Stratification of Yakuwarigo as Character Stylization Patterns

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/sijp.2021.64-65.1

ABSTRACT
This study aims to revise core definitions and categories of stylistic strategies introduced to Japanese discourse as yakuwarigo 役割語. For this purpose, the key concepts of yakuwarigo studies are briefly introduced, with a particular focus on the lack of clarity in the terminology used in the discourse and on possible improvements to the preexisting categorizations. The established term ‘role language’ (Kinsui 2017), used as the English equivalent of yakuwarigo, and four types of Character Language (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015) are reassessed based on how they correspond with the observed nature of the phenomena. The correlations between linguistic markers, characteristic traits of fictional speakers linked with them and complexity of character types result in the proposal of four Marker-Trait Relations (M-TR). The primary opposition among these relations is based on the axis of agreement and disagreement between linguistic markers and character traits composing particular stylization patterns or clichés. This differentiation is followed by the distinction of Character Stylization Patterns (CSP), Character Stylization Markers (CSM) and Character Stylization Traits (CST). The suggested stratification takes into consideration both stylizations present in contemporary Japanese discourse and stylizations that are utilized only in the works of Japanese popular culture. This brief reevaluation of the yakuwarigo discourse results in the proposal of a methodological apparatus that allows for a more precise categorization of this stylistic subcategory and a potential adaptation in stylistic analysis of similar phenomena found in other languages.

KEYWORDS: Japanese linguistics, stylistics, terminology, typology, sociolinguistics, dialectology

The aim of this study is to reevaluate and revise existing definitions and categories of Japanese stylistic strategies known as yakuwarigo 役割語. The primary motivation behind this attempt lies in the evident need for improvements in the terminological consistency of this concept. For example, while the term yakuwarigo is translated as ‘role language’ into English, it is believed that this term does not reflect the true nature of the stylization strategies chosen as the subject of this study. Furthermore, multiple possible interpretations of the original term make the meaning of
‘role language’ unclear. This is due to the fact that it can be interpreted both at the level of whole stylization patterns and at the level of their lexical and grammatical markers (Kinsui 2017: 124). A similar statement can be made about the way particular relations between constituents of stylizations are addressed in the discourse. However, the mention of Character Language and its four types proposed by Kinsui and Yamakido (2015) hints at the possibility of mapping the relations between linguistic markers and distinctive character traits. Based on previous studies, this paper proposes both a set of Marker-Trait Relations that aids the categorization of *yakuwarigo* and a stratified model of Character Stylization Patterns. Special focus is put on various dependencies between stylizations, actual use of different speech styles, and relations between stylization markers and distinctive character traits.

**The Definition of *Yakuwarigo* as Speech Stylistics**

As a field of scholarly inquiry, *yakuwarigo* studies date back to 2003, when the term was first used by Satoshi Kinsui. However, to introduce the stylistic phenomena that are the subject of this field of studies, a more recent definition of *yakuwarigo* is cited below:

> Often in Japanese fiction and popular culture, a character’s vocabulary and grammar vary greatly according to the person’s attributes (gender, age, social status, occupation, region of residence or birthplace, appearance, personality, etc.). Consequently, one can infer the type of role portrayed from the character’s vocabulary and grammar. Examples of established character types in popular culture, associated with particular linguistic features, include the elderly male, the young lady of a good family, and the Chinese person. Their fictional utterances often make these established character types easily recognizable in Japanese culture, even if actual people fitting these character types are unlikely to produce such utterances in real life. (Kinsui 2017: 125)

As the description suggests, the concept introduced by Kinsui consists of elements with varying levels of complexity. One of them is the level of linguistic markers that evoke particular character stereotypes, yet another is the level of those character stereotypes. These levels require precise terms that do not seem to be evident in the cited discourse. However, before revising the preexisting terminology, it is crucial to assess the accuracy of
basic definitions. What is more, the relation between stylistic markers and character stylization described as yakuwarigo requires further explanation. Stylized vocabulary and grammar are connected with distinctive character types. Particular grammatical categories are described as the primary sources of potential markers of yakuwarigo stylizations. Another excerpt from the previously cited book shows some of such categories. The grammatical analysis of examples included in the cited text is omitted due to a different focus of this paper.

Let us look at a few sample variations of a phrase meaning ‘Yes, I know that’ in (1). The hypothetical speakers of (1a) to (1c) are an elderly male, a female, and a macho male, respectively.

(1)  
   a. Sō-ja washi ga shit-teoru-zo  
       […]  
   b. Sō-yo atashi ga shit-teiru-wa  
       […]  
   c. Sō-da ore ga shit-teru-ze  
       […] (After Kinsui 2010: 51)

In these examples, the respective combinations of the copula (i.e., ja, [zero copula+] particle yo, or da), first-person pronoun (i.e. washi, atashi, or ore), aspect form (i.e. teoru, teiru, or teru) and final particle, shūjoshi (i.e. zo, wa, or ze) correspond to the character types portrayed (elderly male, female, macho male). These sets of spoken language features (e.g. vocabulary and grammar) and phonetic characteristics (e.g. intonation and accent patterns), associated with particular character types, are called yakuwarigo (“role language”). (Kinsui 2017: 125-126)

As it can be seen in the cited examples, all grammatical categories present in spoken Japanese, together with phonetical, lexical and phrasal varieties characteristic of particular social and regional dialects of this language, could be treated as potential sources of yakuwarigo. Furthermore, different character traits are stereotypically linked with different linguistic markers. Based on the notion that patterns previously mentioned as Role Language (abbrev. RL) points at recurring character stylization strategies established in popular culture, any stylizations that did not match these criteria required introducing a separate term. Hence, four types of correlations that
are not to be treated as RL were introduced as Character Language (abbrev. CL):

Character Language Type (i): Restricted Role Language – a speech style that, while associated with a particular social or cultural group, is not widely enough recognized within the speech community at large to qualify as true role language.
Character Language Type (ii): Role Language Shifted Outside of Its Social or Cultural Groups – a speech style in which a type of role language is unexpectedly adopted by a character who does not belong to the social or cultural group with which it is typically associated.
Character Language Type (iii): Regional Dialect Employed to Represent a Character’s Personality – a speech style in which a type of role language is employed to express its speaker’s personality, rather than the stereotype of the social or cultural group with which it is associated.
Character Language Type (iv): Unique Character Language – a peculiar speech style that does not correspond to any social or cultural group, but is assigned to a certain character for his/her role in the story (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015: 32-39).

The differences between particular Character Language Types (abbrev. CLT) are based either on the way particular stylization patterns relate to a non-stylistic use of a speech style, social dialect or regional dialect (CLT2 and CLT3), or on the degree particular stylizations are established as recurring patterns (CLT1 and CLT4). This typology creates an opposition between the proper RL and the CL that cannot be classified as RL. The former guarantees a high probability of correct inference of speaker traits based on used vocabulary and grammar, or the other way around. On the other hand, the latter points at either little or no possibility of such inference due to particular relations between linguistic markers and distinctive character traits typical for speech stylization. This is due to the fact that either these relations are not recognizable, or they differ from what can be expected based on the conventionalized use of speech styles. Hence, the introduction of CL provides useful insight into the actual extent of the stylistic subcategory first introduced as yakuwarigo.

**Marker-Trait Relations in Character Stylization Patterns**
The preliminary introduction of RL and CL with its subtypes allows for further stratification of these subcategories of Japanese speech stylistics. The paper cited above attempts to categorize distinct RL patterns, dividing them into six subgroups based on the following categories:

I. Gender: male language, female language, gay male language
II. Age/generation: elderly male language, elderly female language, middle-aged male language, young speaker’s language, boy’s language, schoolgirl language, gal language
III. Social class/occupation: wealthy woman’s language, young-lady-from-a-good-family language, boss language, formal-speech language, king/nobles language, butler’s language, army language, comedian’s language, doctor’s language, (young)-dancing-girl-of-Kyōto language, maid language, yakuza (gangster) language, delinquent-girl’s language, sumo-wrestler language
IV. Region/nationality/ethnicity: Osaka language/Kansai language, rural language, Okinawan language, Owari language, Tosa language, Nagoya language, Kyūshū language, Kyōto language, arimasu-language, aruyo-language, pidgin, broken language, Chinese language
V. Pre-modern: Edo language, princess language, Kyōto-Ōsaka language, court-noble language, live-in student language, merchant-class language, ninja language, samurai language, prostitute language, jii (old chaperon) language, downtown language
VI. Imaginary creatures: alien language, god language, ghost language (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015: 31-32)

Even though this categorization includes over fifty variants of yakuwarigo, it still lists only some of the stylization patterns already observed in Japanese popular culture by contributors to this field of study. The range of stylizations presented by Kinsui and Yamakido includes only variants based on the dialects that have been noted to have particular stereotypes linked to their users. Also, multiple additional stylizations, such as patterns relying on the onomatopoeic repertoire of the Japanese language, could be included, for example, the feline language, in which the onomatopoeia nyaにゃ (lit. ‘meow’) replaces phonologically similar parts of utterances in fiction (Akizuki 2012). However, this categorization of yakuwarigo hints
at an open stylistic category, serving as a starting point for further categorization.

One additional remark can be made regarding the terminology used in the cited categorization. The English term *language* used by Kinsui and Yamakido suggests there is at least some systemic complexity in these stylizations. However, as the names assigned to them suggest, their use is restricted to utterances whose aim is to evoke particular character types. Hence, in most cases, the use of the term Character Stylization Pattern (abbrev. CSP) instead of *language* seems to express the function of stylizations in a more precise way, for example, elderly male CSP, formal-speech CSP, gal CSP, broken language CSP, ninja CSP, etc.

Due to the fact that *yakuwarigo* is defined as restricted to genres of Japanese popular culture such as comic books and animated cartoons, they require a brief introduction. One feature shared by them is their multimodality, which means “the coexistence of more than one semiotic mode within a given context” (Gibbons 2013: 8). The semiotic modes present in comic books and animated cartoons are text, picture and sound. For the purpose of this paper, only multimodality based on the coexistence of text and picture will be taken into consideration. The inclusion of the visual mode allows for a more complex character stylization than in standard text-based literature due to the possibility of emphasizing some direct relations between textual speech stylization markers and visual traits of fictional characters. Four relations of this kind can be introduced in order to enhance the scope of comparison proposed in preceding typologies of *yakuwarigo* stylizations. These relations can also be applied to contexts that are lacking multimodality, where character traits point at any characteristic features of fictional speakers indicated in text, composing CSP. Previously cited CLT will be used as reference for the proposed Marker-Trait Relations (abbrev. M-TR).

The first of the relations introduced in this paper is the Relation of Agreement (abbrev. RoA). It points at the compatibility of linguistic markers and graphic depictions of fictional characters’ traits in a particular RL or CL character stylization pattern. Examples of RoA stylizations can be observed in female characters who use stereotypically female speech or characters representing particular social groups who use the corresponding social dialects. This basic relation applies to most RL stylizations, CLT1 and CLT3. These two types of CL adhere to the requirements of RoA due to the fact that even though they are not recognized as widely as RL, they still are composed of compatible markers and traits.
The second relation introduced in this paper is the Relation of Emphasis (abbrev. RoE). Even though it could be treated as a subtype of RoA as it also requires the M-D relation of compatibility, its distinctive feature is the overuse of the markers. In other words, RoE points at the inclusion of linguistic markers and character trait depictions that is more excessive than the M-TR needs to be to function as a stylization. An example of CLT3 presented by the authors of the CL typology can be classified as a representation of RoE where a regional variant is used by a character in particular situations to represent that character’s personality (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015: 37-38). Another example would be the macho male type of a fictional character mentioned in the second excerpt from Kinsui (2017) in the first section of this paper. Excessive use of stereotypically masculine speech enhances the impression of a physically strong male character.

The third relation introduced in this paper is the Relation of Disagreement (abbrev. RoD). An example of this relation is the stereotypical use of African American Vernacular English in pre-contemporary American animated movies as the dialect used by animals that can speak (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015: 34). CLT2 is the only type of CL that is not compliant to relations number one and two precisely because it is shifted outside of the social or cultural groups that use it by default and its M-TR is that of disagreement.

The fourth and last relation proposed here could be treated as a subtype of the RoD as it is also founded on the incompatibility of textual and visual modes of stylization. However, its distinctive feature is the fact that these markers must not only be shifted (see CLT2), but also show the relation of contrast (M-TR of contrast). Hence, it could be named Relation of Contrast (abbrev. RoC). This relation can be observed in the examples of the stereotypical gay male CSP or delinquent girl CSP included in the categorization of RL by Kinsui and Yamakido. Table 1. compares all four M-TR, presenting how they are placed on the axis of agreement between markers and traits and how they correspond with RL and CL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M-TR</th>
<th>M-D in Agreement</th>
<th>M-D in Disagreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RoA</td>
<td>RoE</td>
<td>RoD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL, CL</td>
<td>Most RL, CLT1, CLT3</td>
<td>CLT2, some RL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Marker-Trait Relations and Role Language
The introduction of M-TR into the discourse can aid proper recognition of yakuwarigo as a subcategory of stylization strategies used in contemporary Japanese text, notably in popular culture genres.

**Character Stylization Patterns as a Stratified Model**

A brief analysis of possible designations of the Japanese term yakuwarigo and vagueness of the English term ‘role language’ proved the need for a new set of terms to designate particular elements of the quasi-systematic speech stylistics described by Kinsui, Yamaguchi and other scholars of this subject. Since these elements can be observed mainly in multimodal genres of contemporary Japanese popular culture such as comic book and animation, they should not be treated as literary stylistics. As it has been already noted, some particular stylization patterns are purely fictional and were created by establishing a conversational convention in a particular work of fiction, overusing existing speech styles for accomplishing various stylistic means, or mixing stylistic markers that do not appear together in the real-life use of the Japanese language. From the perspective of the revision of the terminology used in the discourse on yakuwarigo, it is important to differentiate between character stylizations, their linguistic markers (vocabulary, grammar, phonetics) and the distinctive traits of fictional characters with whom they correlate. Moreover, there is a need for reassessing the complexity of particular stylizations and revising them according to the proposed set of relations.

At the highest level of the stratified model proposed in this study lie Character Stylization Patterns (abbrev. CSP). This term indicates that particular speech patterns can function as a correlation between the character type and the speech style associated with it. As it has already been mentioned, RL types introduced in the second section of this study could be renamed with the addition of CSP abbreviation for easier categorization. However, some of the stylizations have limited sets of linguistic markers. Such stylizations are lacking variation; therefore, they seem cliché compared to patterns richer in available linguistic markers. Hence, Character Stylization Clichés (abbrev. CSC), a sub-category of CSP consisting of such patterns, could be distinguished.

Each CSP consists of two elements. In the proposed stratification, they are called Character Stylization Markers (abbrev. CSM) and Character Stylization Traits (abbrev. CST). The former are linguistic representations of speech styles conventionalized as characteristic for particular stylization patterns. The latter mean distinctive features of fictional speakers stereotypically linked with particular markers. Due to the simplicity of the
proposed stratifications, it is possible to introduce them smoothly into the discourse. Rebranding *yakuwarigo* as either Character Stylization Patterns or Character Stylization Clichés allows for the introduction of this concept in discourses concerning similar phenomena observed in other natural languages.

One additional remark has to be made regarding a potential categorization of CSP with the inclusion of CSC. This attempt would require assessing the clichéness of all previously introduced stylizations by differentiating patterns that have vaster sets of stylization markers than those that have fewer stylization markers. For example, the male language from the categorization proposed by Kinsui and Yamakido would be treated as a CSP, while the ‘boss language’ would be considered a CSC because it is expressed mainly by the use of the archaic verb *tamau* 給う as a sentence-ending imperative *tain* 給 (Kinsui et al. 2014: 122). This is due to the fact that the use of stereotypically male speech does not seem to contrast with the actual language use to such an extent as the inclusion of an imperative verb that is no longer used in contemporary Japanese.

**Conclusion**

This stratification proposal aimed to show aspects of *yakuwarigo* that have not yet been addressed in preceding papers dedicated to this field of inquiry. This addition allows for a further research into the subject with a more stratified methodological apparatus.

As it has been observed, stylistic phenomena that are the subject of *yakuwarigo* studies require a more stratified approach due to their heterogeneous nature. The reevaluation of the results of preceding studies led to the introduction of four Marker-Trait Relations (M-TR) as an extension of the preexisting Role Language (RL) and Character Language (CL) model. The dependencies between the constituents of RL that had determined the emergence of Character Language Types (CLT) were used as reference to assess those relations. The Relation of Agreement (RoA) and Relation of Emphasis (RoE) indicate stylizations with compatible linguistic markers and distinctive character traits, with RoE manifesting in the overuse of stylistic markers. On the other hand, Relation of Disagreement (RoD) and Relation of Contrast (RoC) are distinguished based on the lack of such compatibility, with RoC being limited to situations where markers are opposite to those conventionally inferred from the distinctive character traits available in a given context.
Upon introducing the set of four M-TR, a stratified model of Character Stylization Patterns (CSP) was proposed, with Character Stylization Markers (CSM) and Character Stylization Traits (CST) as its constituents. In this model, CSM indicate linguistic markers of character stylizations, and CST indicate distinctive character traits that are stereotypically associated with particular speech styles or behavioral patterns. This simple stratification allows for a more precise presentation of particular dependencies within this concept. Furthermore, because not all CSP are equally complex with respect to their linguistic markers and non-linguistic traits, the CSP model could incorporate Character Stylization Clichés (CSC) as a separate subgroup. CSC would indicate stylizations more complex in terms of intertwining CST but less complex in terms of the repertoire of CSM. This proposal hints at the need for further research and categorization of character stylizations based on the complexity of their CSM and CST. Such a categorization could be conducted on a wider range of stylizations extracted from a larger corpus of stylized utterances than the categorization cited in this paper. It would require comparing the complexity of each character stylization with other instances of the same pattern or cliché. Nevertheless, from the perspective of general linguistic inquiry, an approach incorporating the stratified model of M-TR and CS could serve as a prototype of a methodological apparatus dedicated to the exploration of other natural languages in search of stylistic strategies similar to yakuwarigo.

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>Character Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT1</td>
<td>Character Language Type (i)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT2</td>
<td>Character Language Type (ii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT3</td>
<td>Character Language Type (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT4</td>
<td>Character Language Type (iv)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>Character Stylization Cliché</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSM</td>
<td>Character Stylization Marker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>Character Stylization Pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CST</td>
<td>Character Stylization Trait</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-TR</td>
<td>Marker-Trait Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RL</td>
<td>Role Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RoA</td>
<td>Relation of Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RoC</td>
<td>Relation of Contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RoD</td>
<td>Relation of Disagreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RoE – Relation of Emphasis

References


AUTHOR’S PROFILE

Wojciech Gęszczak
is an MA in the field of Japanese Studies (Nicolaus Copernicus University). Currently, he is a PhD student at Warsaw University (the Department of General Linguistics, East Asian Comparative Linguistics and Baltic Studies). His main fields of interest are the stylistic, dialectological and sociolinguistic varieties of the Japanese language, stylistic diversity of contemporary Japanese popular culture and linguistic equivalence in translations of contemporary popular culture.