

# Modern Japanese ‘Role Language’ (Yakuwarigo): fictionalised orality in Japanese literature and popular culture

*Mihoko Teshigawara and Satoshi Kinsui*

## Abstract

*An emerging field of research in Japanese linguistics examines the association between types of characters portrayed and their spoken language features in fiction, popular culture (e.g., manga [comic books] and anime [animated cartoons]), and beyond (the Internet). Sets of spoken language features (vocabulary and grammar) and phonetic characteristics (intonation and accent patterns) psychologically associated with particular character types are termed “role language” (yakuwarigo) in Kinsui (2003). This study seeks to introduce non-Japanese readers to the expanding research on role language in Japanese. It gives an overview of this new field, drawing on key literature (Kinsui, 2003, 2008b) and related research on literature, popular culture, and Internet resources in Japanese and other languages. Through an examination of role language and its origins in Japanese, it will be shown that role language is used to characterise minor characters in a story in order to highlight the main characters, which require more nuanced descriptions. Analyses of some established character types are also discussed and cross linguistic studies of role language in Japanese and other languages are reviewed. Similarities and differences across languages are noted, as well as possible problems role language poses for learners of Japanese.*

KEYWORDS:     ROLE LANGUAGE; JAPANESE; LINGUISTIC STEREOTYPES; POPULAR CULTURE;  
                          CHARACTER TYPES; FICTIONALISED ORALITY

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## Affiliations

Mihoko Teshigawara: Komazawa University, Japan  
Satoshi Kinsui: Osaka University, Japan  
email: mteshi@komazawa-u.ac.jp and kinsui@let.osaka-u.ac.jp

## 1 Introduction

A newly emerging field in Japanese linguistics examines the connection between spoken language features and the depiction of character types in fiction, popular culture (e.g., *manga* [comic books] and *anime* [animated cartoons]), the Internet, and beyond. 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 good family, and the Chinese person. Their fictional utterances often make these established character types easily recognisable in Japanese culture, even if actual people fitting these character types are unlikely to produce such utterances in real life. 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 washī ga shit-teoru-zo*  
 yes-COPULA I NOM know-ASPECT-PARTICLE
- b. *Sō- yo atashi ga shit-teiru-wa*  
 yes-[ZERO COPULA]-PARTICLE I NOM know-ASPECT-PARTICLE
- c. *Sō-da ore ga shit-teru-ze*  
 yes-COPULA I NOM know-ASPECT-PARTICLE
- (after Kinsui, 2010:51)

In these examples,<sup>1</sup> the respective combinations of the copula (i.e., *ja*, [zero copula+] particle *yo*, or *da*), first-person pronoun (i.e. *washī*, *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'), a term coined by Kinsui (2003:205).

Variations in spoken language, produced according to character type, are not exclusively Japanese; for examples from other languages, see section 4. In order to help non-Japanese readers understand Japanese role language, we provide similar examples from English below. Comparing role languages in Japanese and English, Yamaguchi (2007) mentions four methods of creating role languages in English: using eye dialect; using stereotyped pidgin varieties; manipulating

personal pronouns; and phonological manipulation. Eye dialect uses non-standard spelling to represent nonstandard pronunciation, including regional and foreign accents. A stereotyped pidgin variety, for instance, dropping articles and *be* verbs, might give an impression of foreign-accented speech. One can also create a role language by replacing the first- and second-person pronouns with the actual names of the speaker and the addressee in the third person, as in '*Dobby has known it for months, sir. Harry Potter must not put himself in peril,*' when Dobby is talking to Harry Potter. Phonological manipulations can represent a baby-talk and/or onomatopoeic effects, e.g. '*I tawt I taw a puddy tat*' instead of '*I thought I saw a pussy cat*' in *Looney Tunes*.

Some role languages may sound quite different from actual speech. However, except for purely imaginary ones (see section 2.4), most role languages are linguistic stereotypes rooted in non-fictional language usage, whose origins can be traced, as will be shown in section 3. A good example is elderly male language, where the audience would easily recognise it as such, while being aware that an elderly male would not normally speak 'elderly male' role language, although some features of that role language might be found in real speech. Kinsui has traced the origins of some role languages, including elderly male language, examining historical non-fiction as well as fiction (Kinsui, 2003, 2007b, 2008b). Since Kinsui's initial publication (2003), the study of role language has grown to include two edited volumes of papers (Kinsui, 2007a, 2011). Role language research now includes studies on 'character-associated endings', *kyara-gobi* (i.e. copulas and particles that connote certain character types), usage on the Internet (e.g. Sadanobu, 2007; Sadanobu and Zhang, 2007). Non-writers' weblogs and electronic bulletin boards are a goldmine, not only for classic role languages, but also for somewhat looser types that are newly and often instantly invented by these bloggers (see section 2.4).

The present study seeks to introduce non-Japanese readers to the expanding field of research on role language in Japanese. We will give an overview of this emerging research field, drawing on key literature (Kinsui, 2003, 2008b) and related research in literature, popular culture, and Internet resources in Japanese and other languages. Not only does Japanese have a large variety of first-person pronouns and endings (copulas and final particles), it also allows great flexibility in inventing new endings (e.g. Sadanobu, 2007; Sadanobu and Zhang, 2007). All of these features contribute to the continual development of existing role languages and the creation of new ones in Japanese. Through examination of role language and its origins in Japanese, we will show how it is used to characterise minor characters in a story in order to highlight the main characters, which require more elaborate portrayal. Some established character types will be analysed and cross-linguistic studies of role language in Japanese and other

languages will be reviewed. Similarities and differences across languages will also be noted as well as possible problems role language pose for learners of Japanese. Throughout this paper, we will demonstrate how Japanese – a language with rich data from popular culture and Internet resources, as well as literary works – has much to offer in the development of research on role language, a type of fictionalised orality.

## 2 Some key concepts of role language

### 2.1 Formation of role language

As discussed in section 3, the origin of role language can often be traced back to actual spoken language, except for purely imaginary varieties. From actual language usage, individuals acquire knowledge about the relationship between a particular variety of the language and its speakers, then categorise and reinforce this knowledge. What is important here is that this kind of knowledge does not remain with a particular individual; rather it disseminates among people and is shared by the community. When such conditions are met, role language becomes established as a linguistic stereotype and an effective communication tool. Role language will then begin circulating in fiction, which now becomes a means for the audience to acquire knowledge about role language. In this way, once established, role language self-perpetuates in fiction, regardless of reality. This process of knowledge propagation through fiction plays an extremely important role in the circulation, dissemination and maintenance of role language (Kinsui, 2008b:207–208).

By contrast, we surmise that purely imaginary varieties (e.g. role languages of aliens or animals) have been invented at some point, then become current, and maintain themselves in popular culture.

### 2.2 Function of role language in fiction

In order to give the audience immediate access to the storyline unfolding around the main characters, fiction creators make use of stereotypical characters and situations. Characters that are made to speak distinctive role languages (i.e. those not spoken in reality, e.g. elderly male language or stereotypical Chinese language) are not main characters. They are either assigned special roles in the story (e.g. an elderly male language speaker, a mentor, or a trickster) or are simply minor characters that quickly disappear from the scene (Kinsui, 2003:50). In other words, role language is used to develop the story effectively, by relying on knowledge shared between the creator and the audience.

Role languages are not the only somewhat unnatural or unrealistic expressions found in fiction. Yamaguchi (2007) compares role language with artificial explanatory lines spoken by characters to describe the dramatic setting to the audience, or colourful and verbose gustatory expressions used in Japanese gourmet *manga*. Role language can be considered one type of communication device characteristic of fiction, used to convey the creator's intentions to the audience.

### 2.3 Role languages vs. Sociolects/actual speech styles

How does one distinguish role language from sociolects or speech styles/registers observed in real life, especially as most role language origins can be traced back to actual language use? Role languages and sociolects are similar in that both are language varieties extracted from groups of speakers differing in extralinguistic variables or attributes, such as gender, age, social status, occupation and so forth. By contrast, differences between the two can be explained in terms of research methods, as shown below.

#### 2.3.1 Data sources and methods of data analysis

Role language research primarily examines fictional data sources and describes the speech characteristics of the target character type. Since it originated specifically from interest in language usage in fiction, which is sometimes quite different from actual speech uttered by real people, role language research describes particular character types that are easily recognisable as such (e.g. elderly male language). In addition to fiction in print and other media, data sources now include those that are not fictional in a strict sense, such as Japanese subtitles or the dubbing of interviews with non-Japanese-speaking foreigners and verbal play observed in amateur weblogs (see section 2.4). By contrast, sociolinguists scientifically observe and collect actual language usage data from informants belonging to groups differing in the social variable under investigation (e.g. gender), and quantify the frequencies of occurrences of the observed variants.

#### 2.3.2 Extralinguistic variables

In addition to the social variables usually examined in sociolinguistics, role language research can also consider such extralinguistic variables as appearance, personality, and even humanity (i.e. whether the character is human or nonhuman, even though aliens and animals would never speak human language in reality). For instance, in role language research, one can conduct a study on language varieties of good-looking vs. physically unattractive

characters, as portrayed in fiction. In fact, there are role languages for aliens and animals, neither of which are speakers of Japanese in reality.

## 2.4 Types of role language

It is estimated that the number of role language varieties may be as great as that of the types of extralinguistic variables, i.e. an unknown number. Most classic types of role language are those that normally sound very different from the utterances produced by real people fitting the character types, including such groups as elderly Japanese men and Chinese speakers of Japanese. The origins of these types may be traced back to actual language used hundreds of years ago (see sections 3.1 and 3.2). There are also truly unrealistic types, e.g. the talk of aliens or animals that do not have actual speaker models in reality.

Other types may exhibit a range of expressions from highly unrealistic to near-realistic because these categories can contain numerous subsets; regional dialect speakers and gendered types (see sections 3.3 and 3.4) form part of this group. For instance, Japanese female language can include a range of subtypes from the archaic (e.g. young lady from a good family) to something close to male language (see section 3.4); somewhere between these two, a more realistic type may be observed, as in the example below:

- (2) *Ara suteki- da-wa*  
 oh wonderful-COPULA-PARTICLE  
 'Oh, that's wonderful!'

An utterance like this may be found in actual speech data as well as in fiction. Translations of non-Japanese speakers' speech in the form of dubbing or subtitling (e.g. interviews with foreign athletes) are another domain where role language is used.

Thus far we have primarily discussed role language in fiction. However, role language research now encompasses 'speech character types', *kyara*, that are created by adopting distinctive *kyara-gobi*, 'character-associated endings' (i.e. copulas and final particles that connote certain character types). In addition to fiction, such speech character types appear in everyday casual written communication data in amateur weblogs and electronic bulletin boards, where users can switch characters for amusement (e.g. Sadanobu, 2006, 2007; Sadanobu and Zhang, 2007). These types are different from the classic types noted above in that they can be instantly invented by non-professionals merely by manipulating the first-person pronouns and endings. These character types may also be non-human (e.g. animals and imaginary beings). In the sense that people can switch character types by adopting different sets of first person pronouns and

character-associated endings, role language may be considered similar to speech style, as opposed to sociolect.

## 2.5 Role language research

Variation in spoken language among or within individuals, so-called styles or registers, have been investigated in traditional Japanese linguistics (e.g. Tanaka, 1999). Since this discipline studies actual language use, its object of study should also be the language actually in use. However, when investigating historical variation, traditional Japanese linguists have also relied on fictional data, such as novels, often uncritically, regardless of whether the data reflected real language in use or simply the expressive intent of the writer. In order to solve this problem, Kinsui (2008b:206) strongly recommends introducing the concept of role language, which first treats these data in the context of communication between the creator and the audience in a code based on shared knowledge between the two parties, which is the role language of that particular character type.

From this perspective, reexamination of historical data in fiction, such as passages containing role language, can reveal that possible role language usage, distorted by the author's intention, may have been alleged to be historical fact in previous research. An example can be drawn from Takayama (2007) as cited in Kinsui (2008b:211–212), where a passage containing utterances by learned men from *Genji Monogatari* by Murasaki Shikibu is reanalysed using a role language framework. From the viewpoint of Japanese language history, it has been pointed out that the learned men's utterances are full of Japanese renderings of Chinese words, reflecting the actual speech styles of intellectuals of that period. However, Takayama casts doubt on this traditional view, which tries to overly conform to historical fact. Instead, he suggests that the exaggerated use of Japanese renderings of Chinese words is a role language of this character type, used by the author to fit the stereotype of learned men. In this way, role language research can challenge traditional interpretations of fictional utterances and encourage researchers to reexamine alleged facts in the study of language history.

## 3 Analyses of established role languages in Japanese fiction

Let us analyse some established role languages in Japanese fiction. The first two subsections deal with classic examples of role language, namely elderly male language and the *aruyo* language of a Chinese-speaker; both have lexical markers and it is unlikely that people actually fitting these categories (i.e. an elderly Japanese male or a Chinese-speaker) speak these role languages. Section 3.3



speak this variety. Table 1 compares elderly male language, Western Japanese and standard Japanese/Eastern Japanese.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Comparison of elderly male role language, Western Japanese and standard Japanese/Eastern Japanese**

	Elderly male Language	Western Japanese	Standard Japanese/ Eastern Japanese
Affirmation	<i>kyō wa ame ja*</i> It is rainy today.	<i>kyō wa ame ja / ya</i> It is rainy today.	<i>kyō wa ame da</i> It is rainy today.
Negation	<i>shiran / shiranu†</i> I do not know.	<i>shiran / shirahen</i> I do not know.	<i>shiranai‡</i> I do not know.
Existence of animate beings	<i>oru</i> be	<i>oru</i> be	<i>iru</i> be
Progressive/Stative	<i>shitteoru / shittoru</i> I know.	<i>shitteoru / shittoru</i> I know.	<i>shitteiru / shitteru</i> I know.

*\*Elderly male characters may use da quite often and ja only occasionally, just to give a flavour of this character type. †Shiranu, as an alternative to shiran, is a classic Japanese form using a classic negative auxiliary nu. ‡In addition, shiranē is included in the Eastern Japanese dialect. (after Kinsui, 2008b:216–217)*

Examination of this table reveals that, apart from some minor differences, elderly male language is similar to Western Japanese. In other words, the characteristics of elderly male language are regional, not age-related. Of course, it is highly unlikely that people (especially those outside Western Japan) would suddenly start speaking differently (i.e. a variety similar to Western Japanese) when they reach a certain age. Nevertheless, these unrealistic cases occur quite often in the world of comics; furthermore, Japanese readers find it quite natural. Because of these characteristics – the lexicon and the unreality of this variety – we can say that elderly male language is a classic example of role language.

The origins of elderly male role language were investigated by Kinsui (2008b:218–228) through an extensive historical review of Japanese fiction and traced back to late eighteenth century in Edo (Tokyo), the capital of the Tokugawa shogunate. While the younger generation was more likely to speak the eastern dialect of Edo, the older educated generation tended to speak the more conservative, normative western dialect of Kyoto. Older learned males, such as scholars and medical doctors, would often use the more traditional dialect of the imperial capital and appear old-fashioned to younger speakers of the emerging and changing Edo dialect. This contrast between the rising younger Edo generation and the conservative older authorities was emphasised and stereotyped by writers of that period and incorporated into popular plays and

novels. This resulted in the transformation of western dialectal characteristics into a fictional attribute of elderly male language.

### 3.2 Chinese person type: aruyo language

Another example of a role language with relatively solid characteristics that has developed independently from real spoken language is *aruyo* language, which is often associated with Chinese people (Kinsui, 2003:ch. 6, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b). The following is an example:

- (4) *Yasui aru- yo, hayaku kau yoroshi*  
 cheap exist-PARTICLE soon buy good  
 'It's cheap. You had better buy it now.'

Grammatical characteristics of *aruyo* language include: 1) use of *aru* immediately following the base form of a verb or adjective, or negative *nai*, or the stem of an adjective verb (*yasui aru* above); 2) use of *yoroshi(i)* after the base form of a verb (*kau yoroshi* above) as a request or command form.

The origin of *aruyo* language can be traced back to a pidgin Japanese that emerged in the Yokohama area at the end of the Edo period and beginning of the Meiji period. Yokohama was one of the ports opened under pressure from the West and settlements for foreign residents developed there. It is documented that pidgin Japanese was used in these port areas, especially in Yokohama, where Westerners and Chinese needed to communicate with Japanese nationals. While these expressions are actually observed in documents recording the language used in those days, they also started being used in novels and dramas. That *aruyo* language is based on pidgin Japanese makes it hard for readers to identify with characters speaking this role language (Kinsui, 2003:200–201), which relegates its use to minor character types.

Although international affairs in East Asia underwent drastic changes, *aruyo* language expressions have continued to be associated with Chinese characters in some films, *manga* and *anime* during the post-war period. The character types speaking *aruyo* role language were confined to suspicious or comical adult males. The use of this language evokes a sense of discrimination by Japanese toward Chinese, who lived under Japan's pre-war occupation. From the late 1970s to the 1980s, the character types speaking *aruyo* language in fiction (especially in *manga* and *anime*) shifted to young women dressed in traditional Chinese costumes (e.g. Shampoo in *Ranma 1/2* and Tsururin Tsun in *Dr. Slump*). However, this shift of speaker types for *aruyo* language should be regarded as a cultural preference, rather than a reflection of reality (Kinsui, 2008a, 2008b).

### 3.3 Regional dialect speaker types

Regional dialect speaker types are thought to be the most commonly found role language type in other languages (e.g. Hosokawa, 2010; Jung, 2005). Drawing on Kinsui (2003:ch. 3), this subsection summarises accounts of regional dialects and standard Japanese as role languages in fiction.

The main character in Japanese fiction generally speaks standard Japanese, while minor characters are assigned regional dialect role languages. Growing up immersed in Japanese culture as native Japanese speakers, the audience can empathise with the standard-Japanese-speaking character (main character), irrespective of their own native dialects, while perceiving dialect-speaking characters as marginal. Kinsui (2003:ch. 3) explains how standard Japanese became the language with which the audience identifies.

After the Edo period, the Meiji Government needed a standard language to modernise the country. The dialect spoken in the Tokyo area was adopted as standard Japanese for several reasons, including: 1) it was the language of Tokyo, the centre of politics and business for centuries; 2) much of Japanese literature and the performing arts were written and performed in this dialect; 3) many intellectuals spoke this variety. As a result of adopting Tokyo dialect as the standard, Japanese speakers are now all educated in standard Japanese. Therefore, they can identify with standard Japanese speakers regardless of their own dialects. Newly developed mass media (i.e. print, visual, and audio media) played a significant role in establishing, disseminating, and reinforcing standard Japanese among speakers throughout the country.

On the other hand, various role languages in nonstandard Japanese were also produced and circulated via the mass media. Such dialects spoken by regional characters are often not consistent and are made up of a number of regional dialects (Kinsui, 2003:54–58). As a playwright, Kinoshita (1982:273) mentioned that he assembled rustic words from various regional dialects into a dialect for supporting roles (*fuhen hōgen* 'universal dialect'), as opposed to his main character's language, which is standard Japanese. This same phenomenon (i.e. making up a dialect based on multiple regional sources) has also been found in Korean (Jung, 2005) and German (Hosokawa, 2010). Cooley has also discussed the case of African American literary dialect, where a Caribbean variety 'constituted a prototype for other early African-American representations regardless of provenance' (1997:53).

However, there is also an established role language of a regional dialect in Japanese, that of the Osaka or Kansai speaker, and Kinsui (2003:81–101). He traces the origin and transformation of the images of this dialect speaker type from classic literature through modern mass media.

Ironically, perhaps, the role language of dialect speakers becomes most prominent in Japanese translations of foreign literature (Gaubatz, 2007; Inoue, 2003). Kinsui (2003:184–187) remarks on the association between African American characters and Japanese translations using northeastern Japanese regional dialects. Gaubatz (2007) hypothesises that Nishida (1977) translated dialects in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* into Japanese role language rather than any actual regional dialect. To confirm his hypothesis, Gaubatz elicited Japanese speakers' impressions of excerpts from Nishida's translation. The survey results revealed that Huck's language gave Japanese respondents an impression of a role language of somewhat rural origin, although they felt closer to Huck than to other characters, including Jim (speaking a stronger dialect in the Japanese rendering). Gaubatz states that, because role language is a tool in 'virtual reality', role languages are more effective in the translation of fiction than existing dialects, which are closely connected to the culture, geography and society where they are spoken.

Inoue (2003:325–327) analyses a translation of *Gone with the Wind* from English into Japanese and highlights differences in translations of dialogue of Caucasian main characters versus those of African American supporting characters. While the dialogue of the Caucasian characters was translated into male and female role languages (see the next subsection for characteristics of these role languages), those of African American characters used 'ungrammatical forms, or some unspecified 'regional dialect,' at best'. In other words, we can say that these African American characters were deprived of gendered language in the Japanese rendering (setting aside the issue of whether gendered renderings are good or bad).<sup>4</sup>

To summarise these two subsections on speakers of foreign and regional accents, we would like to introduce an American study that has investigated linguistic stereotypes depicted by contrived accents in American animated films (Lippi-Green 1997:ch. 5). Lippi-Green deals with accents as spoken in animated films. She conducted a large-scale survey of Disney feature films involving an investigation of a total of 371 characters. Among the relationships observed between the language varieties and attributes of the characters, the relationship between mainstream US or British accents and positive roles is comparable to that observed in Japanese role language studies, that is, main characters speak the standard language.

### 3.4 Gendered types: female and male language

A significant body of research has considered gendered varieties of Japanese language to analyse how Japanese men and women speak differently (e.g. Ide



Nakamura's view is that knowledge and evaluation of schoolgirl language were constructed by the media and fiction writers, and did not emerge naturally from female students' actual language use. What is also important is her statement that the speaker's knowledge of gendered language, constructed by media and fiction (i.e. language ideology), influences and constrains the speaker's actual language in the interaction between gendered language and actual language usage. Here, female student language is different from elderly male language: while knowledge of elderly male language can be used for language play when adopting the character type, it is unlikely to be associated with any specific language ideology.

Today, while such apparently feminine language has been disappearing in reality, it continues to exist as a language for imaginary young ladies of good family (*ojōsama*) in popular culture. The varieties of role language styles used by female characters in current popular culture can range from traditional female language to something like male language, depending on the genres, character attributes (especially age), creators, etc. Translations of foreign works are among the most conservative varieties, where female characters still tend to use exclusively female endings as in *teyodawa* language. By contrast, male language can be used for female characters in some comics featuring girls of high school age. While this type of phenomenon may be viewed as a loosening of norms in contemporary society, we may also consider it an example of a new identity created by shifting existing language resources (see Nakamura, 2007b:16).

#### 4 Crosslinguistic studies of role languages

Initial crosslinguistic studies conducted by Kinsui's research project members have been published in Japanese (Jung, 2005, 2007; Sadanobu, 2007; Sadanobu and Zhang, 2007; Yamaguchi, 2007), among which those published in Kinsui (2007a) are accompanied by English summaries at the end of the collection. These initial studies inspired other linguists, resulting in embryonic crosslinguistic studies presented at the symposium held in March 2009 on *Yakuwari / Kyarakutā / Gengo* ('Roles/Characters/Languages') (Hosokawa, 2010; Kaneda, 2010). The next volume of papers, with English summaries, has been published to include those from talks given at the symposium in March 2009, Kinsui, 2011).

As a Korean teacher of Japanese, Jung's motivation for studying role language in both languages was to apply her research findings to improve the translation quality of printed and visual media between the two languages (Jung, 2005, 2007). Sharing grammatical characteristics with Japanese, such as word order (SOV), and being an agglutinative language with final particles (see also

Sadanobu, 2007), Korean has also developed a rich range of role languages. According to Jung's (2005) experimental results, despite existing role language varieties, it is possible that Korean speakers are less aware of the existence of role languages. Also, the character types portrayed by role language do not necessarily match between Korean and Japanese since role languages in the two languages apparently have different areas of expertise: whereas Japanese has finer gender distinctions, Korean distinguishes generational differences better. These languages' differences can result in loss of the original portrayal differences in the translation renderings, especially from Japanese into Korean. It should be noted that Korean also has a 'universal dialect', consisting of a combination of features from various regional dialects (see section 3.3). As a follow-up study, in addition to having a third participant group of Japanese learners of Korean for the same experiment as in Jung (2005), Jung (2007) collected impressions of Korean regional dialects from native speakers and compared these with Japanese speakers' impressions of Japanese regional dialects from the 1980s (Inoue, 1980, 1983). Although the results of the impression comparisons are somewhat mixed, the kinds of knowledge obtained from this research are deemed useful for improving translation quality by matching the impressions of dialects used between the two languages.

Drawing on online communication data, Sadanobu and his colleagues have compared character-associated endings in Japanese with those in Korean (Sadanobu, 2007) and Chinese (Sadanobu and Zhang, 2007). Under *kyaragobi* ('character-associated endings'), two subtypes are identified in Japanese, namely *kyara-kopyura*, 'character-associated copula' and *kyara-joshi*, 'character-associated particle'. A *kyara-kopyura* is a copula-like ending resembling an actual copula morphologically and phonologically, whereas a *kyara-joshi* does not resemble any copula, and occurs only sentence-finally. After identifying these two types in Chinese, Sadanobu and Zhang (2007) found a third type, *kyara-shūjoshi* 'character-associated final particle', which can occur where normal sentence-final particles can occur (i.e. phrase-finally), both in Japanese and Chinese. The first two types are also found in Korean (Sadanobu, 2007). Sadanobu (2007:45–46) surmises that, in addition to enjoying the verbal play itself, language users may adopt such speech character types that display cuteness or comicality in order to smooth over the immediately following (face-threatening) communication (e.g. avoiding arguments, making requests, asking for forgiveness). Su (2009) also discusses the functions of verbal play in online communications. Switching character types became apparent in the 1980s, when characters were detached from individual fictional works and began circulating as autonomous objects in younger speakers' language (Kinsui, 2008b). It may

also be connected with the propagation of typed language, such as mobile telephone text messages (Tanaka, 2007).

Illustrating four ways of creating English role languages, Yamaguchi (2007) states that English has disadvantages in producing new role languages freely compared with Japanese. As introduced in section 1, English has the following four means of creating role languages: using eye dialect; using stereotyped pidgin varieties; manipulating personal pronouns; and phonological manipulation. Eye dialect in English can be compared to regional dialects in Japanese fiction; however, English eye dialect inevitably gives readers an impression of the speaker's lack of education due to nonstandard spelling, limiting the character type using that role language. Using pidgin English, for instance, dropping a set of lexical items including articles, *be* verbs, and the subject of the sentence, results in less diversity and productivity of role language in English. Replacing the first- and second-person pronouns with the actual names of the speaker and addressee is an awkward way of composing sentences with limited productivity. Lastly, phonological manipulation is also limited, as in the example mentioned in section 1: Tweety Pie's line simply relies on baby talk and onomatopoeic expressions (*tweet, twitter*) sharing similar phonological patterns. Despite these limitations, English still utilises role language for effect – by making a character speak role language, the creator signals that this is a minor character that will not be described to detail.

Hosokawa (2010) examined how Japanese role language in comics is translated into German. According to him, as translations of Japanese *manga* have become popular, a new method of comic translation has been developed, utilising *Kunstdeutsch* (artificial dialect) to invent an alternative when a regional dialect in the original language has no counterpart in German. An example is shown where, by making a character speak a mixture of northern and southern dialects (i.e. 'universal dialect'), the translator can create an image of a rural/uneducated character. Hosokawa also mentions that there have been borrowings of Japanese terms of address (e.g. *dono* 'Mr/Ms/Esq.')

and sentence-final expressions (e.g. *sōrō*, an archaic copula), directly by transliteration, in order to retain the original image of the samurai character.

Based on important grammatical characteristics that signal role languages in Japanese, Korean and Chinese, Kaneda (2010) attempts to determine universal grammatical characteristics contributing to the creation and development of role languages. He examined French and English translations of Japanese popular media, with regard to these three factors: phonological manipulation, use of specific lexical items (e.g. unmarked lexical forms such as infinitive, or omission of articles) and variation in personal pronouns. He also investigated sentence-final discourse markers (e.g. tag questions, English *you know, huh*, French *n'est-*

*ce pas, hein*) and terms of address/swear words that occur sentence-finally. Of these, terms of address or swear words occurring sentence-finally were deemed effective as role language, connoting specific character types. He also notes that transliterations of Japanese character-associated endings in English translations suggest the emergence of a new grammatical category devoid of grammatical or semantic function, which exclusively signals speaker attributes.

To conclude this section, we would like to mention a few studies that attempt to apply findings from crosslinguistic role language research to language education and to further develop this research field. As role language is a form of linguistic stereotyping, which could lead to bias and discrimination, introducing it into education should be done with caution. At the same time, because role language plays such an important role in Japanese across varieties of media, appropriate knowledge of role language should be useful and beneficial to Japanese learners. Given that the number of students of Japanese as a foreign language that are motivated by interests in Japanese popular culture has been on the rise recently, it is necessary to teach the difference between role language and actual language usage. Onzuka's (2008) paper was written from this point of view, asserting that textbooks biased towards 'natural Japanese' (i.e. Japanese as used in real-life situations, having less clear-cut differences between genders) could actually be more difficult for students. Advocating the introduction of role language instruction into Japanese language education, she maintains that it is necessary to develop textbooks incorporating 'virtual reality' (i.e. role language) suitable for the target levels and purposes. Jung (2010) describes an effort to include role language in education more consciously. Based on her contrastive research on Japanese and Korean role languages, mentioned above (Jung, 2005, 2007), she devoted three class hours to incorporating role language translation of parts of novels in her Japanese-Korean translation seminar for advanced Korean learners of Japanese.

## 5 Conclusions

This review introduces non-Japanese readers to the world of role language research in Japanese, drawing on key literature (Kinsui, 2003, 2008b). After presenting key concepts, we discussed analyses of some established role languages, followed by summaries of existing crosslinguistic studies. As has been shown, Japanese provides great flexibility in inventing new role languages, thanks to a wide selection of first-person pronouns and endings (copulas and particles), and as a result, it has developed many varieties of role language types for fictionalised orality. Therefore, we think research on Japanese role languages can contribute to the study of fictionalised orality. For a particular language to

develop role languages, the following two conditions appear important: typological tendencies (Kaneda, 2010) and penetration of popular culture (e.g. translations of Japanese *manga* and *anime*) and electronic media.

The first point has been explored experimentally in Kaneda (2010). Among other things, we also consider the variation in personal pronouns (especially first- and second-person pronouns), accompanied by an absence of subject-predicate agreement, and variation in sentence-final expressions, including terms of address and swear words, to be important contributing factors. The penetration of popular culture and electronic media has also been pointed out in Sadanobu (2007).

In role language research, we first treat discourse data from fiction as a portrayal of character by the creator and as clues to investigating the stereotypical knowledge of a certain character type shared between the creator and the audience. Among such shared knowledge, there may be some that encompasses language ideologies constraining actual language use (i.e. female role language). It has also been shown that there are varieties of role languages that, after their creation, based on actual language usage, underwent exaggeration and transformation and are still in use, irrespective of their basis in linguistic reality (e.g. elderly man language, *aruyo* language). In addition, we have looked at a group of studies investigating everyday language use that plays with role languages by switching character types (e.g. Sadanobu, 2007).

Role language is still a new, emerging area of research filled with problems to be solved from historical, crosslinguistic and educational perspectives. Nevertheless, it is an interesting field of multidisciplinary inquiry in the humanities and social sciences,<sup>7</sup> providing strong incentives to develop this research topic further in order to elucidate the nature of fictionalised orality, which may be confounded with reality in conventional analyses.

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### About the authors

Mihoko Teshigawara is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Komazawa University, Tokyo, Japan. She studies the phonetic correlates of vocal stereotypes of good and bad characters in

Japanese culture, using *anime* voices. Her most recent publication is 'Vocal expressions of emotions and personalities in Japanese *anime*' in *Emotions of the Human Voice, Vol. III: Culture and Perception*, edited by K. Izdebski (Plural Publishing, 2009).

Satoshi Kinsui is Professor of Japanese linguistics at the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University, Japan. His first publication on 'role language' (*yakuwarigo*), *Vācharu Nihongo Yakuwarigo no Nazo* (The enigma of virtual Japanese role language), Iwanami, 2003, intrigued many other researchers in Japanese linguistics and beyond, leading to the development of this emerging research field. He has also published numerous books and journal articles on traditional Japanese linguistics.

## Notes

- 1 Throughout this paper, transliterated Japanese words may be divided into morphemes by using hyphens to indicate morpheme boundaries, when relevant to the discussion, while maintaining word boundaries elsewhere in the text.
- 2 For an extensive analysis, see Kinsui (2008b:section 7.4).
- 3 Standard Japanese and Eastern Japanese are presented in the same column because standard Japanese was based on the Uptown Tokyo dialect and therefore inherits features of Eastern Japanese.
- 4 This interplay of race, language variety and sexuality in the Japanese renderings may be comparable to that between accent and sexual attractiveness and availability of the character pointed out in Lippi-Green (1997:97, 102–103), where she states that for characters to be sexually attractive and available, they must not have strong accents.
- 5 For more details in English, see Inoue (2002), Nakamura (2004, 2005) and references cited therein.
- 6 See Nakamura (2004, 2007a) for descriptions of how *teyodawa* language was demeaned after it spread in popularity.
- 7 Although not discussed here, there are also researchers in a role language research group, led by Kinsui, studying phonetic aspects of role languages in Japanese *anime* (Teshigawara, 2007, 2009), and *manga* characters' faces and bodies from the viewpoint of stereotyping, that is, visual aspects of role 'languages' in *manga* (Yoshimura 2007, 2008).

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