

***WAKAMONO KOTOBA* USED BY JAPANESE YOUTH ON INSTAGRAM**

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the forms of *wakamono kotoba*, or Japanese youth language. As *wakamono kotoba* continues to develop in Japanese, it is frequently found on social media platforms such as Instagram. Its deviation from standard Japanese can become a problem in understanding its meanings. The data were collected from the Instagram accounts using the observation method and note-taking techniques. The data were analyzed using the identity method and distributional techniques. The forms of *wakamono kotoba* were examined based on the word formation theory proposed by Tsujimura (1996) and Kageyama (2016). The results indicate that *wakamono kotoba* can be classified into five morphological forms, namely affixation, compounding, reduplication, clipping, and borrowing. This study hopes to contribute to the understanding of Japanese language variation, particularly in digital communication, and provides insights into the morphological processes in forming Japanese youth language. Based on the results, there are seven forms of *wakamono kotoba* found, including affixation, compound, reduplication, clipping, borrowing, phonological change, and dialect variation. *Wakamono kotoba* reflects the creativity and linguistic dynamism of Japanese youth through innovative expressions that enhance emotional intensity, expressiveness, evaluative meaning, and informal communication.

Keywords – morphology, language variation, youth language, Japanese

Introduction

Language has evolved rapidly alongside the times, giving rise to various language variations. These variations are not only used individually but also within groups, such as young people. Youth language is an informal variety of language used by teenagers or certain social groups for internal communication, often to prevent outsiders from understanding it. It consists of constantly changing and newly emerging vocabulary (Kridalaksana, 2009). This phenomenon reflects the idea that human experiences, emotions, thoughts, and perceptions are often richer and more complex than the words available to express them. As society, technology, and social media continue to develop, new lexical items emerge to capture contemporary experiences and behaviors. For example, terms such as “selfie,” “FOMO” (fear of missing out), and “ghosting” demonstrate how digital communication practices contribute to the creation of new vocabulary (Nishat, 2024).

In Japanese, youth language has similarities with *wakamono kotoba*. According to Masakazu (2003), *wakamono kotoba* refers to language used by young people, which constantly changes and differs across groups. Yonekawa (1997) also added *wakamono kotoba* is defined as language or particular expressions used by speakers approximately 10 to 30 years

old in everyday life. The use of *wakamono kotoba* is often found in media such as manga and anime. Words such as *maji*, *ossu*, *yabai*, and *kimoi* are commonly used by young people. From an etymological perspective, these words originate from dialects or variations of pre-existing words.

This study analyzes the formation of *wakamono kotoba* from a morphological perspective. Every language has its own uniqueness in word formation processes, including Japanese. Morphological processes can create new words by systematically expanding the vocabulary of a language (Booij, 2007). *Wakamono kotoba* is not part of the standard in the Japanese language, which may cause difficulties for Japanese learners in understanding its usage as a single word or in sentences.

In analyzing the forms of *wakamono kotoba*, this study employs the theory of word formation proposed by Tsujimura (1996) and Kageyama (2016). Word formation in Japanese is richer than that in English. This is because morphology plays an important role in the formation of complex predicates (Kageyama, 2016). Japanese word formation consists of five processes: affixation, compounding, clipping, reduplication, and borrowing (Tsujimura, 1996). This indicates that Japanese has a structured and consistent grammatical system for forming new words and conveying particular nuances of meaning.

Studies about *wakamono kotoba* have been done previously. Hidayat (2021), in his article entitled “*Analysis of Wakamono Kotoba (Slang Words) as the Interjections in LINE Chat Conversation*,” analyzes the use of *wakamono kotoba* functioning as interjections in LINE conversations among Japanese youth. The LINE group used as the data source focuses on casual conversation topics, leading its members to predominantly use informal language, including *wakamono kotoba*. The *wakamono kotoba* data were then analyzed using the classification of interjection types proposed by Ishikawa (2018). The results indicate a tendency toward the use of abbreviated forms in *wakamono kotoba* functioning as interjections in LINE conversations. Both Hidayat’s study and the present study analyze *wakamono kotoba* in Japanese. However, Hidayat focuses specifically on interjections found in the LINE social media platform, whereas this study examines the forms of *wakamono kotoba* in Instagram.

Oktavia (2025), in her study entitled “*A Study on Japanese Youth Language (Wakamono Kotoba) Use on Social Media X*,” analyzes the forms and usage of *wakamono kotoba* using data from 100 Japanese user accounts on the social media platform X during 2024. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings reveal 282 instances of *wakamono kotoba*, dominated by the *shouryaku* (abbreviation) form. The study also shows that some *wakamono kotoba* undergo semantic change or expansion. In general, the use of *wakamono kotoba* on social media X functions as a means of creative and emotional expression, creating a more casual communication atmosphere and facilitating the expression of events in social interaction. The similarity between Oktavia’s study and the present study lies in their shared focus on analyzing the forms and functions of *wakamono kotoba* used by Japanese youth. The difference lies in the type of data sources analyzed, as this study uses Instagram as its data source.

Methodology

This study uses commentary from a Japanese Instagram account as its data source. Instagram comment sections tend to reflect informal interactions, making them a rich source for observing the usage of *wakamono kotoba*. This study observed the comments from 4 Japanese young actresses' Instagram accounts that have many followers, which are: Fumiya Takahashi (@fumiya_0_3_1_2), Hideyoshi Kan (@hideyoshi_kan_official), Kohaku Shida (@shida_kohaku), and Yuna Hoshino (@yuna_hoshino_official). Each account has been followed by around 2 million followers.

The method used to collect the data is the observation method with the note-taking technique (Sudaryanto, 2015). This method is used to observe the usage of *wakamono kotoba* found in the comment by a Japanese account, which is then analyzed using relevant theory. After the *wakamono kotoba* data have been collected, they are using the identity method with the distribution technique (Sudaryanto, 2015). The reason is that the analysis of *wakamono kotoba* does not originate from the language itself, but is instead used specifically within certain social groups. Furthermore, the distribution technique is used to classify *wakamono kotoba* based on the word-formation theory proposed by Tsujimura (1996) and Kageyama (2016). The results were then presented using the informal method, which describes the results of the analysis using ordinary words (Sudaryanto, 2015). This method is employed to describe the forms of the *wakamono kotoba* analyzed through the analysis.

Finding and Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis, there are seven types of *wakamono kotoba* forms were found in the comments on a Japanese Instagram Account. The word-formation processes consist of five types: affixation, compounding, reduplication, clipping, borrowing, phonological change, and dialect variation. The following section presents an analysis of the forms of the *wakamono kotoba*.

1. Affixation

Affixation is the process of adding a prefix or suffix to a base form (Tsujimura, 1996). According to Kageyama (2016), affixes cannot stand by themselves and always attach to a lexeme. This characteristic distinguishes affixation from compounding, in which lexemes can attach both before and after other lexemes. In this case, the formation of *wakamono kotoba* was found by adding the prefix *geki-* (激) to the noun and the suffix *-sugi* (すぎ) after adjectives. The following describes the analysis of *wakamono kotoba* formed by the affixation process.

Data 1

ほんとにほんとに可愛すぎて出会えてよかったって毎日思う。これからも
 ずーっと大好き激愛!!!!

*honto ni honto ni kawai sugite deaete yokattatte mainichi omou. Korekara mau zu--
 -tto daisuki gekiai!!!!*

‘She’s so incredibly cute, I think every day how glad I am that I met her. I’ll always
 love her so much!!!’

In a comment written by the account *rr_tsu.1107*, the word *gekiai* (激愛) is used, which is a *wakamono kotoba*. The word *gekiai* is formed through the addition of the prefix *geki-* to the noun *ai* ‘love’. The prefix *geki-* functions to intensify the meaning, similar to “extremely”, and it can also be found in other *wakamono kotoba* expressions such as *gekiuma* ‘extremely delicious’ and *gekikawa* ‘extremely cute’. In this context, *gekiai* expresses an extremely strong or intense feeling of love or admiration toward the actress. This reflects a typical characteristic of *wakamono kotoba*, where emotional expressions are often amplified for emphasis and impact.

Data 2

文哉君の舞台挨拶姿は素敵すぎ

Fumiya-kun no butai aisatsu sugata wa suteki sugi

‘Fumiya-kun looked **absolutely wonderful** at his stage greeting.’

In a comment written by the account *mikanmikan18*, the word *sutekisugi* (素敵すぎ) can be classified as *wakamono kotoba*. The word *sutekisugi* is formed through an affixation process. Specifically, the adjective *suteki* “wonderful” undergoes the addition of the suffix *-sugi*, which adds the meaning of “too much” or “excessive,” resulting in *sutekisugi*. The suffix *-sugi* is also commonly found in other *wakamono kotoba* expressions, such as *yabasugi* ‘too amazing’ and *kawasugi* ‘too cute’.

2.Compounding

Compounding is the process of combining two or more words (Tsujimura, 1996). Japanese compound words consist of combinations of different word classes. For example, compound nouns can be formed from noun–noun, verb–noun, and adjective–noun combinations. This is because the word class of a compound is determined by the end of a compound (Akimoto, 2002). Here are *wakamono kotoba* that were formed through the compounding process.

Data 3

朝ドラや縦型ドラマのプロデュース、主演映画などテレビや映画で活躍している姿を見るたびに沢山の元気と勇気をもらっています。

asadora ya tategata dorama no purode-yūsu, shuen eiga nado terebi ya eiga de katsuyaku shite iru sugata o miru tabi ni takusan no genki to yūki o moratte imasu

‘Every time I see you active on television and in movies, producing **morning dramas** and vertical dramas, and starring in films, I get a lot of energy and courage.’

In a comment written by the account *@hi.23ya*, the word *asadora* is used. This term belongs to *wakamono kotoba* and is formed through the combination of the noun *asa* ‘morning’ and the noun *dorama* ‘drama’. In its formation process, the noun *dorama* undergoes clipping and is shortened to *dora*, resulting in the form *asadora*. In terms of meaning, *asadora* refers to “a drama broadcast on Japanese television in the morning.”

Data 4

ブラックこっちゃんもカッコカワチだったよ
buraku kotchan mo kakkokawachi datta yo

‘Black Kotchan was also **cool and cute**.’

In a comment written by the account kenta11_01, the word *kakkokawachi* is used. This *wakamono kotoba* term is formed through compounding by combining the adjective *kakkoii* ‘cool’ and *kawaii* ‘cute’. The resulting form *kakkokawachi* represents a blended expression derived from both source adjectives and expresses a nuanced evaluation that combines two positive attributes simultaneously.

3.Reduplication

Reduplication is the process of repeating parts or whole words to create a new word (Tsujimura, 1996). Kageyama (2016) also added types of reduplication in Japanese, which includes represent plurality, produce adverbial, and representing circumstantial activities. In Japanese, reduplication commonly appears in nouns, adverbs, adjectival nouns, verbs, and mimetic words.

Data 5

PRADA きになってるの。だいすきなゆなちゃんにもおすすめされたらも
 っともっときになる
PRADA ki ni natteru no. Daisuki na Yuna chan ni mo osusumesaretara mottomotto
ki ni naru

‘I’m interested in Prada. If my favorite Yuna-chan recommends it, I’ll be **even more** interested!’

In a comment written by the account *Yn_tann07*, the expression *mottomotto* (もっともっと) is used, which belongs to *wakamono kotoba* and is formed through a reduplication process. The form *mottomotto* originates from the adverb *motto* ‘more’ or ‘again’, which undergoes full reduplication. According to Kageyama (2016), this is a reduplication of *wago* or Sino-Japanese elements to produce adverbials. It has a denotative meaning of “more and more” or “even more” and is commonly used to convey strong encouragement, enthusiasm, or desire for continuation.

4.Clipping

Clipping is the process of shortening a word (Tsujimura, 1996). There are two types of clipping of *wakamono kotoba* found. Kageyama (2016) added clipping in Japanese, frequently found in *wago*, *kango*, and foreign words, and is often limited to the colloquial language, in this case as a *wakamono kotoba*.

Data 6

完成披露試写会お疲れ様でした。公開を楽しみに待ちまあす。今日もカ
 ツコよ～

*kansei hirō shisha-kai otsukaresamadeshita. Kōkai o tanoshimini machi maasu.
 Kyō mo kakko yo*

‘Thank you for your hard work at the premiere screening. I'm really looking forward to the release. You **looked great** today too!’

In a comment written by the account *Haru_haru249*, the word *kakko* (カッコ) is used. This *wakamono kotoba* is derived from the adjective *kakkoi* ‘cool’. In its formation process, *kakkoi* undergoes clipping, specifically the deletion of the final segment *-ii*, resulting in the form *kakko*. A shortened form of a word is typical of informal or online communication among younger speakers. In terms of meaning, *kakko* retains the same meaning as its original form, namely “cool”.

Data 7

そして文哉くんビジュが良すぎです

soshite Fumiya-kun biju ga yo sugidesu

‘And Fumiya-kun's **visuals** are just too good.’

In a comment written by the account *tomomin327*, the word *biju*, which is a *wakamono kotoba* is used. This term is a shortened form of *bijuaru* ‘visual’. In its formation process, *bijuaru* undergoes clipping through the deletion of the final segment *-aru*, leaving only the initial part *biju*. In this context, *biju* is used to comment on Fumiya’s face or appearance, indicating that it is very attractive.

5.Borrowing

The last type of word formation *wakamono kotoba* is borrowing from a foreign language. Words from other languages are borrowed in one language and used as complements in the language to keep up with the times. These words are the result of interactions between countries with different languages, which lead to the creation of loan words. (Sudipa, 2021).

Data 8

今年で推して 4 年目になるけど、まだ 1 回も会えてないからいつかファ
 ンミとか行って大好きな文哉くんに会って拝めますように

*kotoshi de oshite 4-nen-me ni narukedo, mada 1-kai mo ae tenaikara itsuka fanmi
 toka itte daisuki na Fumiya-kun ni atte ogamemasu yō ini*

‘This year marks my fourth year as a fan, but I still haven't been able to meet him even once, so I hope that one day I can go to a **fan meeting** or something and meet and admire my beloved Fumiya-kun.’

In a comment written by the account *fumi_love_0312*, the word *fanmi* is used. This term belongs to *wakamono kotoba* and is a loanword derived from the English expression *fan*

meeting. The phrase *fan meeting* is first adapted into Japanese phonology as *fanmītingu*, and then shortened through a clipping process to form *fanmi*. The word *fanmi* refers to “an intimate event where idols, actors, artists, and others interact directly with their fans.” These terms are widely used in fan communities and online discourse to refer to such events, reflecting the efficiency and expressiveness of *wakamono kotoba*

Data 9

最終回もリアタイします！あと最終回は 23:00 から放送の筈やで
saishūkai mo riatai shimasu! Ato saishūkai wa 23: 00 kara hōsō no hazuya de

‘I’ll be watching the final episode **in real time**! The final episode should air at 11:00 PM.’

In a comment written by the account *shinp0709*, the word *riatai* (リアタイ) is a *wakamono kotoba* and is derived from the English expression *real time*. The phrase *real time* was first adapted into Japanese phonology as *riaru taimu*, and then shortened through a clipping process to form *riatai*. The word *riatai* means “watching something as it is broadcast” or “watching in real time.” This term is frequently used in online and fan communities to emphasize real-time participation.

6. Phonological Change

In addition to the five processes previously discussed, there are also phonological changes that characterize *wakamono kotoba*. One common pattern is vowel lengthening. For example, the word *yabai* (やばい) becomes *yabaii* (やばーい). The word *yabai* itself has undergone semantic expansion, shifting from its original meaning of “dangerous” or “risky” to include meanings such as “oh no!”, “really cool!”, “extreme”, “terrible,” depending on the context. Similarly, the word *zutto* (ずっと) may appear as *zuutto* (ずーっと), which conveys the meaning “continuously” or “forever” with a stronger emotional nuance.

Another phonological variation can be observed in the word *kawaii* (かわいい), which changes to *kyawaii* (キャワイイ). The shift from *ka* to *kya* reflects a more expressive pronunciation, enhancing the sense of “cuteness.” There is also a variation in the word *sugi* that appears as *sungi* (すんぎ), as found in expressions such as *ureshisungi* (うれしすんぎ). This reflects a non-standard phonological alteration that contributes to a playful tone.

7. Dialect Variation

Japanese has a wide range of dialects that vary according to both region and speaker. Certain lexical items from specific dialects may become popular and be adopted by speakers outside their original regions. Some of these expressions are subsequently used by younger speakers, allowing them to function as part of contemporary *wakamono kotoba*. The following section presents an analysis of *wakamono kotoba* that incorporates elements derived from Japanese dialects.

Data 10

そして、目黒くんの、人差し指で鼻を押さえる仕草をいじってくれて、
オモロくしてくれてありがとう

*Soshite, Meguro-kun no, hitosashiyubi de hana o osaeru shigusa o ijitte kurete,
omoroku shite kurete arigatō*

‘And thank you for making fun of Meguro-kun's gesture of pressing his nose with his index finger, and for making it **funny**.’

Data 11

そして表紙から**めっちゃ**かわいい！発売楽しみにしてます

*Soshite hyōshi kara **metcha** kawai! Hatsubai tanoshimini shitemasu*

‘And the cover is **really** cute! I'm looking forward to its release!’

In data (10) and (11), there is the usage of words *omoroi* (おもろい) and *mechcha* (めっちゃ), both of which originate from the Kansai dialect. The word *omoroi* is a variant of *omoshiroi* “funny”, formed through the deletion of the *-shi-*, and resulting in a more informal form. In terms of meaning, *omoroi* conveys the same meaning as *omoshiroi*, which is “funny,” “interesting,” or “amusing.”

Similarly, *mechcha* is derived from the form *mechakucha*, which undergoes clipping through the deletion of the final segment *-kucha*. The word *mechcha* functions as an intensifier meaning “very,” “extremely,” or “really.” In the context of *wakamono kotoba*, these expressions illustrate the adoption of dialect as expressive stylistic words by young speakers in Japan.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the analysis, *wakamono kotoba*, or Japanese youth language, found in Instagram comments, can be divided into seven forms of variation. The process of forming *wakamono kotoba* consists of 1) affixation (adding prefixes and suffixes); 2) compounding; 3) reduplication (whole words); 4) clipping; 5) borrowing from a foreign language; 6) phonological change; and 7) dialect variation. The analysis shows that *wakamono kotoba* in the data is formed through diverse word formation processes, for example, *gekiai* (affixation), *kakkokawachi* (compounding), *mottomotto* (reduplication), *kakko* (clipping), *fanmi* (borrowing), and so on.

These formations demonstrate the creativity and productivity of young speakers in generating innovative expressions that emphasize emotional intensity, efficiency, and nuanced meaning. The usage of *wakamono kotoba* functions to strengthen expressiveness, convey evaluative meanings, and facilitate informal communication, particularly in online interactions. Overall, the findings suggest that *wakamono kotoba* reflects the dynamic of Japanese youth in adapting language to social and communicative needs.

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