat experiences insurmountable loneliness and an inability to communicate not only with humans but also with other cats. This intricate process can hardly be depicted if one decides to only focus on role languages. The readers of *Wagahai-wa Neko de Aru* are drawn into a comical world only to find out that they themselves become the target of a satire, which may at times be rather biting. This change in humour is also reflected in the style of the cat – a nameless narrator whose idiosyncrasies gradually dissolve in his narration. The references to various styles of expression in the novel help create a world that is attractive to readers because it transcends stereotypes in language and perception, thus evading any one-dimensional reading. It is a world where styles rather than “role languages” are blended to form an ingenious work of fiction.

References

Fujii, James A. 1993. *Complicit fictions. The subject in the modern Japanese prose narrative*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press.

Głowiński, Michał, Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński [eds.] 1976. *Słownik terminów literackich*, [dictionary of literary terms]. Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich.

Inukai Yūichi 2001. “Wagahai-wa hatashite neko-na-no-ka? Sōseki-no jiko genkyū suru chisei” [self-reference through a cat: Natsume Sōseki and his own parodists]. *Yokkaiichi Daigaku Ronshū* 13(2), 159-174 (犬飼裕一 「吾輩ははたして猫なのか? 漱石、自己言及する知性」 『四日市大学論集』).

Itahana Atsushi 1982. “Wagahai-wa neko de aru ron. Sono tagengo sekai-o meguri [discussion of *I am a cat*. The question of its multilingual world]. *Nihon Bungaku* 31(11), 1-12 (板花淳志 「『吾輩は猫である』論—その多言語世界をめぐる—」 『日本文学』).

Izu Toshihiko 1988. “»Neko«-no tanjō – Sōseki-no katarite” [the birth of the “cat” – Sōseki’s Narrator]. *Nihon Bungaku* 37(1), 57-68 [伊豆 利彦 「「猫」の誕生: 漱石の語り手」 『日本文学』).

Kawana, Sari 2010. “A narrative game of cat and mouse: Parody, deception, and fictional whodunit in Natsume Sōseki’s »Wagahai wa neko de aru«”. *Journal of Modern Literature* 33 (4), 1-20.

Kinsui Satoshi 2003. *Vācharu Nihongo: Yakuwarigo-no nazo* [virtual Japanese. The enigma of role language]. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten (金水敏 「ヴァーチャル日本語 役割語の謎」 岩波書店).

Kinsui Satoshi, Hiroko Yamakido 2015. “Role language and character language.” *Acta Linguistica Asiatica*, 5(2), 29-40.

Leech, Geoffrey, Mick Short 2007. *Style in fiction. A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose*, Second edition. Harlow: Pearson Longman.

Matsuoka McClain, Yoko 2006. “Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) and his first novel *I am a cat*.” *Silva Iaponicarum*, 7, 14-21.

Melanowicz, Mikołaj 2006. “Wagahai-wa neko de aru – Narrator’s eyes and ears.” *Silva Iaponicarum*, 7, 22-29.

Nagayama Yasuo 1998. “Wagahai-wa neko de aru”-no nazo [the mystery of *I am a cat*]. Tokyo: Bunshun shinsho (長山靖生 「『吾輩は猫である』の謎」 文春新書).

Nakano Harumi 2007. “Bungaku-no bunpōteki yomikata. Wagahai-wa neko de aru-o megutte” [reading literature through grammar. The case of *I am a cat*]. *Nagasaki Kokusai Daigaku Ronsō*, 7, 67-84 (中野 はるみ 文学

の文法的読み方—『吾輩は猫である』をめぐって—』『長崎国際大学論叢』).

Natsume Sōseki 2002. *I am a cat*. Transl. Aiko Itō, Graeme Wilson. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle.

Natsume Sōseki 2011a. *Jitensha nikki* [bicycle diary]. [In:] *Natsume Sōseki zenshū* [the collected works of Natsume Sōseki] 10. Tokyo: Chikuma shōbō, 681-695 (夏目漱石 「自転車日記」 『夏目漱石全集』筑摩書房).

Natsume Sōseki 2011b. *Rondon shōsoku* [letters from London]. [In:] *Natsume Sōseki zenshū* [the collected works of Natsume Sōseki] 10. Tokyo: Chikuma shōbō, 648-680 (夏目漱石 「倫敦消息」 『夏目漱石全集』筑摩書房).

Natsume Sōseki 2005. *The Tower of London. Tales of Victorian London*. Transl. Damian Flanagan. London and Chester Springs: Peter Owen.

Natsume Sōseki 2006. *Wagahai-wa neko de aru* [I am a cat]. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten (2th edition) (夏目漱石 「吾輩は猫である」岩波書店).

Yoshimoto Takaaki 2017. *Natsume Sōseki-o yomu* [reading Natsume Sōseki]. Tokyo: Chikuma shōbō (吉本隆明 「夏目漱石を読む」筑摩書房).

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Katarzyna Sonnenberg-Musiał

Katarzyna Sonnenberg-Musiał is assistant professor at the Department of Japanology and Sinology, Jagiellonian University, Krakow. She pursued her studies in Japanese language and literature in Krakow (Jagiellonian University), Kanazawa (Kanazawa University) and Tokyo (Ochanomizu University); she has published a number of articles and monographs on the narrative strategies in early-modern and modern Japanese literature; she translated into Polish works of Ihara Saikaku, Higuchi Ichiyō, Kunikida Doppo, Natsume Sōseki, Mori Ōgai, Nagai Kafū, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Hiraide Takashi and others.