

Analysis of *Wakamono Kotoba* (Slang Words) as the Interjections in LINE Chat Conversation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the way *wakamono kotoba* used by Japanese young people which express interjection in LINE chat conversation. Using a descriptive method, the data were gathered from chat conversations within two weeks in a group of LINE Open Chat consisting of 180 LINE accounts whose belong to Japanese teens and twenties. The LINE Open Chat group used in this study was the one that focuses on the topic of idle talk. Therefore, even though the group members do not know each other, they use colloquial language, including slang words. The data which consisted of *wakamono kotoba* (slang words) were then analyzed by using Ishikawa's (2018) types of interjection. The findings show that there is a tendency of using shortened word forms of *wakamono kotoba* which express interjections in LINE chat, such as *maji* that shortened from *majime* which means "serious" and *sorena* that shortened from *sono toori* which means "agreement".

Keywords: *Interjection*, LINE, *social media*, *wakamono kotoba*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Young Japanese people use *wakamono kotoba* or Japanese slang in their daily life (Tsujimoto, 2017). Therefore, it is important for Japanese language learners to understand the use of *wakamono kotoba*, so that they can communicate properly with young Japanese people. (Tsujimoto, 2017). However, *wakamono kotoba* are generally unavailable in the school curriculum, so that many Japanese language learners are not familiar and have difficulty understanding *wakamono kotoba*.

Wakamono kotoba is the language used by the younger generation, mainly from around their teens to around their thirties, and is a unique language and phrase with several characteristics (Yonekawa, 1996, 2000, 2009; Koyano, 2006). Kikuchi (2014) divides the characteristics of *wakamono kotoba* into two: (1) Shortened words and (2) Meaning expanding words. Here are examples of the characteristics of shortened word *wakamono kotoba*.

- 1) *Uzattai* → *Uzai* (Annoying)
- 2) *Torima* → *Toriaezu maa* (First off, foremost)
- 3) *Maji* → *Majime* (Serious)

Meanwhile, these are examples of the characteristics of meaning expanding word *wakamono kotoba*.

4) *Hiku* : Pull → Flout at

5) *Yabai* : Dangerous, risky → Terrific, amazing

Wakamono kotoba tends to a function as an interjection (Horasawa & Iwata, 2009). Interjection is an independent word in a sentence that express feelings towards an event or response to the speech of another person (Masuoka & Takubo, 1989; Koike, Kobayashi, Hosokawa, & Inukai 1997).

Various studies on interjection have been carried out in the past. One of them is Ishikawa (2018) who researched the process of forming interjection from the Meiji era to the Showa era, using the literature study method in Japanese grammar books and Japanese textbooks from those eras. From this study, Ishikawa (2018) concluded that the interjection used in the present are independent words and has three characteristics, namely (1) Expression of emotion (e.g. *aa*, *ara*, *oya*), (2) Expression of a call (e.g. *yaa*, *oi*, *ya*, *yo*), and (3) Expression of a response (e.g. *hai*, *ee*, *iya*).

Yang (2020) has carried out research about interjection that appears in the form of written communication via chat on social media (LINE and WeChat) in Japanese compared to Chinese. Yang (2020) analyses the use of interjections which state the conditions of the speaker's information processing

process. In chat conversation in Japanese, there are types of interjection that express the speaker’s feelings such as *a* (*ah*), *a-* (*a*), and *a!* (*ah!*) 39 times as well as types of interjection that express responses such as *nn~* or *nn~to* (hmm...) 7 times, *u~n* (hmm) 4 times, *e~to* or *etto* or *ettone* (well/err...) 4 times, and *ano* (um/er) 1 time. Whereas in chat conversation in Chinese, the type of interjection that expresses the speaker's feelings is only found 3 times, and interjection that express responses are not found. Therefore, it can be seen that interjection appears a lot in Japanese chat conversation compared to other languages.

Yonekawa (2014, 2016) states that as information and communication devices develops such as smartphones tablets, etc, *wakamono kotoba* in recent years have become available in written form on screens. However, studies on *wakamono kotoba* in conversation via social media are still few to be found.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the way *wakamono kotoba* or slang words used by Japanese young people which express interjections in LINE chat conversation.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected using the note-taking method, which were conversations in a LINE Open Chat group consisting of 180 LINE accounts belong to Japanese people with the age ranges from teens to twenties within a period of 2 weeks in July 2021.

LINE Open Chat refers to a new feature that extends the group talk function of LINE. This feature was launched in 2019. LINE Open Chat is different from conventional talk and has the following features: (1) It can change profile for each talk room, (2) Each talk room can be set to public or private, (3) It is able to check the previous conversation even if join a talk room in the middle, (4) A talk room can contain up to 5,000 participants, and (5) It is able to invite people to a talk room with a URL or QR code. As everyone is free to join and leave the group, the number of members changes each time. LINE Open Chat used in this study is a group that focuses on the topic of idle talk. Therefore, even though the group members do not know each other, they use colloquial language in the chat conversation.

With the characteristic above, a group of LINE Open Chat as a data may be difficult to control gender and total of participants. However, there are two reasons why chat conversation with the topic of idle talk in LINE Open Chat group is considered relevant as data of the present study. First, based on the results of the Insta Lab (2021) survey, the most widely used chat application in Japan is LINE, with a total of more than 70 million users dominated by people of the age of 20. Second, according

to Yonekawa (2014, 2016), *wakamono kotoba* in recent years has become available in written form on screens. It can be interpreted that *wakamono kotoba* is currently widely spread through social media, and LINE is the most widely used social media in Japan. Therefore, the data obtained has a wide range because anyone who has a LINE account can join the group.

After all the data have been collected, they were analyzed using several steps. First, identifying *wakamono kotoba* that appeared in LINE chat conversation. Second, classifying *wakamono kotoba* expressed interjections by using Ishikawa’s (2018) types of interjection. Third, analyzing the characteristics of *wakamono kotoba* which served as interjections by using Kikuchi’s (2014) theory about characteristics of *wakamono kotoba*. Then, all the findings were interpreted and discussed regarding the theoretical framework and previous studies. Finally, conclusions were drawn.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis was carried out based on Ishikawa’s (2018) interjection theory, which has three categories of interjection, namely (1) Expression of emotion, (2) Expression of a call, and (3) Expression of a response. The collected data from conversations in a LINE Open Chat group in this study are informal talk. Regarding from self-introduction of the members, the known ages of group members ranged from 10-20 years old, so it is in accordance with the definition of *wakamono kotoba* according to Yonekawa (1996) where *wakamono kotoba* is widely used among young people or those aged 10-30 years old.

In terms of the type of interjections, the findings revealed that *wakamono kotoba* which express interjections were (1) Expression of Emotion, and (2) Expression of a Response, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 shows *wakamono kotoba* which expressing interjections found in LINE chat conversation data. In the type of interjection that expresses emotion, *wakamono kotoba majika* is found 138 times, *yaba* 30 times, and *egu* 4 times. Examples are as follows.

- (1) A : “*Kōgyō kōkōda to, jugyō owatte kara, 6-jikan jishū toka aru nda yo. Kaeri yoru da yo~*”

Table 1. *Wakamono kotoba* expressing interjection

Type of Interjection	Example	Means
Expression of Emotion	(138) <i>Majika</i>	Express feelings of surprise
	(30) <i>Yaba</i>	
	(4) <i>Egu</i>	
Expression of a Response	(269) <i>Sorena</i>	Express agreement
	(2) <i>Ryo</i>	Express understanding
	(7) <i>Ui</i>	
	(47) <i>A~ne</i>	

(At the technical high school, we have 6 hours of practical training after class. I'm going home at night.)

B : “*Majika! Sore wa kitsui*”

(Seriously? That's a tough one.)

- (2) A : “*Mozaiku kaketemasuga, gachi de sunderu shūhen no shame totte kimashita...*”

(It's mosaicked, but he took pictures of the area where I live.)

B : “*Yaba. Konna jikan ni*”

(Oh no. At this hour.)

- (3) A : “*Ore manshon dakedo kagi nai toki wa yojinobottoruyo*”

(I live in an apartment, but if I don't bring the key, I climb up.)

B : “*Egu*”

(Ugh.)

Seen from the examples of chat conversations found in the data, as in the example (1), (2), and (3), the words *majika*, *yaba*, and *egu* appear as independent words and express feelings of surprise to what the speaker says. As for interjection type which serves as an expression of a call, it was not in this study. Meanwhile, for the type of interjection that expresses responses, the word *sorena* is found 269 times, *ryo* 2 times, *ui* 7 times, and *a~ne* 47 times. Examples are as follows.

- (4) A : “*Teka kyou haitte kara omotteta ndakedo, kono opucha meccha hito iru yo ne*”

(I've been thinking since I came in today, there are so many people in this open chat.)

B : “*Sorena!*”

(Yeah.)

- (5) A : “*Maa kyou wa semete 12-ji ni neru yo*”

(Well, I'll be in bed at least by midnight today.)

B : “*Erai. 9-jikan wa ne na*”

(That's good. Get at least 9 hours of sleep.)

A : “*Ryo!*”

(Roger.)

- (6) A : “*Minna iiko ni netene na.*”

(Sleep well, everyone.)

B : “*Ui*”

(Roger.)

- (7) A : “*Nan no gēmu shite n no~?*”

(What game are you playing?)

B : “*Switch no puroguramingu no yatsu~*”

(The Switch programming one.)

A : “*A~ne*”

(Uh I see.)

The words *sorena*, *ryo*, *ui*, and *a~ne* appear as independent words and express responses to what the speaker says. The word *sorena* expresses agreement, meanwhile, the words *ryo*, *ui*, and *a~ne* shows understanding.

In example (4), the speaker says that he felt there were too many members of the group. In this regard, the speech partner uses the word “*sorena*” to express that he agrees with what the speaker has said.

In example (5), (6), and (7), the speech partner expresses an understanding to the orders or explanations from the speaker.

In this study, seven words of *wakamono kotoba* expressing interjection in LINE chat conversation were found in the data. The seven words found, are *majika*, *yaba*, *egu*, *sorena*, *ryo*, *ui*, and *a~ne*, will be classified based on Kikuchi's (2014) *wakamono kotoba* theory which divides the characteristics of *wakamono kotoba* into two, namely (1) Shortened word, and (2) Meaning expanding word.

From all the seven words, two of them (*yaba*, *egu*) are categorized as meaning expanding word *wakamono kotoba*, seen from the meaning of the word that is expanding.

- a. *Yaba/Yabe/Yabai*
Dangerous, risky → Terrific, amazing
- b. *Egu/Egui*
Harsh, nasty → Awesome, cool

Meanwhile, five of them (*majika*, *sorena*, *ryo*, *ui*, *a~ne*) are categorized as shortened word *wakamono kotoba*.

- c. *Majika/Maji* → *Majime* (Serious)
- d. *Sorena* → *Sono toori* (Agreement)
- e. *Ryo* → *Ryoukai* (Understanding)
- f. *Ui* → *Ryoukai* (Understanding)
- g. *A~ne* → *Naruhodo* (Understanding)

Figure 1 shows the frequency of *wakamono kotoba* which has the function as an interjection in LINE chat conversation. It shows that there are seven words of *wakamono kotoba* which function as an interjection in LINE chat conversations based on Ishikawa's (2018) types of interjection and Kikuchi's (2014) characteristics of *wakamono kotoba*. Five of them (*majika*, *sorena*, *ryo*, *ui*, *a~ne*) are included in the type of shortened word *wakamono kotoba*, and two of them (*yaba*, *egu*) are included in the type of meaning expanding word *wakamono kotoba*.

From the result, we found that in Japanese chat conversations through social media, the frequency of occurrence of interjections remains as high as during direct conversations. This is under the results of Yang's (2020) research which states that interjections in chat conversations appear more frequently in Japanese than in other languages.

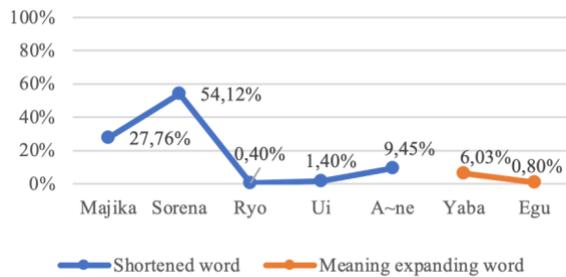


Figure 1 Frequency of *Wakamono Kotoba* which expressing interjection.

From the view of the frequency of occurrence, *majika* and *sorena* which are included in the *wakamono kotoba* type of shortened word are appear the most. Meanwhile, *wakamono kotoba* type of meaning expanding word, namely *yaba*, the frequency of occurrence is only 6% and *egu* is not up to 1%. Even so, *ryo*, *ui*, and *a-ne* which are also included in the shortened word *wakamono kotoba* have a low frequency of occurrence. The frequency of occurrence of *a-ne* is less than 10%, *ui* is only 1.4% and *ryo* is not up to 1%. This is in accordance with Kuwamoto (2003) who states that one of the characteristics of the establishment of *wakamono kotoba* is abbreviation such as shortened word, but words that are too abbreviated tend not to use widely.

The social distance dimension contributes to the appropriate choice code in conversation. How well do they know each other, social distance between the participants such as strangers, friends, or brothers would use a different code to each (Holmes, 1992) The data used chat conversation in a group LINE Open Chat. The participants are strangers to each other, but they use *wakamono kotoba* even if they don't know each other.

4. CONCLUSION

From the findings, young Japanese people are likely to use *wakamono kotoba* in LINE chat as interjections. Thus, although *wakamono kotoba* are generally unavailable in the school curriculum, it is important to know and understand *wakamono kotoba* because it may help when talking with Japanese students and get to know them better. For further research, comparison of the use of *wakamono kotoba* expressing interjection in social media chat conversation with face-to-face conversation is also considered necessary. *Wakamono kotoba* has many varieties of forms and types, and there is still a lack of study regarding the use of *wakamono kotoba* in social media chat conversation compared to face-to-face conversation.

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