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Characterisation and Perceptions
in Written Video Game Dialogues

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Introduction

Japan is home to some of the largest videogame development companies in the world – Nintendo, Square Enix, Konami, Sega, Namco Bandai and Capcom to name a few. The games produced by these companies span many different genres – role-playing games, fighting games, stealth action shooters, turn-based strategy, and so forth. The richness and diversity of the medium is significant. I believe that these games should not just be seen as market products but as artistic works and cultural artefacts, that can tell us much about the culture of the place of origin. Japanese games are not only highly regarded for their production standards, but also sell millions of copies annually across the globe, drawing players in with their unique perspective on universal human ideas. (Hutchinson, 2019: 1)

This thesis investigates language ideologies in Japanese pop culture, and specifically the linguistic stylisation of non-human characters in written video game dialogues, with a focus on the role of video game developers and on the perceptions and linguistic attitudes of players. The theme of language use in pop culture has been the subject of numerous studies, and it has attracted considerable interest in diverse fields of studies, such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, sociology of language, and linguistic anthropology, following a variety of paradigms in their research. However, as will be discussed in this work, many aspects remain underexplored, and especially so in the video ludic medium.

Video games occupy a key place in contemporary Japanese popular culture: the Japanese market is the third world market in terms of revenues, behind only the United States and China, and the first in terms of market penetration rate and rate of diffusion of the medium among the population (Statista, 2025). However, such importance from a quantitative and qualitative point of view has not been accompanied by an equivalent attention to the video game as an object of research. Moreover, «Japan constitutes the third biggest market in the world, but their demographics, genre and entire gaming culture differs significantly from the West, practically constituting a separate market with Japan-only video games with limited export intentions» (Dymek, 2012: 39). Such “insularity” is often referred to also as “Galapagos syndrome”, which is described by the Japanese sociologist Nakamura Takayasu as «a frequently used term in Japanese business circles to mockingly refer to technologies and specifications advancing in a form that lacks compatibility with other countries, much like how animals on the Galapagos Islands evolved uniquely in a closed environment» (Nakamura T., 2013: 66). Due to this supposed insular nature, Japanese-language video games would appear to be heavily optimised for the

Japanese market. However, rather than in terms of a supposed superiority of the “Japanese” cultural product in the vein of *nihonjinron*, referring to «discourses on the distinctiveness of the society, culture, and national character of the Japanese» (Yoshino, 2016: 1), and ethnocentric nationalist literature in general, such specificity can be interpreted as being due to the contemporary pop cultural environment where it is situated. In these regards, as argued also by Picard & Pelletier-Gagnon (2015):

Japanese video games, that we can qualify by the Japanese term *geemu* [sic!], which underlines its local specificity, is not bound to any “essence” (national, mediatic, etc.), but to a market, or rather to markets, which birthed a game-related culture, or rather cultures (and subcultures) which are themselves fluctuating and mobile under the influence of industrial structures (publishers/developers, console manufacturers, marketers, localizers, etc.) and of interpretative communities (specialized and popular press, player communities and fans of popular culture, scholars, etc.). Thus, the local Japanese video game market should not be separated from the particular media ecosystem within which it evolves, and particularly within a larger content industry strongly characterized by specific commercial strategies, and one in particular, that is the marketing strategy best known in Japan under the name of media mix (*media mikkusu*). (Picard & Pelletier-Gagnon, 2015: 3)

Therefore, this study aims to fill a gap in scholarship on “pop cultural linguistics” (as will be introduced in 3.1) by researching language and ideologies in contemporary Japanese video games, with a strong focus on the reproduction and circulation of language ideologies inside video games dialogues, which is also influenced by the intertextual nature of the media mix of contemporary Japan. This will be achieved through a triangulation of approaches, with an author-oriented, text-oriented, and player-oriented approach, aiming to explore the implicit and explicit construction of virtual identities. This approach allows for insights from different perspectives into how written in-game dialogues are constructed by game developers, presented to consumers, and received by the audience. The notion of intertextuality, therefore, will be crucial to the analysis and the interpretation of the role of language ideologies in the mediated communication of contemporary pop culture, as also suggested by Hiramoto & Park (2010):

the notion of intertextuality becomes a highly useful concept for the linguistic anthropological study of media discourse in the context of modernity, as it provides us with a tool for exploring the semiotic processes that underlie the way in which the media negotiate and

reinscribe the complex relationships of identity that characterize late modern subjecthood.
(Hiramoto & Park, 2010: 180)

The thesis is structured as follows. The first three chapters provide the theoretical and methodological foundations of this research. Specifically, Chapter 1 introduces previous scholarship on language and characterisation. Starting from the framework of *yakuwarigo*, I introduce categories and concept borrowed from linguistic anthropology, focusing on the representation of stereotyped identities through fictional characters in contemporary Japanese popular culture, and on mediated communication as an avenue for the propagation of language ideologies. Chapter 2 provides an overview of video games as a medium, focusing on their textual and linguistic aspects, and detailing the construction of the target corpus for textual analysis. Chapter 3 reviews secondary sources, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies for analysing language use in popular culture, by examining pop cultural linguistics, research on English-language video games, scholarship on Japanese in fictional works, and studies on Japanese language in video games.

The three chapters that follow build on this theoretical and methodological basis to conduct empirical research, following the aforementioned triangulation of approaches: author-oriented, text-oriented, and player-oriented. Specifically, as for the author-oriented analysis, Chapter 4 examines how ideologies shape communication in Japanese video games, focusing on the creative use of language by developers and the scriptwriting process from a linguistic anthropological perspective. I investigate the interplay between visual and linguistic elements in character design, particularly regarding non-human characters, and I explore how these choices can impact narrative and gameplay from the point of view of game creators. Data are drawn from interviews with six male and one female Japanese native game developers, encompassing both independent and commercial perspectives. This qualitative analysis, which builds on and expands previous scholarship, aims to provide an empirical basis for a language ideological reading of popular culture in video games. Then, for the text-oriented approach, Chapter 5 analyses linguistic representation in dialogues from a corpus of 24 Japanese-language video games, focusing on how language choices index character roles and identities across various genres and production. I employ a primarily stylistic approach, supplemented by field and questionnaire methods, to determine whether internal variations exist in the dialogue of different game types. Characters are categorised as ally, good, neutral, or villain based on established literature, and their registers are described through macro-, micro-, and meso-level analyses. I examine a range of linguistic features, including pronouns, imperatives, and sentence-final particles, and I

compare dialogues with preexisting corpora. Ultimately, the aim of the analysis is to illuminate how fictional identities and ideologies are constructed in video game NPCs, offering broader sociolinguistic insights into mediated character portrayal. Finally, for the player-oriented approach, building on previous research on perceptions of role language in fictional characters, Chapter 6 follows the textual metalinguistic analysis of Chapter 5, by presenting a questionnaire survey that investigates metapragmatic stereotypes and discourses among native speakers of Japanese, using real examples from the target corpus. The aim of this investigation is to shed light on the degree of diffusion and knowledge of fictional registers of language among a contemporary audience, and to compare the impressions of consumers to the experience of game developers, gaining insights into linguistic attitudes at both end of the spectrum.

Lastly, in the conclusions I will address the possible limitations of the study, and I will offer suggestions for future possible directions of research. I will suggest potential paths for future research, highlighting areas that would deserve further exploration and to enhance our understanding of language in Japanese pop culture. In addition to data-driven conclusions on language in video games, I will also address how, from a methodological perspective, this thesis shows that applying categories from linguistic anthropology can effectively enhance the reliability and depth of sociolinguistic analysis on fictionalised orality in Japanese. To summarise, following the definitions proposed by English sociolinguist Andrew Moody (2019), the examination of language ideologies in this thesis will focus on linguistic representations in written video game dialogues (the performative channel), and on attitudes and perceptions of developers and users towards fictionalised orality in games and across contemporary Japanese pop culture (the affiliative channel).

Language ideologies are usually observed through two non-exclusive channels in popular culture: within the *performative channel*, which examines the influence of language ideologies upon language choice in the production of pop culture artifacts, and the *affiliative channel*, which examines the reception and reactions toward language in pop culture artifacts. [...] Whereas the *performative channel* examines language ideologies from pop culture performances, the *affiliative channel* examines fans' reaction to language used in popular culture. Two aspects of popular culture make this channel especially important for the examination of language ideologies: First, popular culture is largely driven by a marketplace that encourages consumers to evaluate performance, and, second, the multimodal nature of popular culture encourages intertextual references between artists and fans. (Moody, 2019: 1-2)

Chapter 1: Language and Characterisation in Japan

As argued by Moretti (2025a: 129), the use of linguistic variation to delineate specific categories of characters within fictional works is a common phenomenon in many cultures. For a contemporary example, in her analysis of 24 animated Disney films, Rosina Lippi-Green (1997/2012) shows that, in general, characters portrayed as “good” tend to have speech patterns of middle-class Americans (or occasionally middle-class British individuals), even when it might not logically align with their expected language background. On the other hand, characters depicted as “bad” are more inclined to possess foreign accents or employ other non-standard or non-mainstream varieties of US English, predominantly African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Latino English. This choice is regarded as instrumental in reinforcing the «promotion of the needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalised groups, by means of disinformation and misrepresentation of those non-dominant groups» (Lippi-Green, 2012: 67).

Within the Japanese context, the concept of *yakuwarigo* ‘role language’ has gained considerable traction over the past two decades. Initially introduced by Japanese linguist Kinsui Satoshi in the article *Yakuwarigo tankyū no teian* (A proposal for the exploration of role language, 2000), but arguably going largely unnoticed, with the release of the book *Vācharu nihongo: Yakuwarigo no nazo* (*Virtual Japanese: The Mystery of Role Language*, 2003), the concept has begun to receive widespread recognition both among the general public and scholars alike (Kinsui, 2013: 25). As of today, research in this area includes, apart from articles, edited books, and dissertations, also a dictionary of role language, providing explanations for expressions commonly associated with specific categories of fictional characters (Kinsui, 2014a).

1.1. Role language and fictional characters

Role language refers to «a set of spoken language features (such as vocabulary, grammar and phonetic characteristics) that can be psychologically associated with a particular character type» (Kinsui & Yamakido, 2015: 30), with potential attributes including age, gender, occupation, social status, appearance, and personality.

ある特定の言葉遣い（語彙・語法・言い回し・イントネーション等）を聞くと特定の人物像（年齢、性別、職業、階層、時代、容姿・風貌、性格等）を思い浮かべることができるとき、あるいはある特定の人物像を提示されると、その人物がいかに使用しそう

な言葉遣いを思い浮かべることができるとき、その言葉遣いを「役割語」と呼ぶ。

(Kinsui, 2000: 311; Kinsui, 2003: 205)

When a particular use of language (vocabulary, word usage, phraseology, intonation, etc.) can bring to mind a particular image of a person (age, gender, occupation, class, era, appearance, personality, etc.), or when a particular image of a person is presented to us and we can imagine the language that the person might use, we call that use of language “role language”. (Translation mine)

Even when it appears within media based on the written word, such as novels or manga, the category of role language is used exclusively for the representation of spoken language (*hanashikotoba*). As such, language stylisation through role language is peculiar to the characterisation of fictionalised orality (cf. Teshigawara & Kinsui, 2012). Some of the linguistic features most frequently associated to role language belong to the categories of personal pronouns (*ninshō daimeishi*), and so-called sentence-final expressions (*bunmatsu hyōgen*), and among these, final particles (*shūjoshi*) are of particular importance. Along with sentence-final expressions, different variations of diaphasic registers, such as honorific speech (*keigo*), are employed. Finally, other possible elements of role language are found in paraverbal elements, such as accent, interjections, intonation, speed, and fluency of speech (Kinsui, 2003: 205-207). Subsequently Teshigawara & Kinsui (2012) introduce the term “fictionalised orality” in the context of *yakuwarigo*, and explain its origin as follows:

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. (Teshigawara & Kinsui, 2012: 40)

As such, although role language appears to be especially prevalent in modern popular media, like anime or manga, multiple studies have highlighted how characterisation through linguistic means has been a recurrent feature of fictionalised orality in Japan since at least the Edo period (1603-1868). For example, through a corpus-based analysis, Pappalardo (2023) shows how female characters in *kyōgen*, a form of comic theatre, in the *Toraakirabon* transcription of 1642 are linguistically distinguished through specific vocabulary, such as personal pronouns and specific verbal copulas, but also with a more conservative use of morphosyntactic structures, which in turn makes their language more elegant and polite, and arguably more “feminine”. Kinsui (2003: 16-20) has traced the use of some categories of role language, such as ‘elderly male language’ (*rōjingo*), back to the late Edo period, in some of the works belonging to the genre of *gesaku* popular novels, such as *Ukiyoburo* (*The Bathhouse of the Floating World*, 1809-1812) by Shikitei Sanba (1776-1822), or in *kabuki* plays like *Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan* (*The Tōkaidō Yotsuya Ghost Stories*, 1825). Nakamura Momoko (2012: 118-119) has noted how the use of overtly female language, so-called *te yo da wa kotoba*, and its semiotic connection with the stereotype of upper-class young ladies, has been applied to the linguistic characterisation of a female cat in *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (*I Am a Cat*, 1905-1906), the famous satirical novel by Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) about Japanese society during the Meiji period (1868-1912).

As further pointed out by Teshigawara & Kinsui (2012), previous research on role language, especially in Japanese scholarship, has thus mainly focused on the supposed systematic characteristics of *yakuwarigo*, and on the description of recurring features, without much emphasis on the discursive meaning-making processes:

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). (Teshigawara & Kinsui, 2012: 41)

Drawing on the role language approach in his studies on style and personality in communication research, Sadanobu Toshiyuki (2006, 2011b) introduces the term *hatsuwa kyarakuta* ‘utterance character’, with reference to when, in addition to the content of the speech, verbal language also implicitly describes the characteristics of the speaker, as in *sō ja, washi ga shitte oru* ‘it is so, I know it’, by a stereotypical ‘old scientist character’ (*rō-hakase kyara*) (Sadanobu, 2006: 120). In these regards, role language appears to be more concerned with the connotative

meaning and the indexical dimension of the utterance (as will be explored in 1.3), rather than with its denotative meaning. In addition, Sadanobu has also investigated the relationship between language and speaking character. He identifies at least three ways in which these two parameters (*kotoba* and *kyarakuta*) relate to each other (Sadanobu, 2006: 120). According to Sadanobu (2006: 120-121), the three (mutually non-exclusive) relationships are as follows: when the language directly describes the character, one can speak of a ‘character label’ (*raberu*) and of a character that is “labelled” according to a certain system of values and referring to widely established stereotypes (such as *botchan* ‘young master’ to define a spoiled male). Conversely, when the verbal language not only describes the actions performed, but it also implicitly frames the character traits of the person performing the action (e.g. *nitari to warau* ‘sneer’), one can speak of an ‘action character’ (*dōsa kyarakuta*). In this case, the character is depicted as evil not by means of an explicit label, but through a specific behaviour. Finally, when, in addition to the content of the speech, the language also implicitly describes the characteristics of the speaker, Sadanobu refers to the concept of role language. An example of this is the aforementioned expression *sō ja, washi ga shitte oru*. Sadanobu refers to this specific category of speakers as ‘characters of verbal expression’ (*hatsuwa kyarakuta*), which may be exemplified by the “character of the old scientist”, a recurring figure in science fiction narratives. According to this formulation, while referencing concepts such as *yakuwarigo* and *kyarakutā*, Sadanobu regards them as more discursive and less systematic compared to their original theorisation. Furthermore, *kyarakutā* (or *kyarakuta*, as spelled by Sadanobu) means both ‘character, personality’ and ‘fictional character’. As such, *kyarakutā* can be understood to point not only to specific fictional characters, but also to character tropes, archetypes, and fictional identities and ways of being. In 1.4, I will introduce the concept of “characterological figure” (Agha, 2007; Johnstone, 2017), which will be used in this thesis in reference to such two-fold understanding of *kyarakutā* and its abbreviation *kyara*.

1.2. Criticism of role language

Despite the popularity of *yakuwarigo*, especially in Japanese academia, criticism has been levelled at its theoretical approach and methodological framework. Kinsui & Yamakido (2015) highlight some aspects that would require further elaboration, such as the extent of shared knowledge that would be necessary for a language feature to be classified as role language, or a clearer definition of what can constitute an attribute of the speaker.

- (3) i. The earlier definition does not specify the extent to which knowledge about the association of a particular language feature with a certain character type (or attribute) must be shared for it to be considered a type of role language. Can we consider it to be role language if even only one individual possesses the knowledge, or does it have to be shared by all members of the speech community?
 - ii. The earlier definition does not specify what can constitute a speaker's attributes. Can any attribute of the speaker associated with a particular language feature qualify as role language?
 - iii. The earlier definition does not specify how role language relates broadly to stereotypes.
- (Kinsui & Yamakido 2015: 30-31)

Furthermore, Maynard (2016: 78) finds the role language approach limited in scope, with unclear groundings from a theoretical perspective, and with its findings tending to be anecdotal. Likewise, while acknowledging the innovations made by Sadanobu, Maynard (2016: 80) finds shortcomings both from a theoretical perspective, regarding the definition of *kyarakuta*, and from a methodological perspective, about the choice of media under analysis. To overcome these supposed limitations, Maynard proposes her own character-speak theory, to analyse not only speech, variations, and styles of Japanese, but also the characteristics of the speakers and the modes of verbal interaction, with character-speak operating as indexical signs, evoking characters and characteristics with their creative potential (Maynard, 2016: 63-67). As such, Maynard suggests that linguistic characteristics and their associated meanings are not fixed and always present “in a vacuum”, but that they are instead pragmatically understood as processes of contextualisation and recontextualisation. Such arguments are indeed insightful in presenting how ideologies inform the linguistic characterisation of fictional speakers. However, the character-speak theory does not appear to deal with how such linguistic and semiotic repertoires come to be recognised as differently valorised registers, and with how these registers are reproduced in fictionalised orality across different media, and especially in Japanese video games dialogues. Also, as suggested by Yamashita (2019: 224), «[i]f one extends role language to all fictional registers that are associated with a particular gender, age, or occupation, we can find many more roles than those identified by Kinsui. Role language, as a fictional register, can also be used in everyday social interactions». For these reasons, I argue that positioning role language research in the existing scholarship on linguistic anthropology and language ideologies would be fruitful in overcoming such supposed shortcomings.

1.3. Role language as enregisterment and iconization

As highlighted by Patrick Heinrich (2012: 12), there is no consensus on how to conceptualise language ideologies and how to study them. According to the first definition proposed by Michael Silverstein (1979: 193), «ideologies about language, or linguistic ideologies, are any sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or *justification* of perceived language structure and use». Subsequently, Paul V. Kroskrity (2000) emphasises the influences of sociopolitical interests on beliefs about language, arguing that «language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group» (Kroskrity, 2000: 8). As also explained by Susan Gal (2023):

the term ideology itself has long been implicated in questions about the neutrality of knowledge. When first proposed, in the late 18th century, the term ideology referred to the scientific study of all human ideas. But it was soon burdened with the pejorative meaning of false consciousness: speakers' mistaken view of the world as against the presumed-to-be more accurate one held by the analyst. Most work on language ideologies rejects the assumption of false consciousness for its overprivileging of the researcher's knowledge and instead emphasizes the unlikelihood of any speakers' worldview being entirely false. Research projects vary along this dimension, from positing neutral ideas to unveiling domination. Some scholars have avoided the term ideology altogether, preferring to call the object of analysis metadiscourse, metacommunication, or the metasemiotic framework—terms which are used interchangeably. These rubrics are indispensable, but there are conceptual reasons for retaining ideology, though without the presumption of false consciousness. (Gal, 2023: 5)

As highlighted by Woolard (1998) in her introduction to the field of inquiry, language ideology deals with «[r]epresentations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world» (Woolard, 1998: 3). As such, their study lies mainly in the field of linguistic anthropology. As further noted, the terms “linguistic ideologies”, “language ideologies”, and “ideologies of language” can be used interchangeably, despite some minor differences in their application depending on the researcher and on the traditions of use (Woolard, 1998: 4). In this thesis I will employ the term “language ideology” and “linguistic ideology” as synonymous, and I will use them according to the broader definition proposed by Silverstein (1979), encompassing any sets of beliefs about language articulated by its users. This definition, as argued by Heinrich (2012), stresses «the importance of taking the speaker's own rationalization and justification of their language into account» (Heinrich, 2012: 14).

As also suggested by Gal (2023: 1), concepts like indexicality, enregisterment and iconization are essential for the study of language ideologies. First, indexicality is defined by Silverstein (1976: 29) as «the property of sign vehicle signalling contextual “existence” of an entity». Subsequently, Silverstein has coined the concept of indexical order, according to which «any n-th order indexical presupposes that the context in which it is normatively used has a schematization of some particular sort, relative to which we can model the “appropriateness” of its usage in that context» (Silverstein, 2003, 193). Subsequently, Penelope Eckert (2008, 2018) operates a synthesis between the terminology introduced by Silverstein and that previously introduced by sociolinguist William Labov. For Eckert, a first-order index is equivalent to a Labovian indicator, as this simply indicates that the speaker belongs to a specific group: when the linguistic form is linked to a metapragmatic meaning about its use by specific ethnic or social groups, this becomes a Labovian marker, or a second-order index (Eckert 2008: 463). Eckert therefore coins the term “indexical field”, referring to how the meanings of linguistic variables are not precise or fixed, but rather constitute a field of potential or ideologically related meanings, which «can be activated in the situated use of the variable» (Eckert, 2018: 144). This is in line with scholarship on the so-called “third wave of sociolinguistics” (Eckert, 2012), which emphasises the agency of individuals with respect to their language use, and the social meaning of variation.

Diatopic variation and diastratic variation are widely used in fictionalised orality as second-order indexes for the creation of specific characterological figures (see 1.4). There also appears to be a strong tendency to resemanticise diatopically marked traits in a diastratic sense. For example, the first-person pronoun *washi* is typical of Western Japanese varieties, particularly Chūgoku and Kansai. However, the prevalent use in fiction is marked in a diastratic sense, as indicative of the register of elderly speakers (*rōjingo*), regardless of the geographical provenance of the speaking figure (cf. Yamashita, 2019: 225). Similarly, the use of lexical and phonetic variants commonly associated with the diatopic variation of the Kansai region (*Kansai-ben*) are widely used as diaphasic markers of a humorous register, or as diastratic markers associated with working-class speakers. Such discursive practices can be regarded as examples of enregisterment, which refers to «processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorised semiotic registers by a population» (Agha, 2007: 80). Asif Agha (2024: 2-3) gives Standard English, registers of business and bureaucracy, journalism and advertising, technical and scientific registers, varieties of slang, and criminal argots as examples of different register of English which are all linked to distinct social practices. In the context of fictionalised orality, role language can also be seen

as an example of enregisterment, where linguistic features (as discussed in 1.1) are pragmatically understood as signs of recognisable fictional identities.

The category of “register” has historically been employed in Japanese linguistics. The term *isō* (literally ‘phase’, but close in formulation and use to the notion of ‘register’) refers to peculiar aspects of language associated with social groups or classes, or aspects of contextual and pragmatic language use (Tanaka A., 1999: 1). The field of study of diaphasic and diastratic variation (*isōsa kenkyū*) is based on empirical observation and description of language use by real speakers. In its conceptualisation and methodologies, this field of study is akin to variationist sociolinguistics, as it has emerged from the seminal work by Labov (1966/2006) on the social stratification of English in New York City. As such, it can be considered as belonging to the so-called first wave of sociolinguistics, with broad correlations between linguistic variables and macro-scale general sociological categories, such as age, sex, class, and ethnicity. Kinsui acknowledges the debt of his role language theory to the field of *isōsa kenkyū*, and therefore also to variationist sociolinguistics. However, he also specifies how the object of his research is virtual language, whose knowledge is shared by native speakers (Kinsui repeatedly uses the term *nihongo no bogo washa* ‘native speakers of Japanese’), but that has thus far been largely overlooked (Kinsui, 2000: 322-323). However, both *isōsa kenkyū* and role language research appear to be more concerned with the description of linguistic styles devoid of situated context, intended as fixed and systematic, and do not consider the use of language as discursive practice. Therefore, while role language can be regarded an emic category, concerned with the description of the use of stereotypical language in fiction (especially in scholarship about Japanese popular culture), enregisterment refers to an etic category, concerned with the creative processes of reappropriation and reuse of linguistic variables for the construction of (virtual) identity. Within fictional works, such features become second-order indexes, as they refer to stereotypes and to linguistic ideologies regarding these registers, to immediately characterise the speaker.

Role language can also be considered as an example of iconization of specific linguistic tokens, as «[l]inguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence» (Irvine & Gal, 2000: 37). In this sense, a whole category of (virtual) speakers can be indexed solely by their use of a personal pronoun or of a verbal form, such as the use of *washi* and *ja* iconically representing the social group of elderly male speakers (see 1.1). The process of iconization would later be renamed by Gal & Irvine (2019) as “rhematization”:

Rhematization is a process by which, to observers, speakers themselves seem to share the qualities perceived as characterizing their speech. Speakers are taken to be the way they are supposed to sound, in contrast to the characteristics of some other speaker and speech stereotype. Or, conversely, their speech is heard as sounding the way they are perceived to be. Invariably, the contrasting characteristics are ones that are culturally and often politically salient in the world the participants inhabit. (Gal, 2023: 9-10)

In this thesis I will use the term “iconization” when referring to these processes, as it is the formulation most widely used in previous scholarship, and because the notion of “icon” refers to the Percian terminology of “symbols”, “icons”, and “indexes”, originating in semiotic theory but also widely used in research on language ideology (Eckert, 2019: 754), as also seen in the aforementioned concepts of indexicality and indexical field.

Iconic connections are central to language ideology (Irvine & Gal 2000), allowing the construal of language features or entire varieties as natural reflections of a characterological construal of their speakers. Iconicity is also fundamental to variation (and expressivity more generally), as the social meaning of a variable can be intensified by repetition and, in the case of phonological variables, by phonetic intensification. (Eckert, 2019: 754)

Linguistic features in fictionalised orality can also be interpreted as undergoing a process of regimentation, from both a linguistic and an indexical point of view. On the one hand, language regimentation refers to ways in which dominant discourses about language are controlled, produced, and received within a society (Kroskrity, 2000: 10). On the other hand, indexical regimentation refers to processes whereby «a previously broad indexical field of potential semiotic meanings (Eckert, 2008) is narrowed to a much smaller set of strongly ideologized and semiotically inflexible meanings» (Bucholtz, 2011: 257). For example, on her analysis of pseudo-Tōhoku-*ben* ‘pseudo-Tōhoku dialects’, Hiramoto (2009) notices how a small amount of real dialectal features belonging to dialects from the Tōhoku region are combined arbitrarily, resulting in the production of a speech style that superficially sounds similar to Tōhoku-*ben*, but which actually indexes a prototypical ‘rural dialect’ (*inaka-ben*), with the aim of evoking «an image of someone who is rough, unpolished, and lacking education» (Hiramoto, 2009: 259-261). Linguistic features associated to role language are highly regimented and possess a high degree of iconicity.

Finally, scholarship on language ideologies can also be related to the field of perceptual dialectology, which is described as «a discipline that investigates what language users

themselves think and believe about language» (Montgomery & Beal, 2011: 121). As these beliefs are informed by language ideologies, investigating attitudes and perceptions can prove insightful for researching how language can shape identities. Moreover, as explained by Preston (1999):

Perceptual dialectology, then, represents the dialectologist's-sociolinguist's-variationist's interest in folk linguistics. What do nonspecialists have to say about variation? Where do they believe it comes from? Where do they believe it exists? What do they believe is its function? Once linguists are in possession of these facts [...], they may go on to compare scientific and folk characterisations of dialect areas (or social class varieties or others), discovering, for example, that there may be perceived folk dialect areas where there are none scientifically and vice versa [...]. Once it has been decided that the folk facts of dialectology are worth knowing, it remains only to visit the folk and find them out. (Preston, 1999: xxv)

While I have not explicitly employed the “principal techniques” of the discipline, developed by Preston in the 1980s (Preston, 1999: xxxiv-xxxv), in my research I have aligned with the central focus of perceptual dialectology, namely the interest in what nonspecialist have to say about language. This will be analysed in detail in Chapter 4, where I explore the creative use of linguistic resources by video games developers through semi-structured interviews, and in Chapter 6, dealing with language attitudes and linguistic perception of participants through a questionnaire survey.

1.4. Language and characters in contemporary Japan

As language ideologies are fundamentally «the everyday presumptions about language variation, speech forms, and associated social values that speakers bring to any linguistic interaction» (Gal, 2023: 1), studying language ideologies cannot evade a study of how speakers are constructed. In research on fictionalised orality, this means fictional characters and, as pointed out in 1.1, *kyarakutā*. Fictional characters are found to be ubiquitous in contemporary Japanese society (Nozawa, 2013). Among them, human characters are often used, both by corporate companies as marketing tools (Occhi, 2010), and by local governments to distinguish their service and make them feel closer to the user.



Figure 1: Fictional characters as advertisement by Kyōto City subway (January 2023, photo by author).

As an example of this, Figure 1 features four fictional human characters of the multimedia advertising campaign *Get on! Kyoto City Subway* (*Chikatetsu ni noru*), produced by the Kyōto Municipal Transportation Bureau (*Kyōto-shi kōtsū-kyoku*) in 2013 to promote the subway (*Kyōto-shi kōtsū-kyoku*, 2022). The names of the various characters playfully reference names of subway stations throughout the city, such as Uzumasa Rei and Uzumasa Moe (first and second from right) referencing Uzumasa Tenjingawa Station, Matsuga Saki (third from right) referencing Matsugasaki Station, and Ono Misa (fourth from right) referencing Ono Station. In this way, the characters function as a sort of mascot characters for each station.

Advertisement featuring non-human characters appears to also be widespread. Local mascot characters (so-called *gotōchi kyara* ‘local characters’, or *yuru kyara* ‘soft characters’) are used for commercial purposes and to draw tourism to the city or region they represent (Akizuki, 2010). Famous examples can be found in Kumamon, the bear-like mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture, Hikonyan, the cat-like official mascot of Hikone in Shiga Prefecture, and Funassyi, the pear-like character that unofficially represents the city of Funabashi in Chiba Prefecture. Peculiar speech features are commonly associated to such characters, in particular so-called *kyara gobi* ‘character-associated word endings’ (Kinsui, 2003: 188), *kyara kopyura* ‘character-associated copular forms’ (Sadanobu, 2007: 28), or *kyara joshi* ‘character-associated particles’ (Sadanobu, 2007: 31). Such word endings are often completely fictional and are created mainly for comical purposes. For example, Funassyi always ends their sentences with *nasshii*, a non-standard final particle created from the proper name of the character. In the case of Kumamon, the character usually uses the ending *mon*, always written in katakana. At first glance, this can be compared to *nasshii*. However, in a metapragmatic interpretation of its own stylistic choices,

the official X (formerly Twitter) account for Kumamon has recognised this style as a creative take on actual linguistic features belonging to Kumamoto dialect.

熊本弁だけど、ボクのモンは、熊本の者（くまもとのもん）から来てて、「そぎゃん言う
たろもん（そんな言ったでしょ）」みたいに語尾につけるもんじゃないモン☆ [...].

(@55_kumamon, 2012)

It is Kumamoto dialect, but my *mon* comes from *Kumamoto no mon* ‘a person from Kumamoto’ and should not be added to the end of a word, like *sogyān yutaro mon* ‘I told you so’ [...]. (Translation mine)

On the other hand, while Hikonyan does not speak, the name of the mascot references the feline onomatopoeia *nyan* (cf. Akizuki, 2012), due to the depiction of the character as a white *maneki-neko* ‘beckoning cat’ with an orange helmet. Even when inspired by real-word occurrences, such character-associated features can thus be compared to idiolects, as language styles occurring only in a single user, or in a very limited group of users. In these instances, linguistic forms often undergo a semiotic process of indexical bleaching, where the connections between a linguistic form and its social meanings are weakened, while the linguistic meaning, as well as general grammatical and/or referential functions of the form, remains unchanged (Squires, 2014: 43).

On the topic of the ubiquity of characters in Japan, Azuma (2007), with his concept of ‘database consumption’ (*dētabēsu shōhi*), deals with how audiences engage with fictional characters and narratives in contemporary Japanese pop culture, particularly within the realm of so-called ‘otaku culture’ (*otakutachi no bunka*). Database consumption refers to the idea that consumers no longer engage with fictional worlds and characters through linear or coherent narratives. Instead, the audience interacts with them as a collection of fragmented elements drawn from a “database”, including elements such as character traits, visual motifs, story tropes, and other components that can be combined, rearranged, or consumed independently of their original context. Borrowing the term used in linguistics, such “database” can be regarded as a “repertoire”, similarly to a linguistic repertoire. As such, the existence of «an enormous repertoire of fictional characters, some of them stock characters we have learned to recognize since early childhood» (Bacon, 2009: 87) can also be posited, and with it a repertoire of associated linguistic styles.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, fictional characters can be framed as characterological figures, that is, «any image of personhood that is performable through a semiotic display or

enactment (such as an utterance)» (Agha, 2007: 177). Thus, as suggested also by Johnstone, «a linguistic feature or a set of features can be ideologically linked via enregisterment with a way of being and acting associated not just with a social identity in an abstract sense, but with its embodiment in a character, imagined or actually performed» (Johnstone, 2017: 285). Registers of role language are embodied in fictional characters, and the associated characterological figures are performed in the virtual environment of popular media. However, the fact that usages of particular registers or features of language in fictional speech representation do not follow rules, but rather tendencies, must also be taken into consideration (Amador-Moreno & Terrazas-Calero, 2022: 527). In this view, the “database” of character types and the “repertoire” of associated linguistic registers are shared by consumers, and fictional identities are discursively constructed. As also suggested by Hiramoto & Park (2010):

Mediatized texts are created with specific audiences in mind, and for this reason, texts must make connections to prior discourses. When such texts center around given personae, discourse practices are strategically assigned to such characters in order to constrain them to their given roles. We may understand this in terms of linguistic regimentation (Kroskrity 2000) within mediatized texts. [...] Regimentation of language varieties is often practiced in media discourse to allow mediatized personae to fit into expected social ideologies. (Hiramoto & Park, 2010: 180-181)

Taking into consideration the aforementioned characteristics of the speaker in role language proposed by Kinsui, and the fact that role language research is concerned with language use in a fictional setting, Länsisalmi (2019) identifies so-called “virtual speakers”. Within this category, in addition to actors and characters from films and television series, totally imaginary figures such as aliens or robots can also be included. Such virtual speakers are regularly present in works of fiction, and their virtual characteristics are well recognised by the native speaker audience (Länsisalmi, 2019: 430). As such, NPCs in Japanese-language video games can also be regarded as virtual speakers of Japanese. Furthermore, according to Kinsui (2003: 182-187), so-called ‘alien characters’ (*ijin*) undergo a process of “language projection” (*genko no tōei*), whereby a linguistic register is associated (often anachronistically) to a category of speakers who has never actually employed such register. Among the examples proposed by Kinsui are *buke kotoba* ‘samurai language’ for medieval European warriors (Kinsui, 2003: 182), linguistic features attested only in Muromachi period (1336-1573) for the characterisation of nobles from the Heian period (794-1185) like the verb of existence *ojaru* (Kinsui, 2003: 183-184), use of

elderly male language and classical language for the depiction of otherworldly figures like spirits and deities (Kinsui, 2003: 184), and use of Tōhoku dialect for the depiction of African-American slaves due to its negative associations, as seen in 1.3.

I argue that also non-human characters, conceived as a kind of “other” when compared to human characters who routinely use verbal language in their communication, undergo a process of language projection when they are assigned specific registers for purposes of characterisation. In 2.2, I will apply the existing framework around characterological figures and associated linguistic construction also to non-player characters in video games, to frame such figures as object of a linguistic anthropological analysis of language ideologies in their speech inside contemporary Japanese video games. As will be commented also in 4.7, such kind of characterological figures are constructed, justified, and rationalised through language ideologies and through ideologies of communication (Spitzmüller, 2022: 262-263), within specific media and by routinised forms of communication.



Figure 2: Feline characters in an infographic in a Kyōto tram station (December 2022, photo by author)

Figure 2 presents an example of fictional non-human characters used as infographic, produced by the Japan Railways Group, in this case to discourage violent behaviour at the stations and on board of the train. The graphic features two cats, with the one on the left attacking the one on the right, which is depicted wearing a hat and a necklace with a whistle, thus symbolising a train conductor. The large text reads ‘even if you lose your temper, violence is not allowed

meow! (*katto shite mo bōryoku wa dame nya!*), while the cat on the right is saying ‘please stop meow...’ (*o-yame kudasai nya...*). Differently from Figure 1, where the characters advertising Kyōto City subway do not possess speech or do not give instructions to users of the subway, instructions in Figure 2 are linguistically associated to the feline characters due to the presence of the onomatopoeia *nya* ‘meow’, used both as character-associated copular form and as character-associated word ending. As such, the potential forceful nature of the regulation is softened by its playful association with cute fictional characters, as *kawaii* ‘cute’ is regarded as one of the most common attributes in the contemporary semiotic landscape of Japanese popular culture (cf. Hiramoto & Wee, 2019).

1.5. Language in popular media: mediatization and the medialect

In her research on media-based entextualisation practices, Jaffe (2009) focuses, among other aspects, on «representations of languages and language variation in the media [and] the ideological underpinnings of these representations» (Jaffe, 2009: 572). As such, she argues that mediatization «includes all the representational choices involved in the production and editing of text, image, and talk in the creation of media product» (Jaffe, 2009: 572). Conversely, according to Agha (2011), the concept of mediatization refers to «institutional practices that link processes of communication to processes of commoditization» (Agha, 2011: 163). For Agha, mediatization occurs both inside and outside traditional media contexts, and it involves how media can construct, disseminate, and transform social meanings, identities, and practices.

Drawing on such previous scholarship on mediatization in linguistic anthropology, Androutsopoulos (2014: 23) argues that the recontextualisation of media resources is relevant for the analysis of how identities are constructed in the media, also through processes of routinised reproposal. As such, as also suggested also by Dahlberg-Dodd (2022), this concept can be insightful for the analysis of language ideologies in media of pop culture:

The premise for this approach is that language use in scripted popular media products ‘simultaneously produce[s] (or constitute[s]) foundational ideologies about the nature of language’ (Jaffe, 2009: 572) in practice, as well as provides insight on ‘the people who produce, consume, and/or are represented by . . . media texts’ (Johnson & Ensslin, 2007: 15). This relationship between linguistic form, ideology, and popular media can be broadly considered from the perspective of ‘mediatization’, or ‘institutional practices that link processes of communication to processes of commoditization’ (Agha, 2011: 163). Put differently, to say that a given figure is mediatized is to specify that its representation is inherently

constructed (that is, ‘staged’) (Androutsopolous, 2014) by a media creator for the purpose of reception by an audience. (Dahlberg-Dodd, 2022: 62)

Building on this conceptualisation, Chapter 2 will focus on video games as a “scripted popular media product”, highlighting the textual and linguistic dimensions of the medium, and presenting fictional characters inhabiting the game world as example of mediated figures of personhood, or characterological figures. Subsequently, Chapter 3 will present an overview on previous research about language use in works of fiction, with a focus on scholarship analysing the ideological construction of virtual speakers through diverse methodologies and frameworks. Furthermore, Chapter 4 will point out how non-human characters in video games are purposefully constructed and characterised by the use of routinised linguistic forms, in order to be positively received by the audience, thus contributing to the positive reception and the success (in some cases also to the commercial success) of the video game.

In my analysis, to emphasise the fictional nature of the linguistic repertoires under investigation, I also introduce here the concept of medialect. The Danish sociologist of media Stig Hjarvard (2004) has proposed the term to describe the influence of media on language, and to suggest that the media contribute to language standardisation on the one hand, and to linguistic creativity and innovation on the other.

The media represent a material and social infrastructure for communication among people, and as a consequence, their characteristics quite naturally have an imprint on language. My second hypothesis is, therefore, that as human communication becomes mediated [...], mediated varieties of language will arise. Whereas linguists have focused on linguistic traits relating to the user’s geographical origin (dialect) and sociological traits relating to class or degree of formal education (sociolects), any analysis of an increasingly mediated society’s use of language must also take into account the linguistic variants that arise out of specific media. These are what I have chosen to call medialects. (Hjarvard, 2004: 75)

While taking into consideration the above formulation by Hjarvard, I use the term “medialect” in a slightly different sense. The term “lect” is closely related to that of a variety (cf. Bailey, 1973), and it is used to designate a regional or social variety within a language, as in “dialect” for vernacular forms of a language, “sociolect” for a variety used by a social class, and “idiolect” for the language variant used by a specific individual. On a broader conceptualisation, “lect” in the sense of “variety” (and not “social variety”) is used as a compound term in concepts such

as “chronoelect” for a diachronic variety of language. Additionally, it is also used as a compound element in the formation of a number of technical terms in sociology of language, such as “xenoelect” to define a language variety that superficially resembles another language but not in its more fundamental aspects, “matrilect” for the larger language of the dominant local culture upon which a creole or a pidgin is based, or “mimoelect” for a language variety that has become separated from its matrilect both geographically and communicatively (cf. Stewart, 1989). With “medialect”, in this thesis I will refer to a parallel repertoire of language that is encountered in the media, and which is recognised and understood by users, regardless of whether such repertoire is then used in non-mediated communication. I argue that what Kinsui calls the ‘virtual Japanese’ (*vācharu nihongo*) of virtual reality (Kinsui, 2003: vi) can be defined as the medialect of works of fiction, including media of pop culture.

While Register differences are obtained when the researchers study the aspects and variations in real life, role language refers to the ideas regarding reality that we have, so-called ‘virtual reality’. [...] Fictional works, such as novels and scenarios, are worlds of virtual reality created by the authors, in which role language is employed. (Kinsui, 2017: 24-25)

1.6. Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced categories that have been employed in previous scholarship on the use of language for the purpose of characterisation. After introducing the concept of role language, I have also quoted criticisms that have been levelled at its perceived theoretical and methodological shortcomings. Subsequently, I have introduced categories borrowed from linguistic anthropology, namely indexicality, enregisterment, and iconization. I have argued that employing such concepts together with *yakuwarigo* would be useful in overcoming its shortcomings. Finally, I have emphasised fictional characters as object for research on fictionalised orality, and I have introduced the concept of characterological figure to link the study of the linguistic representation of fictional identities with scholarship on language ideologies. The following chapters will see the application of these concept in a of situations. Specifically, Chapter 2 will deal with video games, with a focus on the textual nature of the medium, on language use inside video games with a focus on verbal dialogue, and on the construction of the target corpus, which is the object of one part of this thesis. Subsequently, Chapter 3 will illustrate previous studies and methodologies for research on language stylisation in fictional works of popular culture, upon which the present research is based, and which will be illustrated in Chapter 4 (interviews), Chapter 5 (textual analysis), and Chapter 6 (questionnaire survey).

Chapter 2: The Linguistic Dimension of Video Games

This chapter will feature an overview of video games as a medium, with a focus on their textual and linguistic aspect. In 2.1, I will be referencing and expanding the literature review as presented by Moretti (2021). Subsequently, non-player characters are introduced, and they are framed as characterological figure as object of a study informed by linguistic anthropology. The theme of agency in video games and the role of game developers will also be introduced and discussed. Finally, I will illustrate the construction of the target corpus, which is the object of the textual analysis in Chapter 5.

2.1. Language in video games

According to the groundbreaking definition proposed by ludologist Espen Aarseth (1997), ergodic literature is a genre of fictional work where «nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text» (Aarseth, 1997: 1). In applying such definition also to video games, Aarseth thus emphasises the textual nature of the medium. Moreover, according to the “classic game model” theorised by the ludologist Jesper Juul (2005), games are defined as «a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable» (Juul, 2005: 36). However, this broad definition of “game” comprises also traditional forms of play. To better define the medium, as argued also by digital media and games scholar Mark J. P. Wolf (2008), and as the name clearly suggests, a fundamental aspect of video games lies in their visual component, usually rendered through a screen, which can be the periphery of a computer, the integrated screen of portable consoles, or the TV for home consoles.

From a linguistic point of view, digital culture scholar Astrid Ensslin (2012b: 6) states that it is impossible to talk about a single “language of video game”, due to the great variety of types of discourse that take place inside and outside the medium. As such, she identifies five levels of discourse:

- (a) language about games and gaming used by gamers across different media and communication platforms,
- (b) language about games and gameplay used by industry professionals, such as game designers and developers,

- (c) language about games and gaming used by journalists, politicians, parents, activists and other media stakeholders,
- (d) language used within games as part of their user interfaces, scripted dialogues, instructions and backstories, and
- (e) language used in instruction manuals, blurbs, advertising and other ‘peritexts’. (Ensslin, 2012b: 6)

Among these, four discourses, namely the ones labelled by Ensslin as (a), (b), (c), and (e) involve so-called “paratexts” that are external to the medium. For a sociolinguistic analysis on the use of language inside video games, the level of discourse that needs to be taken into consideration is the one labelled as (d). In particular, in this thesis the focus is put on the language used within written scripted dialogues.

While studying video game paratexts can be useful, as it can provide a “window” into the kind of discourses one might expect within a video game, it does not always provide an insight into how such a phenomenon is discussed within the text itself. Video game paratexts and video games themselves are different genres and usually communicated through different media. (Heritage, 2025: 209)

In comparison to other media based on written language, like novels or comics, ergodic texts require an effort for the player to be able to “read” them. For “traditional” non-ergodic texts like books, no particular effort is required besides eye movement and turning the pages (Aarseth, 1997: 1-2). Conversely, in the case of video games, as argued also by game designer Julian Kücklich (2006), effort «is not only directed at understanding the text, but also at constructing it, for example by making decisions, throwing dice, or engaging in some form of contest» (Kücklich, 2006: 100). As such, the interactive text, or the “gameplay”, has in most cases an equal, if not greater, importance than the written narrative and linguistic text within the video game. As stated by literary and digital media scholar Sebastian Domsch (2017) regarding verbal communication in games:

[i]n contrast to non-interactive media like text and film, games consistently employ two separate levels of communication, one that is understood to happen within the fictional world that the game presents (which we might call diegetic communication), and one that is directed at the player (which would be ludic communication). To complicate things further, these levels can even be present simultaneously, or even be merged in a single

utterance that is understood to refer both to the fictional gameworld and to the actual game-play. (Domsch, 2017: 254)

However, video games have differing degrees of use of written language within them, which is also influenced by the technical limitations of the hardware. The first examples of commercial video games presented no text at all, or at most a very limited amount of text, as in the case of the famous arcade game *PONG* (Atari, 1972), where the only level of communication is ludic communication, relating to the score of the ongoing game, as exemplified in Figure 3. At the other end of the spectrum, we can find interactive fiction and so-called text adventures, such as *Colossal Cave Adventure* (Crowther, 1975; Crowther/Woods, 1976) or *Zork* (Infocom, 1980), where images are replaced by long textual descriptions, and the player has to enter specific commands in English via keyboard to progress through the game (Williams, 2017: 116-117), as shown in Figure 4.

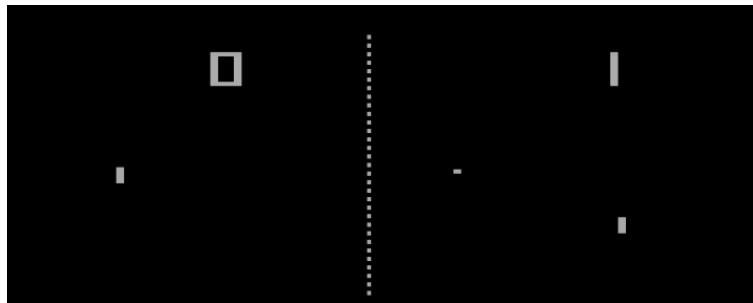


Figure 3: Gameplay of Pong.

```
.run adven

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!!  WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?

yes

SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND FORTUNES IN
TREASURE AND GOLD, THOUGH IT IS RUMORED THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER
SEEN AGAIN.  MAGIC IS SAID TO WORK IN THE CAVE.  I WILL BE YOUR EYES
AND HANDS.  DIRECT ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.  I SHOULD WARN
YOU THAT I LOOK AT ONLY THE FIRST FIVE LETTERS OF EACH WORD, SO YOU'LL
HAVE TO ENTER "NORTHEAST" AS "NE" TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM "NORTH".
(SHOULD YOU GET STUCK, TYPE "HELP" FOR SOME GENERAL HINTS.  FOR INFOR-
MATION ON HOW TO END YOUR ADVENTURE, ETC., TYPE "INFO".)
- - -
THIS PROGRAM WAS ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY WILLIE CROWTHER.  MOST OF THE
FEATURES OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM WERE ADDED BY DON WOODS (DON @ SU-AI).
CONTACT DON IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, ETC.

YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK BUILDING.
AROUND YOU IS A FOREST.  A SMALL STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND
DOWN A GULLY.

east

YOU ARE INSIDE A BUILDING, A WELL HOUSE FOR A LARGE SPRING.

THERE ARE SOME KEYS ON THE GROUND HERE.

THERE IS A SHINY BRASS LAMP NEARBY.

THERE IS FOOD HERE.
```

Figure 4: Gameplay of Colossal Cave Adventure.

Therefore, as argued by Moretti (2021: 28), contemporary video games can be placed in a middle position between such two extremes, and written linguistic text is found to be used alongside other semiotic resources. Despite Ensslin (2012a: 499) also arguing that «computer games tend to be predominantly audio-visual rather than linguistic in nature», I follow the suggestion proposed by semiotician Massimo Mainetti (2017: 62), whereby the object of a semiotic analysis of videogame should be the text itself, rather than the technical or scientific components of the medium.

According to linguist Frazer Heritage (2020), linguistic approaches to the study of video games have mainly employed one out of four perspectives, namely language teaching, translation and localisation, interactions among players, and multimodal approaches. Moreover, data under examination in previous literature on the subject can be divided into three categories, namely language used in video game paratexts and thus outside the medium itself, language used in player interactions, and less frequently language used inside video games, with the medium as a source of textual data (Heritage, 2020).

From a translation studies perspective, scholars O'Hagan & Mangiron (2013: 155-162) have classified such possible semiotic resources found in video games, including resources present within the video game itself, such as writing, music or video, and resources that are external to the game, so-called paratexts such as instruction manuals and advertising material. The classification proposed by O'Hagan & Mangiron (2013) is based on an empirical observation on the characteristics of texts commonly found in video games for home consoles with a focus on the plot, such as adventure games and role-playing games, and gives indications of prescriptive nature for a localisation based on a functionalist perspective. Therefore, as also argued by Moretti (2021: 28), while such classification can be mainly regarded as a working taxonomy for translators and localisation teams, nonetheless the definition of the main functions of video game resources can be useful also for other areas of research, such as language use inside the medium. Table 1 references the taxonomy of narrative-oriented game text with their function, description, and characteristics, relative to in-game text assets (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013: 155-156). The section relative to translation priorities and strategies is omitted, as they lie outside the scope of this thesis.

Relation-ship to the game world	Translation assets	Text function and description	Characteristics / translation brief
In-game text assets			
Non-diegetic	User Inter- face (UI)	Informative function for smooth navigation and game-play. Typically contains short text fragments, such as menu items and also help messages.	Brevity due to space constraints; user-friendliness of text; clarity of text.
Non-diegetic	System mes- sages	Informative function for instructive pragmatic purposes. Messages generated by the system, such as warning messages, instructions, and confirmation mes-sages.	Platform-specific terminology needs to be used.
Diegetic	Narrative text	Expressive / informative function for imparting certain information in a dramatic manner. Literary passages used to engage the player in the game world or to a new level within the game. They contextualize and provide information about the game story, including a back story	Often formal and literary style; natu- ral flowing writing style often asked and separate rewrit- ing may be applied.
Non-diegetic	Exposition / tutorial	Informative function with instructive and didactic mes-sages. In-game tutorials may be used to explain game mechanics by way of demonstration and the player practice. Passages describing characters, monsters, ani-mals, geographical locations, etc.	Clarity and in- formativity is stressed.
Diegetic	Unvoiced di- alogue scripts	Informative / expressive function mainly to provide in-formation and elicit a certain action by the player. Dia- logue which appears only in written form, commonly used for Non-Playable Characters (NPCs).	Speech expressed in written text with colloquial style; natural flowing style may be asked.

Table 1: Taxonomy of narrative-oriented game text (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013: 155-156).

For the purposes of this research, unvoiced dialogue scripts, as an example on diegetic written orality, are of particular interest. As argued in 1.1, role language is regarded as a feature of oral discourse, even when it is reported in writing, as in the case of in-game dialogue in video games.

Despite the availability of audio channels, many games still include dialogues that appear only in written form often to conserve the processing capacity of the hardware, as well as to minimise the high cost associated with voiceover. These written dialogue scripts are often used for – but not limited to – the lines of side characters, called NPCs, that are controlled by the game engine and are assigned certain roles in the game. [...] These texts in games normally use colloquial and idiomatic language and may include plays on words, rhymes, or humorous remarks. (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013: 161)

Such lines of dialogues are often reserved for secondary NPCs, who lack a deep characterisation and are often sketched as stereotyped character tropes in their role in the story. Therefore, video game dialogues, and especially dialogues of secondary NPCs, would be the most likely to feature highly schematic representations, informed by linguistic ideological processes such as enregisterment and iconization, in the linguistic construction of its speakers.

2.2. NPCs as characterological figures

As argued above, another reason why studying language inside video games can be useful is the presence of characters, both playable (usually protagonists of the story, whose actions are controlled by the player) and non-playable, whose actions are not controlled by the user. The latter are commonly defined as non-player characters (NPCs) and are generally controlled by the game itself (Pozo, 2021). Several studies have been devoted to the analysis of characters, for example as potential elements of non-unilinear narrative inside the fictional game world (Domsch, 2013: 93-98), or as dynamic entities and identities in the Japanese media mix, transcending the limits of the original medium (Blom, 2023). However, NPCs, especially secondary characters, are often found to be repetitive in their in-game behaviour and in their linguistic choices, often saying the same few lines of dialogues repeatedly when prompted by the player (Pozo, 2021: 735-736).

Regarding such formulaic nature of video game characters, as argued by Ensslin (2015), «[a]n NPC typically fills one of Propp's (1968) seven character types, for example "hero," "villain," "helper," or "princess"» (Ensslin, 2015: 3). Moreover, as explored in 1.4, from a linguistic perspective, video game characters can be framed as characterological figures (Agha, 2007: 177). As such, as further argued in 1.4, registers of fictionalised orality are embodied in fictional characters, and the associated characterological figures are performed in the virtual environment of popular media. As example of characterological figures associated to a specific language variation, Johnstone (2017) analyses two talking dolls called "Yappin' Yinzers": when the dolls are squeezed, «the sound module plays a sentence uttered by someone using a Pittsburghese accent, highlighting one or more Pittsburghese words or phrases» (Johnstone, 2017: 287). Thus, through such merchandise, the specific diatopic variation of the city of Pittsburgh becomes enregistered with a characterological figure, which can be regarded either as positively valourised as a reminder of a utopian working-class past, or as a stigmatised image of contemporary Pittsburghers: in either of these cases, Pittsburghese can be interpreted as becoming «an icon of a persona linked with a way of life» (Johnstone, 2017: 297).

Encounters with registers are encounters with characterological figures stereotypically linked to speech repertoires (and associated signs) by a population of users. Language users typify such figures in social-characterological terms when they say that a particular form of speech marks the speaker as masculine or feminine, as high- or low-caste, as a lawyer, doctor, priest, shaman, and so on. (Agha, 2005: 45)

As noted by Park (2021: 48), Agha has variously used other terms to indicate the same concepts, such as “characterological figure”, “model of personhood”, and “image of personhood”, and different researchers have alternatively used one of the three terms, even though differences in usage between them (if there are any) are not always made explicit. In this thesis I use the terms “characterological figure”, as it is the one most explicitly linked with the concept of “character”.

As commented in 1.4, taking into consideration the fact that this research is concerned with language use in a fictional setting, characters can also be defined as virtual speakers (Länsisalmi, 2019: 430), which can include totally imaginary figures such as aliens or robots. Such virtual speakers are regularly present in works of fiction, and their virtual characteristics are well recognised by the native speaker audience. As such, NPCs in Japanese-language video games can be regarded not just as fictional archetypes, actantial roles, or character tropes, but also as speakers of Japanese. Their language can thus be analysed as if it were employed for actual communicative purposes, and not merely as in-game filler, which is of secondary importance compared to the gameplay. Video game dialogue can also be regarded as a type of “staged” performance, which is enacted by virtual speakers.

The form of the performance is more likely to be scrutinized than in routine communicative practice, and the metalinguistic and poetic functions of language come to the fore. There is heightened reflexivity – social stereotypes can be explicitly put on display, offering a space for critical reflection on self and society. There is also a heightened awareness of the existing repertoire of cultural texts, and value is placed upon their skillful recontextualization [...] Media products such as films, radio shows, and popular music recordings are also staged performances. They are perhaps best distinguished as ‘mediated performance’, although their pervasiveness in contemporary society makes them the primary channel of public performance. (Bell & Gibson, 2011: 558)

Bell & Gibson (2011) also add that mediated performances play an important role in associating linguistic resources with various characterological figures, as «[s]taged performance

provides a forum where an audience's attention can be drawn to indexical relationships, reinforcing some social meanings and reinterpreting others» (Bell & Gibson, 2011: 560-561). Characterological figures can be real-life or fictional individuals, or the members of an iconic social group, and thus «[s]taged performance plays a central role in the enregisterment of styles and associated characterological figures in the mediated and digitalized environment» (Bell & Gibson, 2011: 561). In the context of video games, characterological figures and their mediated “staged” performances are created by video game developers.

2.3. Agency in video games and the role of developers

As argued by Muriel & Crawford (2020: 138-139), video games have been celebrated as an interactive medium, and their definitions have thus focused on the idea of player control, broadly defined as “agency”. Bódi (2023) finds three approaches to the study of agency in video games: the first one discusses agency in terms of diversity and community participation in and around video games; the second one is a narratologically-oriented approach concerned with the ability of players to change the course of the story; finally, the third approach relates agency to game mechanics and the material affordances of the medium (Bódi, 2023: 13-14). However, while still taking into consideration research on agency in the medium, video games can also be regarded primarily as a text crafted by a specific author, as expressed by previous literature on the subject (Aarseth, 1997; Juul, 2005). Framing video games as texts can also be useful when researching how they communicate with players, as also argued by Heritage (2021), particularly for research on language in video games.

Although different to texts such as newspaper articles or novels, multiple scholars have proposed that games should be viewed as textual in nature [...]. Even though they must be played through kinetic interaction rather than simply read, watched, or listened to, there are underlying rules which are articulated semiotically—verbally and nonverbally (Ensslin, 2015). But regardless of these rules, videogames have ways of communicating thoughts, ideas, and concepts to the players—even if what they communicate is sometimes very limited. (Heritage, 2021: 46)

Authors in this context are understood as video game developers. In the context of so-called “triple-A games”, or “AAA games”, produced by large teams with a pronounced commercial intent, and which undergo extensive physical and digital distributions, attributing the composition of specific dialogues to a single scriptwriter can prove challenging. On the other hand, we

can also find independent video games, or “indies”, which are broadly regarded as games «made by individuals or small companies, with limited budgets, and distributed privately or via online platforms bypassing traditional publishers» (Ruffino 2021: 2). As such, independent video games are thought to exhibit greater autonomy in their production processes compared to commercial games (Hichibe & Tanaka, 2016: 44).

As argued by Roth (2025), «[c]omputer games, *dōjin* games, and indie games are without doubt crucial for understanding videogame culture in Japan» (Roth, 2025: 4). Regarding such label of *dōjin* ‘amateur’ games, which is only used for Japanese-language games, Fiadotau (2019: 39) notes that independent and hobbyist game making in the Japanese context have historically largely been defined under the umbrella term *dōjin gēmu* or *dōjin sofuto*. *Dōjin* literally means ‘circle’ or ‘clique’, and accordingly *dōjin* games are developed by independent developing teams and often distributed primarily or solely in digital format, or with sales occurring at physical conventions, thus fostering this sense of “cliqueness” and solidarity between creators and users. However, in his comparison of Western indie games and Japanese *dōjin* games, Fiadotau (2019: 61-63) also notes that *dōjin* games are not interested in subverting existing gender representations, do not have a sociopolitical stance, and are not concerned with formal innovations. As such, they would appear more “conservative”. On the other hand, Ito (2007: 138-141) claims that the non-commercial nature of many amateur freeware games allows greater artistic and expressive freedom to the developers. Nonetheless, there is also the case of commercial *dōjin* games, which are developed by independent creators but still retain a commercial nature, which is more aligned with the categorisation proposed by Fiadotau (2019). Due to such autonomy and freedom in the production process on the one hand, and their supposed conservative nature in terms of ideological foundations on the other, *dōjin* games can thus offer valuable insights into examining the relationship between language and metapragmatic stereotypes within the medium, to understand whether such “conservatism” also extend to the linguistic characterisation of characterological figures inside them. Notably, video games created by a sole developer, typically pursued as a hobby, and released for free exclusively in digital format without commercial aspirations, can be helpful for such exploration, due to the straightforward association of dialogue authorship and character creation to a single developer. Independent video games are also more reliant on written text-based language, as they lack the budget needed to produce spoken language in dialogue, which in turn make them more like other media based on the written word, like comic books (Domsch, 2017: 256-257). As such, they appear to be well-suited for qualitative corpus analyses.

2.4. Construction of the target corpus

Previous research on how to gather data from media has noted how various tools are available for collecting corpora from audiovisual media, such as by using preexisting transcripts, or with the researcher manually transcribing the data, with each method having varying degree of accuracy (Heritage, 2020). As also argued by van Stegeren & Theune (2021):

Fan culture can give rise to extensive fan-made websites and wikis, where players collect information about the game, discuss strategies and share fanart. Often these fan-made websites are a great resource for texts (and other media) from the game. [...] The main advantage of collecting data from fan websites is that the text is already available in plain text, as opposed to text in game files, which is often compressed, encrypted or stored in a proprietary format. A possible drawback is that data from fan websites generally needs considerable data cleaning before it is of comparable quality to data extracted from the games themselves. (van Stegeren & Theune, 2021: 4)

The target corpus of this analysis is composed of written textual dialogues, taken from 24 contemporary video games, released from 2000 to 2020. A table with information is reproduced at the beginning of Chapter 5, as introduction to the textual analysis. Specifically, in my choice I have mainly followed the criteria proposed by Heritage (2020: 114), namely that games had to be narrative-driven, had to be played offline, had to contain language, and had to be released in a specific and defined span of time. In particular, offline games were chosen because online games heavily rely on language used by players in chat boxes to communicate among themselves, which cannot be regarded as staged language and lies outside the scope of this thesis (cf. Heritage, 2020: 114-115).

As for “narrative-driven” games, such classification is most usefully formulated in retrospect, after playing the game and experiencing first-hand the importance of its story elements, or lack thereof. However, certain genres are found to be routinely more narrative in nature. As noted by Roth (2025: 22-24), despite genre classification being discursively constructed and thus possibly subjective and inconsistent, nonetheless «genre descriptions facilitate standardized descriptions of videogame content across a wide range of games and, as such, “they are still a primary access point for users searching and browsing video games and other media objects”» (Roth, 2025: 23-24). Thus, also following previous categorisation as suggested by Ma (2023), I have taken into consideration action games, adventure games, role-playing games, and simulation games as broadly defined genres. In action games, the player controls the protagonist and

must navigate levels and fight enemies to reach the end of a level, with subgenres including fighting games, shooter games, and platform games: as their focus often lies more heavily on the gameplay than on the narrative, they appear to have the least amount of language use inside them. Adventure games are less linear than action games, and the player can often explore the game world and perform several tasks to complete an overarching achievement of the story, with less focus on the physical challenges of the single levels (Wolf, 2021: 18). As such, adventure games have a greater narrative focus and a higher use of language. Role-playing games, also defined as RPGs, are similar to adventure games in that the player has the freedom to explore the game world and perform a variety of tasks (also defined as “quests”) to complete the overarching objective of the game (so-called “main quest”). However, RPGs have a focus on quantifiable elements, such as experience points that are gathered through combat, and that are needed to “level up”, to strengthen the player character and obtain new skills that are required or useful to progress through story-driven gameplay (Mäyrä, 2021: 869-870). RPGs are also often differentiated between Japanese RPGs (also JRPGs), regarded as more linear, and Western RPGs, considered as more open-ended and affording a higher degree of freedom to the player (Mäyrä, 2021: 870). Games scholar Wada Takeaki (2017: 142-144) argues that JRPGs are defined by predetermined set stories, character development, and by manga-like and anime-like characteristics and NPCs. JRPGs heavily feature dialogues and scripted language, and their narrative characteristics make them akin to forms of popular media that are routinely characterised by role language (and its linguistic ideological construction). Finally, I have considered simulation games in the context of this thesis as example of «virtual life simulations» (Crogan & Jarrett, 2021: 935), or specifically as social simulation games that emphasise relations between NPCs (cf. Andersen, 2021). Due to their focus on living a second virtual life and on interaction with other characters, this type of simulation games can potentially feature the highest number of dialogues of all genres of video games. Overall, the Japanese market appears to feature «a higher number of adventure and role-playing games [...], while offering a comparably lower share of action, sports, and racing games» (Roth, 2025: 28).

In a similar vein to the exclusion of online games mentioned above, I have also excluded games that are based on preexisting intellectual properties and media franchises, the so-called media mix, such as games based on popular manga and anime series. Despite the popularity of these derivative products, they often rely on precedent characterisations and knowledge of the source material, which may also limit the creativity of game developers (see 4.3). As argued by Schules (2015) in his analysis of JRPGs, what he defines as the “cultural media mix” is «an open system whose narrative is ever expanding - consumers can never assemble the whole story,

can never get closure, as the culture industry constantly churns out new exemplars that are absorbed into the narrative» (Schules, 2015: 72). In such cases, preexisting manga and anime can be regarded as paratexts, external to the video game and to language use inside the medium, and therefore outside the scope of this research. As will be explored in Chapter 6, emergent intertextuality will be analysed when participants explicitly mention their previous engagement with other forms of popular culture besides video games, and when they metapragmatically refer to their exposure to stereotyped registers of language through mediated communication.

The corpus in this research is constructed as follows: for shorter games, and for those games for which I already owned the hardware, I played through them from start to finish and wrote down the dialogues of non-human characters. As argued in 1.4, non-human characters often serve as a sort of *tabula rasa*, upon which ideologised linguistic registers are projected. For games with longer gameplay time, and for those games which I was not able to play firsthand due to technical limitations or unavailability on the market, I based myself on materials uploaded by the community of fans on the Internet, namely video gameplays and playthrough uploaded on YouTube, and written text transcripts of the dialogues, uploaded on Internet forums and wikis (cf. Heritage, 2021: 98-106). Out of the 24 games, I transcribed the dialogues of 346 non-human NPCs, for a total of 278554 characters, comprised of hiragana, katakana, kanji, *rōmaji*, and punctuation marks.

The corpus was then segmented and analysed with the online tool Web Chamame (<https://chamame.ninjal.ac.jp>). Web Chamame is a web-based morphological analysis tool, hosted by the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics (NINJAL), which uses UniDic, a tokeniser and morphological analyser dictionary also developed by NINJAL (Tsumi & Ogiso, 2022). As such, Web Chamame is a tool for both morphological analysis and linguistic information about the segmented and tokenised terms. After segmentation, the size of the target corpus amounted to 130280 tokens.

Together with Web Chamame, TagAnt (Anthony, 2024) and AntConc (Anthony, 2024) are the most used tools for the construction and the analysis of ad hoc corpora, and are arguably even more popular than Web Chamame. TagAnt is a freeware segmenter and Part-Of-Speech (POS) tagger, while AntConc is a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordance and text analysis, and both tools are widely used also for corpus analyses of Japanese texts. However, due to its more user-friendly interface, the minimal inconsistencies that it generates, and native support to a variety of dictionaries for segmentation and morphological analysis, as shown in Figure 5, I deemed Web Chamame more useful for the purposes of this research. I still used

AntConc as an integration for the occasional concordance analysis of specific linguistic features, such as sentence-final particles (see 5.8), as shown in Figure 6.

辞書	文境界	書字形 (=表層形)	語彙素	語彙素読み	品詞
現代語	B	わたくし	私-代名詞	ワタクシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	わたくし	私-代名詞	ワタクシ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	うら	うら	ウラ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	か	彼	カ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	B	アレ	彼れ	アレ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	おまえ	御前	オマエ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	おまえ	御前	オマエ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	そっち	其方	ソチラ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	B	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	I	キミ	君-代名詞	キミ	代名詞
現代語	B	ワシ	わし	ワシ	代名詞

Figure 5: Example of token extraction through Web Chamame.

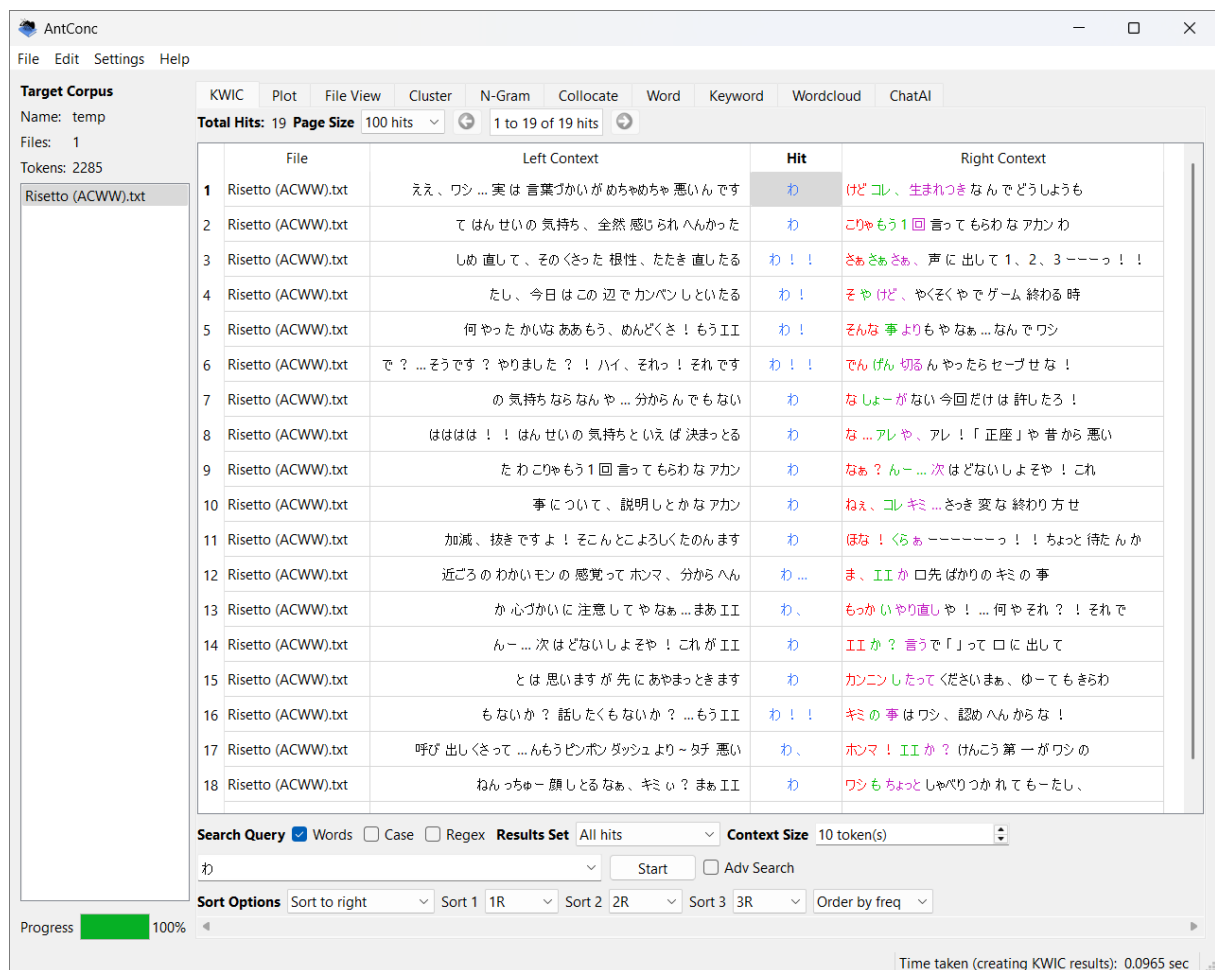


Figure 6: Example of concordances through AntConc.

Following the suggestions by Ensslin (2012b: 21), in Chapter 5 I will attempt a corpus-based (cf. Tognini-Bonelli, 2001) discourse analysis to examine patterns of language use. As it is more difficult to create a balanced corpus with video game dialogues (cf. Ma, 2023), corpus-based discourse analysis appears to be the most effective way to investigate the role of language in the ideological construction of characterological figures and virtual speakers.

2.5. Summary

This chapter has offered an overview of video games, focusing on their textual and linguistic elements. Chapter 3 will feature a review of past research on language use in works of popular culture, with a focus on English and Japanese, and on the ideological construction and reproduction of language in pop culture. Thus, the next chapter will highlight various trends of research and their methodologies, and how this thesis will build upon past scholarship to investigate language ideologies in Japanese written video games dialogues.

Chapter 3: Language, Ideology, and Pop Culture

This chapter will present secondary sources and previous theoretical frameworks and methodologies that have been employed for the analysis of language use in popular culture. 3.1 will focus on pop cultural linguistics as a new paradigm of research, while also referencing previous scholarship on the intersection of language and fiction. Instead, 3.2 will focus on past research on English-language video games. In 3.3 I will present an overview of previous scholarship on Japanese in fictional works of pop culture, both inside and outside research on role language. Finally, research on Japanese language in video games, upon which the present research is based, will be introduced and discussed in 3.4.

3.1. Language in popular culture: Pop cultural linguistics

Linguistic characterisation in popular media is an ancient phenomenon: according to Latinist Robert Maltby (1979), the playwright Terence (c. 195/185 BCE - c. 159 BCE) may have linguistically characterised the language of old men in his plays by means of sociolectal expressions and distinctive archaic lexical features in Latin. More recently, as introduced in Chapter 1, oft-cited previous scholarship by Lippi-Green (1997/2012) on the representation of non-standard speech in animated Disney movies has contributed to opening the field of research on language use in popular culture, with a focus on the ideological construction of fictional identity.

In this vein, an emerging paradigm for the study of language in popular culture is that of pop cultural linguistics, which has been theorised by German linguist Valentin Werner (2022) as follows:

Pop cultural linguistics represents an emerging research subfield. It can be conceptualized as a specific type of media linguistics concerned with the study of performed language as represented in various pop culture manifestations, such as music, TV series, movies, comics, cartoons, and video games, among others. Pop culture is thus viewed as a broad category that includes artifacts with a commercial, entertainment-related purpose that are (mass-)mediated, fall within the mainstream, and represent largely fictional and scripted content. Linguists working in pop cultural linguistics explicitly take account of the current social and practical relevance of pop culture and the fact that it is largely a multimodal phenomenon with a strong linguistic component and the potential for affective engagement. Pop cultural linguistics possesses inherent relevance for the broader area of cultural studies, which may benefit from quantitative and qualitative approaches used in linguistics to

increase the overall validity of findings and to develop a comprehensive picture of pop culture artifacts. (Werner, 2022: 1)

Werner (2022: 11-12) also argues that pop cultural linguistics is concerned with the application of various sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological concepts, such as indexicality, enregisterment, and language ideologies, to the study of performed language in a fictional and often mediated environment.

However, while the conceptualisation of pop cultural linguistics as a subfield of linguistics is fairly recent, many studies, drawing from existing theoretical frameworks, have already explored the use of language in fictional works of pop culture. As would be expected, by far the greatest number of research has dealt with the study of English. Stamou (2014) has proposed a first overview on research on the representation of linguistic style in TV and movie fictional discourse from 1980 to 2012, finding that, out of 60 total articles, 46 have been published from 2000 to 2012, indicating that «this area of research is vibrant and is currently rapidly expanding» (Stamou, 2014: 123). Among such scholarship, Monika Bednarek in particular has contributed extensively and significantly to the study of characterisation, for example exploring the diachronic consistency of televisual characters across different seasons of the same TV series using a corpus stylistic approach to the analysis of their dialogues, highlighting how language contributes to character stability as a way to engage the audience with the narratives (Bednarek, 2011). Then, with a corpus-based analysis on “nerdiness” in the TV series *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019), Bednarek has illustrated the mechanisms for the construction of fictional characters through language stylisation in dialogue (Bednarek, 2012). Finally, she has expanded on previous work in a comprehensive monograph on corpus-based analysis of language, characters, and stereotype (Bednarek, 2023). More recently, Bednarek & Zago (2024) have been compiling a sizeable bibliography of published linguistic research on televisual and movie discourse, attesting to the ever-growing interest on the subject. Despite the focus of said scholarship on televisual discourse, its theoretical foundations and methodologies can be fruitfully applied also to the study of fictionalised orality in other media of pop culture, especially narrative works of fiction. Finally, research on language in pop culture has also taken into consideration novels, cartoons, comics, music and lyrics, and even the use of popular media resources in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (cf. Werner, 2018; Schubert & Werner, 2023).

As such, research on the use of English in contemporary popular culture is an active and expanding direction of study, both outside and inside the label of “pop cultural linguistics”, but

more broadly in the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. However, thus far video games appear to have been somewhat “left behind” as a possible object of research.

3.2. Language use and ideologies in English-language video games

As argued by Ensslin & Balteiro (2019), although video games can be regarded as a global cultural phenomenon, «it is perhaps surprising that little comprehensive work exists to date that examines digital games as diverse, medium-specific objects and tools of language studies and discourse analysis more specifically» (Ensslin & Balteiro, 2019: 1). This resonates also with a similar and more recent observation by Heritage (2025), who argues that «it is uncommon for studies to examine how language is used within video games» (Heritage, 2025: 210). While unarguably few compared to research on other popular media, nonetheless the number of interesting analyses on the subject has been growing during the years.

While mostly focusing on video games in the context of Digital Humanities, employing a literary approach to the study of games and gaming narratives, Astrid Ensslin is unarguably one of the contemporary leading researchers on the use of language inside the medium and on discourse around video games (cf. Ensslin, 2012b), as also introduced in 2.1. In this strand of research, with a greater sociolinguistic interest and specifically on discourse inside video games, Ensslin (2010) has focused on language ideologies in computer game discourse, concentrating on how linguistic choices in games reflect and reinforce social and cultural power structure, and exploring how identities are constructed through in-game language, including character dialogue. Subsequently, Ensslin (2011) has also explored how character speech patterns, particularly non-standard and foreign accents, contribute to stereotyping and cultural differentiation, reinforcing social hierarchies, and highlighting how language in video games can perpetuate exclusionary ideologies. Furthermore, Goorimoorthee, Csipo, Carleton & Ensslin (2019) have examined the portrayal of non-standard accents in character dialogues in the fantasy RPG *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare, 2009), highlighting how these linguistic features can reinforce stereotypes and marginalise certain groups, contributing to a sociophonetic “othering” through the perpetuation of language ideologies that shape the perceptions of players.

Finally, Tarnarutckaia & Ensslin (2020) have analysed discussions on Reddit concerning French and French-accented English in the series *Dragon Age* (BioWare, 2009-2014). Despite the focus of the article on online metadiscourse, and as such its main interest on paratexts outside the video game proper, nonetheless this study is particularly interesting as it shows how users perceive and evaluate the representation of accents, revealing underlying purist and prescriptivist tendencies in folk linguistic discourse. As such, this argument contributes to the

interpretation of how video games may be regarded as a conservative medium, as argued by Fiadotau (2019) in the context of Japanese *dōjin* games: as will also be explored in Chapter 4, the majority of players can be regarded as holding conservative language ideologies, and game developers appear to be unwilling to challenge such traditional beliefs about language use for fear of commercial failure.

Accordingly, these past strands of research have thus highlighted the potential of video games as a meaning-making medium:

Videogames are capable of constructing and reinforcing hegemonic political and attitudinal ideologies that can lead to or reconfirm harmful player perceptions outside of the game-world. It thus becomes increasingly important for game designers to be aware of the ideologies they perpetuate through speech accents. (Goorimoorthee, Csipo, Carleton & Ensslin, 2019: 284)

Besides Ensslin, one of the most active researchers on the theme of video games and language ideology is Frazer Heritage, who has been mainly researching the representation of gender in video games, with a focus on RPGs with a fantasy setting: he has arguably been the first to argue in a published article for the implementation of corpus-based approaches to analyse representation at the lexical level (Heritage, 2020), subsequently expanding on the theme in a monograph (Heritage, 2021), an additional article (Heritage, 2022), and most recently in one chapter in an edited handbook (Heritage, 2025). While such research output focuses on the quantitative analysis of English corpora, nonetheless it shows how a constructionist approach can be fruitfully applied to the study of language and characterisation in video game dialogues.

Apart from such previous scholarship, language use in video games has been examined sporadically, usually following different theoretical frameworks and methodologies, but rarely from a sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological perspective. For example, in two instances translation scholar Silvia Pettini has analysed the video game *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts, 2014) employing a corpus-assisted approach, first from a translation studies and localisation perspective on the lexical representation of personality and psychological traits (Pettini, 2021), and subsequently analysing lexical creativity, with a greater focus on the communicative aspect of in-game language and the creativity of scriptwriters in written textual discourse (Pettini, 2022). Linguist Dušan Stamenković (2023) has instead employed a stylistic approach to investigate the diachronic development of multimodality in the *Football Manager* (Sega, 2005-) series, analysing the combination of textual and pictorial elements across various instalments of the

series. Finally, computational linguist Alessandro Maisto (2024) has also introduced his own ad hoc corpus for the study of slang in video games from a computational linguistic perspective.

As such, research on the linguistic aspects of video games appears to be an expanding sub-field, due to the growing number of studies that have been published in the recent years, and it is currently being undertaken under a variety of approaches and following a variety theoretical frameworks and methodologies. However, research on the interplay between language, ideology, and video games appears to still be an underdeveloped direction of investigation.

3.3. Japanese language in narrative fictional works

As also argued by Moretti (2021), research on scripted language in fictional works in the Japanese context has mostly focused on the use of Japanese in manga, anime, films, and novels. The approaches that have appeared to be predominant thus far are the analysis of the representation of social or ethnic groups within a specific work, or the analysis of the representation of a specific group within a specific genre of fiction or across several works of different genres. As also pointed out in 1.1, Japanese scholarship on language characterisation has treated fictional registers as fixed, with a sort of aprioristic approach, and with the presence of *yakuwarigo* taken for granted, together with its associated effects on language perceptions. Conversely, English-language research has tended to treat the association of stereotyped registers to stereotyped characterological figures as discursive practices, also highlighting the ideological underpinnings of routinised linguistic stylisation.

Apart from the volumes edited by Kinsui (2007, 2011a), regarding the first approach, as also mentioned 1.3, Hiramoto (2009) has analysed the representation of minorities in the Japanese translations of the novel *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell, 1936), noticing how pseudo-Tōhoku dialect is used to index a prototypical rural dialect and associated negative features. Perhaps somewhat attesting to the formulaic nature of much research on role language, Yumi Tanaka (2022) has also analysed the representation of female speech and the sociolect of Black characters in three recent Japanese translations of *Gone with the Wind*, largely adhering to previous findings by Kinsui (2003), Nakamura (2013), and Hiramoto (2009) on the stereotyped nature of women's speech and pseudo-rural dialect in Japanese. Finally, Trowell & Nambu (2023) have more recently undergone a diachronic analysis of three different Japanese translations of the novel, also focusing on dialectal features used to represent the speech of Black slaves, using a framework informed by both linguistic anthropology and translation studies: their findings suggest that Tōhoku dialect has become enregistered as role language, so much that the

problematic linguistic representation of minorities persists across time in the more recent translations of *Gone with the Wind*, too.

On a similar vein, Hiramoto (2010, 2013) has also analysed the semiotic representation of diversity, from both a gender-based and ethnic-based point of view, in the anime series *Cowboy Bebop* (*Kaubōi Bibappu*, Sunrise, 1998), with a focus on intertextual practices and on normative representation of gender and identity from a multimodal and linguistic perspective. On the theme of gender, SturtzSreetharan (2017) has highlighted the creative use of Ōsaka dialect for the creation of a new ideal of contemporary positive masculinity through the representation of a new social role, the warm and connected father, in the film *Soshite chichi ni naru* (*Like Father, Like Son*, 2013) by Koreeda Hirokazu (1962-). Using a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis, Lee (2018) has instead focused on the construction of non-human identity in the science-fictional anime series *From the New World* (*Shinsekai yori*, A-1 Pictures, 2012-13). Besides showing how quantitative analysis can be fruitfully applied in combination to critical discourse analysis to the study of language in a fictional setting, the article by Lee (2018) is also particularly interesting as it highlights possible technical issues in the application of corpus linguistic approaches to the study of ad hoc corpora in Japanese, such as inconsistencies in the tokenisation of the source text. Finally, in two instances Ito (2022, 2024) has explored the mediatization of the Ainu language and the construction of Ainu identity in the anime *Golden Kamuy* (*Gōruden Kamui*, Noda, 2018-), highlighting the covert reproduction of language ideologies related to race, and referencing the colonial legacy of Japanese imperialism in Hokkaidō.

As for the second approach, concerned with the analysis of the representation of a specific group within a specific genre of fiction or across several works of different genres, it appears to be more comparative in nature and applications than the first approach. For example, Oskarsson (2018) has described the use of “foreigner talk” as an established register used to address non-native speakers in two short stories, three novels, and three manga from the 20th century, but without identifying any specific trends and largely adhering to previous findings by Kinsui (2003). On the same theme of “foreignness”, but providing more interesting analysis and findings, Suzuki (2015, 2018a, 2018b) has focused on linguistic nationalism, exploring its intersection with media representation, and highlighting how language can function as a tool to reinforce ideologies while also maintaining an illusion of inclusivity. Ito & Bisila (2020) have also employed a multimodal discursive approach to investigate the linguistic and visual representation of characters depicted as “foreigners” in a corpus of 17 anime series, finding that such characters are marked as Others through the use of simplified and marked non-standard Japanese, the use of visual cues such as blue eyes and blonde hair, and a sexualisation of female

foreign characters, thus reinforcing stereotypes and nationalist discourses. Finally, using a comparative approach for a diachronic study on language and gender, Dahlberg-Dodd (2018) has analysed how dominant masculine ideologies are conveyed through the speech of protagonists in a corpus of 78 anime adaptations of *shōnen* manga (aimed for an audience of boys and young men) from 1982 to 2015, focusing on first-person pronoun usage and phonetic features, to understand how these elements reflect evolving performances of masculinity.

Some studies have also researched the origins of some specific types of role language in premodern Japanese literature, tracing the evolution of their usage and the shifting perceptions of verbal elements over time, until they became characterising linguistic markers: such studies can thus be regarded as analyses on the enregisterment of specific features. From this point of view, much research has focused on the novel *Ukiyoburo* (*The Bathhouse of the Floating World*, 1809–1812), firstly analysed under such terms by Kinsui (2003: 16–20), as noted in 1.1. In particular, Kurosaki (2011) has researched the emergence of first-person pronoun *washi*, nowadays mainly used as index of the register of elderly male characters, in fictional works from the Edo period (1603–1868). Akizuki (2015) has instead focused on the verb *gozaru* and on its evolution, from the aforementioned *Ukiyoburo* to the first Japanese translations of *King Lear* (1605–1606) by William Shakespeare (1564–1616), until *gozaru* has become a characterising feature of the speech of samurai and ninja in contemporary works of fiction.

Research in the use of role language in the translation of non-Japanese, mainly English-language fictional works, has also been productive, as also shown previously regarding *Gone with the Wind*. In one of the first studies that explicitly refers to the concept of *yakuwarigo*, which was first theorised only two years prior and at the time had largely gone unnoticed, Yoda (2002) focuses on various translations of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) and their use of *seiyōjingo* ‘Western people’s language’ for the purposes of foreignisation. Yoda has then expanded her research on the language of Western characters, first taking into consideration also translations of other works by Shakespeare (2007), and then the ungrammatical features of Japanese as uttered by character depicted as stereotypically Western (so-called *katakoto nihongo* ‘broken Japanese’) across popular media (2015). Similarly, Ōta (2009, 2017) has analysed the use of language in the Japanese translations of interviews with various international athletes broadcast on Japanese sports broadcasts, theorising the existence of a specific ‘role language translation’ (*yakuwarigo-yaku*) that assigns a role to each athlete, such as the ‘superstar’ (*sūpāsutā*) or the ‘rival’ (*raibaru*), in order to create a dramatised narrative of sporting events. While Ōta does not explicitly employ its theoretical framework, these narrative roles can also be framed as a kind of characterological figure, as they embody “ways of being”

through the display of an enregistered linguistic styles. Finally, Camilleri (2022) has instead qualitatively analysed the Japanese translations of five Italian novels, focusing on the rendition of elderly male characters, arguing that the use of role language in translation has a domesticating effect, and that established features of *rōjingo* such as *washi* (see 5.2.10) appear more often in popular works than in literary oeuvres.

On the other hand, translations into Japanese have also been the object of analyses that have focused on their indexical and ideological potential, thus adhering less to a descriptive *yakuwarigo* perspective, while employing a more discursive approach to the study of language use in fictional works. In this vein, Furukawa (2015) has referenced *yakuwarigo*, but has instead focused on its ideological function as a tool for intracultural translation, especially in adapting the speech of female characters in English-language works of fiction into existing ideologies about language and gender in Japan. Takiuchi (2024) has instead analysed the representation of British working-class speech and culture in translations, highlighting the challenges translators face in conveying these elements to Japanese readers: while Takiuchi has referenced Kinsui (2003) on the theme of Standard Japanese as the register of protagonists and heroes, he has mainly followed previous insights by Hiramoto (2009) on the use of dialect and pseudo-dialect as index of lower social status.

Furthermore, on the topic of the translation of gender, Okamoto (2021) has analysed the representation of dialogues in the Japanese translation by the same translator of two contemporary English crime novels, employing a constructivist approach based on the concepts of language ideology and indexicality. Similarly, Vitucci (2020, 2023, 2024) has researched the representation of gender in audiovisual translation of several English-language films and series into Japanese, employing a framework that is informed by previous research on role language, but especially dealing with language and gender ideologies, particularly in the vein of previous research heralded by Nakamura Momoko (2013, 2014) on the ideological construction of female language by sociopolitical forces throughout the history of Japan, and especially in contact with Western notion of gender and the translation of Western works into Japanese.

The theme of gendered language in Japanese fiction has been widely studied outside the framework of *yakuwarigo*. In this vein, Maree (2020) has analysed the construction of the characterological figure of the “queerqueen” in the business of contemporary mainstream entertainment, referencing «a variety of differing identifications and identities that intersect with and cut across axes of heteronormativity, gender binaries, and queerness(es)» (Maree, 2020: 6). Maree argues that, through the mediatization of these style, linguistic resources are creatively employed by queerqueen characters, highlighting metapragmatic stereotypes and challenging

societal norms around language and representation. As also referenced in 1.1, through a corpus-based analysis, Pappalardo (2023) has showed how female characters in *kyōgen* are lexically and morphosyntactically stylised to render their language more elegant and polite. Despite the different theoretical frameworks and methodologies employed by these two studies, they both suggest that, while being played by biologically male persons, characters that are framed as “females” in staged performances (queerqueens in contemporary popular media on the one hand, women in *kyōgen* on the other) are recognisable thanks to the association between linguistic features, language ideologies, and gender ideologies.

Lastly, a further line of research has dealt with language ideologies in language learning and language teaching. From a *yakuwarigo* perspective, Kinsui (2011b) argues on the importance and the implications of knowledge of Japanese role language from an educational point of view, both for native speakers and learners. On the other hand, in the field of language teaching Shukuri Yukiko has taken inspiration from her personal experience as a language teacher, first in Japan and then in Russia, and has carried out research on the differences in perception and recognition of registers and fictional characters by native and non-native speakers (Shukuri, 2012), and on problematics that can arise from an unnatural use of the language, arguing for the implementation of “role language teaching” (Shukuri, 2015; Shukuri, 2018). On a broader scale, Miyake (2011) has also argued on the importance of “media language studies” (*media gengo kenkyū*) for Japanese language teaching, due to the deep involvement of media in contemporary communication. While Miyake also references *yakuwarigo*, her definition of media language studies as *media to soko de tsukawareru kotoba no kenkyū* ‘studies on media and language use within them’ (Miyake, 2011: 21) can be compared to the medialect as defined 1.5, as a parallel repertoire of language that is encountered in mediatised communication.

In summary, on the one hand English-language research on the use of Japanese in fictional works of popular culture appears to take into consideration ideological aspects of linguistic characterisation, also employing semiotic categories firstly theorised in Anglo-American linguistic anthropology, resulting in studies with arguably a broader scope. On the other hand, most Japanese-language studies and a few English-language ones only refer to *yakuwarigo* as a paradigm of research. As such, they appear to employ a descriptive approach and can be subject to the criticism levelled, among others, by Maynard (2016) on the shortcomings of role language research from a theoretical and methodological perspective, and with findings tending to be more limited and anecdotal.

3.4. Language use and ideologies in Japanese-language video games

Game studies are a popular and expanding field in Japan, as testified by the vitality of the Japanese chapter of the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA Japan), the annual conferences and the academic journal organised by the association (*Journal of Digital Games Research*, 2007-), and an academic organisation solely dedicated to research on games in the Ritsumeikan Center for Game Studies. However, as first noted by Zanotti & Scarabello (2010: 183-185), such interest in the past decades had focused mainly on sociological or pedagogical aspects of games, or on studies on video game industry and technology as part of a “serious games” approach in social sciences. On the other hand, as shown also by Bruno (2024), the interest in video games in the humanities outside the Japanese academia has grown considerably in the last ten years, as suggested also by the growing number of articles and monographs on the subject. A leading expert on the subject is Rachael Hutchinson, who characterises the intersection of game studies and Japanese studies as follows:

Culture and videogames are thus related in a number of different ways. Videogames depict environments and objects with which the player can interact. Videogames draw on the fine arts as well as computer code to portray people and places on-screen, and are themselves artistic objects. Videogames also reflect the ‘social unconscious,’ expressing the ideas, assumptions and anxieties of their designers. Just as literature and film have long been regarded as ‘texts’ through which we can access the broader cultural attitudes and ideologies of a particular time and place, so can we regard videogames as ‘texts’ that are also a product of their social, historical and political contexts. The videogame is now one of the major narrative forms through which social and political issues are critiqued and problematized by Japanese artists. Like film, literature, pop music, and other contemporary narrative forms, videogames express complex ideas of national identity and belonging, as well as social and political critique. The relationship between the Japanese videogame and ‘Japan’ is thus the relationship between a text and its context. (Hutchinson, 2019: 3)

Despite the cultural importance of video games, previous research on language use inside the Japanese media mix has only sparsely touched upon them. Kinsui (2003: 188) mentions the medium only once and incidentally, referring to the way in which some non-human characters use peculiar sentence-final expressions, especially in products aimed at children, also taking as an example an NPC present in *Final Fantasy IX* (*Fainaru fantajī nain*, Square Enix, 2000) and labelling such type of expression *kyara gobi* ‘character suffixes’. In this line of research on *kyara gobi*, and specifically on the use of *desu* as character suffix in non-normative usage as an

index of childishness, cuteness, and unreliability, Kawase (2010) has also taken into consideration two instalments of the video game series *Higurashi no naku koro ni* (07th Expansion, 2006).¹ Similarly, in her research on the stereotyped speech of Chinese characters (so-called *aruyo kotoba*, after the use of the verb of existence *aru* in non-normative usage as suffix), Nishino (2014) has briefly touched upon the use of this fictional register by one female character from the online video game *Quiz Magic Academy* (*Kuizu majikku akademī*, Konami, 2003-), without focusing on language use inside the game itself. As such, these past studies appear to have only tangentially looked at video games as objects of study, and only as part of descriptive research of specific language features, thus also resonating with the criticism levied by Maynard (2016) at these strands of scholarship.

On the other hand, few research has focused exclusively on video games. For example, Kawahara, Noto & Kumagai (2018) have examined sound symbolic patterns in the Japanese names of Pokémon from the *Pokémon* (Nintendo, 1995-) video game series, demonstrating how certain phonetic features correspond to attributes such as size, strength, and evolution stage. Drawing on finding from this previous research, Kawahara & Kumagai (2019) have then analysed how such phonetic patterns are used to express the concept of evolution in Pokémon names, further exploring the relationship between linguistic form and perceived meaning in fictional naming conventions, with an interest also in researching the perceptions among speakers of Japanese and English on such naming patterns. However, these articles have used the names of fictional video game characters as a natural corpus and as object of a quantitative and statistical analysis, and do not deal with language use inside video game dialogues. Conversely, within the *yakuwarigo* framework, Nomura (2020) has analysed language use within an English-language version of *Chrono Trigger* (*Kurono torigā*, Square, 1995), finding elements that can be reconducted to role language in the localised version of the game as part of a stereotypical archaic register of English, while the original Japanese version did not present such linguistic characterisation of the speaker. Subsequently, in another study Nomura (2022) has also analysed the register of robots in *Chrono Trigger*, with a focus on the use of katakana and on the rendition of so-called *robotto-go* ‘robot speech’ in the English-language localisation. On the same theme of katakana in games, Dahlberg-Dodd (2022) has also looked at six contemporary text-dependent video games to explore the use of katakana as an index of Otherness, referencing *yakuwarigo* but employing a theoretical framework informed by previous scholarship on linguistic anthropology and language ideologies, particularly the notion of indexicality as introduced in 1.3.

¹ An interview with Ryūkishī07, the creator of *Higurashi no naku koro ni*, on language use and characters in his video games is featured in 4.6.

In this sense, arguably the most prolific researcher on language inside video games in Japan is Ma Tzuhsuan, who has argued for the employment of corpus-based approaches to the analysis of video game dialogue, particularly in JRPGs. Ma (2019) has first employed a quantitative corpus-based approach to extract and analyse linguistic data from the game *Dragon Quest III* (*Doragon kuesuto III: Soshite densetsu e...*, Enix, 1988), largely following the theoretical framework of *yakuwarigo* and demonstrating how linguistic patterns contribute to character construction. He has then expanded on the theme of the construction of a corpus of written video game dialogues, still under construction but most recently defined as the *Japanese Game Corpus* (*Nihongo gēmu kōpasu*, JGC), emphasising its potential for linguistic analysis and language teaching (Ma, 2022; Ma, 2023; Ma, 2024).

To conclude, research on linguistic characterisation and language ideologies in written video game dialogues, which is the object of this thesis, places itself at the intersection of linguistics and the expanding subfield of research on video games as part of Japanese studies.

3.5. Summary

This chapter has offered an overview of previous directions of research on language and popular media, with a focus on English and Japanese. Drawing on the theoretical framework and the methodologies presented in the first three chapter of this thesis, the next three chapters will deal with the analysis of language ideologies in video games, starting in Chapter 4 with the interviews with the developers.

Chapter 4: The Author-Oriented Approach

As argued by Moretti (2025a: 134), previous research on the use of role language by fictional characters in Japan has mainly focused on perceptions and attitudes of native speakers, with characterological figures and character types often created ad hoc solely for questionnaire surveys (cf. Shukuri, 2012; Baba & Komatsu, 2017). Conversely, this chapter instead explores ideologies of communication in fictionalised orality inside Japanese video games, with a focus on game developers and their experiences. The intention here is not to assert the representativeness or the prototypical nature of these six cases, but rather to use them as examples, to identify potential trends and commonalities, and as qualitative data which will then be compared with findings from the analyses presented in the following chapters.

Besides gaining insight into the process of scriptwriting from the perspective of both amateurs and professionals, the interviews present an opportunity for a critical analysis of the metapragmatic discourse in the answers of the developers, dealing with their agency in shaping and transmitting ideologies of creativity (Wilf, 2014) from a linguistic perspective. In this chapter, I will offer a perspective on the creative use of language by game developers, who are influenced by these semiotic processes, but who also employ communicative strategies to overcome some of the perceived shortcomings of the video game medium, influenced by media ideologies. The chapter also deals with the supposed conservative nature of *dōjin* video games (cf. Fiadotau, 2019) from the perspective of creators. This qualitative perspective will help enrich the conclusions of the quantitative analysis on language use inside the corpus, which will be undertaken in Chapter 5, and of the questionnaire survey about the linguistic attitudes of native speakers, which will be dealt with in Chapter 6. As such, borrowing the term proposed by Stein (2023: 1047-1049), this sociolinguistic analysis will follow a triangulation of different approaches, namely a stylistic approach, a field approach, and a questionnaire approach.

To summarize, while the stylistic approach works out the target varieties in the text itself, the field approach and the questionnaire approach provide perceptual and ideological responses from the players. The three approaches outlined above each have their advantages and disadvantages, but it is in their combination that they can truly come fruition. Taken together, this mixed-methods approach is uniquely positioned to provide an empirical basis for a language-ideological reading. (Stein, 2023: 1049)

The interviews featured in this chapter will mainly follow a field approach. In Chapter 5, the analysis of the corpus will mainly follow a stylistic approach, while Chapter 6 will deal with a questionnaire approach. The three methods will also be employed simultaneously in the three analyses, to state and emphasise the intertextual nature of the medialect, and to highlight how language ideologies are reproduced inside the video game medium and across other products of popular culture, thus contributing to their circulation and reproduction. While Japanese amateur game developers and designers have been the subject of previous studies on their motivations from a socioeconomic perspective (Ito, 2007; Hichibe & Tanaka, 2016; Kobayashi & Koyama, 2020), this chapter will investigate how ideologies inform the scriptwriting process from a linguistic anthropological perspective.

The data presented in this qualitative analysis are drawn from interviews with six male developers and one female developer on language and fictional characters in their games, conducted in Japanese in 2023 and 2024. The participants are L1 users of Japanese. Four conversations were conducted through an exchange of emails. One semi-structured interview was conducted in person, while one further semi-structured interview was conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Five cases focus on *dōjin* game developers, while one interview focuses on two commercial developers working at a commercial development studio. I began by asking each interviewee about their educational background and professional journey. Specifically, I was interested in whether they had attended a science-related university, due to technical competence required when programming (cf. Crosby, 2000: 8-9), and in what had led them to pursue a career in game development. This helped to set the context for understanding their approach to game design, and whether their focus was more on the technical side of the games, rather than on their narrative elements. Given the recurring presence of non-human characters in their work, I was curious to know why each developer often chose to include these types of entities: this gave the possibility to open a discussion about the creative choices behind character design, and how such non-human fictional characters contribute to the narrative and gameplay experience. Moving to the dialogue-writing process, I asked whether the developer typically starts by imagining the appearance of the NPC before crafting the dialogue, or if the dialogue itself shapes the creation of the character. This allowed me to delve into their creative workflow and the interplay between visual and linguistic elements. Finally, I inquired about their views on the relationship between language, appearance, and role in their characters: by asking which element they believe is more strongly linked to language, I was able to gather insights into how developers perceive the connection between the visual depiction of the characters and the way they speak.

Parts of the first three interviews, and parts of the discussion section, have been accepted for publication and are currently in press (Moretti, 2025a). In this chapter, I also include three additional interviews, which were carried out after the submission of the paper, and I expand on the discussion and the conclusions, based on the additional data. All translations from Japanese to English are mine.

4.1. Interview with developer: Laineus (pseudonym)

In accordance with the wishes of the developer, the interview with Laineus was conducted in written format, and the questions were sent by email to his personal address. Laineus is a web engineer, currently working as development team manager for an online dating app. From a young age, he has had a passion for exploring various forms of creativity, such as drawing or building with LEGO blocks. Game development then became a significant interest for him, particularly during high school, when he discovered a software for game creation without the need for programming. Despite this, the idea of pursuing game development as a profession never crossed his mind, and he has continued this activity from his school years only as a hobby.

Laineus finds that many of his games feature non-human characters, such as dragons in *Unsung Kingdom* (*Ansangu kingudamu*, 2020), and a character based on an apple in *The Dream Libra had* (*Ribura no mita yume*, 2021). The inclusion of these characters is often tied to the story or world setting. Specifically, in *Ribura no mita yume*, since the story focuses on two female human characters, there was a clear distinction drawn between them and the other animal and non-human characters, and because the game is set within a dream, his intention was to incorporate an element of unreality by having animals speak. On the other hand, in *Ansangu kingudamu*, dragons were included as a staple of the fantasy genre. While the final dragon boss has an animalistic appearance, and it would have been possible to leave it without dialogue, Laineus says that he was influenced by the dragon character of Smaug from the movie series *The Hobbit* (Jackson, 2012-2014), in turn based on the novel *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1937). To Laineus, Smaug is a memorable character for speaking in a human-like manner, using the first-person pronoun *ore* in the Japanese-language adaptation and being obsessed with gold. As such, this linguistic characterisation was also applied to the dragons in his game. Non-human characters, particularly monsters, are also convenient for creating combat scenarios, without the need for extensive backstories, as would be the case for human characters.

Regarding language use in his games, Laineus claims that the predominant method of characterisation involves the use of suffixes: he gives examples such as *da ze* for an assertive male, *ja* for an elderly person, and *da wa* for a young lady. In most cases, he does not determine these

suffixes independently, but he adheres to ‘established patterns that are already widely recognised’ (*sekenteki ni patānka sareta mono ni narau*). He states that the inclusion of such suffixes in game dialogues serves the purpose of emphasising ‘the sense of character’ (*kyarakutā-sei*). Laineus then notices a difference in the use of second-person pronouns in games compared to everyday life. On the one hand, in adventure games, characters who are unfamiliar with each other often engage in dialogue without knowing their respective names, and they often readily employ terms like *anata* or *kimi* in their conversations. On the other hand, in ordinary daily interactions, Laineus finds that second-person pronouns are seldom used, even when the name of the other person is unknown. Instead, they are often omitted, as their use can come across as slightly impolite. In the virtual context of games, where characters are fictional, Laineus finds a more casual acceptance of second-person pronouns, and such concerns are unnecessary. Furthermore, Laineus says that, in real-life interactions, pronoun-dropping can be compensated by directing the gaze towards the addressee, or by hand gestures. However, such strategies are challenging to incorporate inside games, and as such the omission of second-person pronouns is more difficult. Additionally, the use of different address terms can also contribute to the characterisation of specific NPCs, much like the impact of the choice of specific suffixes. Regarding first-person pronouns, Laineus states that male characters using *ore*, *boku* or *watashi* are not exclusive to game dialogues, but similar distinctions in use also happen also in daily life, based on the degree of intimacy between the two parties in the conversation. Conversely, language variation in fictional orality comes into play in the representation of the historical setting of the game. As Laineus puts it, in a contemporary setting, characters may use current slang, while in a game set in a fictional world inspired by the medieval period, contemporary language might be avoided to create a supposed sense of authenticity.

Not strictly about language variation, but more on the narrative function of orality in video games, Laineus cites the tendency for dialogues that explain the current circumstances, such as *nantoka taoseta ne* ‘we managed to beat it somehow’ after defeating a boss, or *koko ga ... ka* ‘so this is...’ when changing location. The nature of the video game medium also poses challenges with the structure of verbal communication, especially regarding turn allocations. According to Laineus, in a conversation between three characters, the developer should assign dialogue as evenly as possible. For example, in a situation where characters A and B are on the player’s side and they are talking to a stranger C, in an everyday conversation, it is very likely that the interaction would occur as A-C-A-C-A... (or as B-C-B-C-B...). However, in the case of games, dialogue is often distributed as A-C-B-C-A-C-B: for Laineus, this avoids polarisation and creates a more engaging experience for the player.

In summary, Laineus states that using language that differs from everyday life enhances the ‘dramatic impression’ (*gekiteki na inshō*) of the conversation, potentially intensifying the ‘immersive experience into the extraordinary world of gaming’ (*gēmu to iu hi-nichijō no sekai e no botsunyū*). In retrospect, he recognises his conscious use of pronouns and final particles to match the personality of the chosen character. For characterisation, Laineus believes that the use of katakana instead of kanji increases a sense of ‘innocence’ (*mujakisa*) and mysteriousness. Finally, Laineus thinks that even when characterisation is not necessary in a specific situation, assigning dialogue only in standard language to every character would go against the expectations of the users about the appearance of each character, and that would end up giving an ‘unnatural impression’ (*fushizen na inshō*) to the audience.

4.2. Interview with developer: D. (pseudonym)

The interview with D. was conducted in person. In accordance with the wishes of the developer, his real name, and the actual pseudonym by which he publishes his games have been omitted. During the interview, a friend of D., who is also a *dōjin* game developer, was present. The occasional dialogues between the two proved insightful in gaining a wider perspective of some of the answers. D. is now a full-time developer, but at the time of developing his first games was working full time as a company employee. D. has wanted to create games since elementary school, and he continued his studies in a computer college after high school, where he was also influenced by a dorm room neighbour in trying to pursue a career in game development.

Regarding language use in his games, D. tries to avoid highly stereotypical styles, such as the repetition of the onomatopoeia *nyan* for the speech of anthropomorphic feline characters. However, like Laineus, D. states that avoiding these registers altogether is difficult, and that such patterns are useful. In this, he recognises the influence of the language of anime and manga. D. also claims that his choices in linguistic characterisation are not unconscious, but that he writes his dialogues without knowing anything about the ‘technicalities’ (*senmonteki na koto*) of scriptwriting, employing a ‘for-the-time-being’ or a ‘just-in-case’ (*toriaezu*) approach. He also recalls that he was not good at school, especially in the subject of Japanese language (*ko-kugo*). Overall, D. compares his approach with the music-making process. In his words, he distinguishes between *musica* (*mujika*) and *cantabile* (*kantābire*), using the former to refer to something more structured and refined, while the latter is a musical term referring to a more natural and spontaneous expression. D. then uses *kantābire* in describing his spontaneous and

unstructured approach to dialogue writing. However, these concepts do not seem to be established in music theory but instead appear to be a personal coinage of the developer.

Throughout the conversation, D. emphasises how, inside video games, anything can function as a character, and that thinking of characters only as human beings is reductive. In this, he recognises the influence of old-style video games such as *Galaga* (*Gyaraga*, Namco, 1991), in which the protagonists are geometric shapes or non-human forms composed of a few pixels (in *Galaga*, the player controls a starship and is tasked with destroying alien forces in each stage, while also avoiding enemies and projectiles). Nonetheless, if protagonists are indeed humans, they often possess non-human characteristics, such as Mario (*Sūpā Mario*, Nintendo, 1985-), a plumber capable of jumping high and transforming upon collecting power-ups. As such, given the interest of D. in the ludic aspects of the medium, rather than on their narrative elements, it is easier for him to imagine and employ non-human characters in his games.

4.3. Interview with developer: Pop (pseudonym)

The interview with Pop was conducted in written form, and the questions were sent by email to his personal address. Pop is a full-time developer. After graduating in Informatics, he learned how to make games by himself, and then refined his skills after joining a video game company. In 2022 he left the company, and since then has been working as an independent developer. While originally starting out as a hobby, Pop has been developing games as a career for over ten years. Pop is now developing two games at the same time. The first one is a licensed game for the *FAIRY TAIL* (Mashima, 2006-2017) franchise, while the second one is an original project.

Regarding the use of anthropomorphic NPCs, Pop thinks that making them simpler and easier to characterise is useful to make them appealing to the player and to express the peculiarities of the setting, such as the use of fairies in a fantasy game. Another reason is the easier development of merchandise, and human characters can be too complex to be effective and recognisable mascots (somewhat similar to *yuru kyara*). When writing dialogues, Pop first decides on the personality and background of the character in detail, and then comes up with the lines, as he finds it easier to think about language use if the personality of the character has been previously established. Such characterisation is carried out not only through story elements, but also through language: Pop gives examples of Kansai dialect for a ‘frivolous’ (*ochōshimono*) and cheerful character, or honorific speech for a polite and stiff type. Other goals for this characterisation are often to show the origins of the character, such as their geographical provenance, or the environment in which they have grown up. For example, to show that a character was born in the countryside, it may be made to speak with an ‘accent’ (*namari*). Otherwise, to reveal that

a character has grown up in a poor environment, it may not employ honorific speech. Finally, Pop adds that gendered expressions like *da wa* and *wa yo* are used in games by female characters but are actually rarely used in everyday life.

According to Pop, the language style of a character is more dependent on its personality, rather than on its graphical appearance or role in the story. If, as part of the overall story of the game, an adult woman appears on the scene, Pop first determines the detailed personal background and personality of the female character, and then decides which linguistic features are to be used to represent those personal traits. Pop does not explicitly say whether these styles are his own inventions, but his mentions of widely known registers, such as Kansai dialect or *keigo*, suggests that he also adheres to widely recognised patterns, like Laineus. Moreover, in games based on pre-existing media mix, like *FAIRY TAIL*, characters or language styles of the original work are not to be changed, otherwise fans will be disappointed, and the game will be a ‘huge failure’ (*dai-shippai*).

Finally, Pop states that he has not seen many games implementing a pattern of progressive change in language choices, such as a gradual reduction in honorifics and polite speech following a greater degree of intimacy between NPCs, as it would be difficult to create this kind of evolution in inter-character relationships in the limited timespan of games. However, this is more likely to occur, for example, in role-playing games (RPGs) with long gameplay, and with more time devoted to character development. In passing, Pop also notes how low-quality adaptations of Western games into Japanese usually feature inconsistent or unnatural translations, where the entirety of the dialogue of a character is rendered in *keigo* regardless of the addressee in the conversation, or when the speech style of a character changes frequently and haphazardly. In conclusion, the developer places great emphasis on aligning dialogue with character backgrounds and ensuring consistency, especially in licensed games, with non-human characters often serving as a way to simplify complex human traits and make them more accessible to players.

4.4. Interview with developers: Niizato Hiroto and Noguchi Yasuhiro

The interview with the two developers was conducted via Microsoft Teams on 19 February 2024. Niizato Hiroto and Noguchi Yasuhiro are two full-time game developers currently working at CyberConnect2 Co., Ltd. (*Kabushikigaisha Saibā Konekuto Tsū*), a development company founded in 1996, based in Fukuoka and with more than 200 employees at the time of writing (CyberConnect2, 2024). Among the products developed by the company are both licensed games based on a pre-existing media mix, such as *NARUTO* (Kishimoto, 1999-2014) or

Dragon Ball (*Doragon Bōru*, 1984-), which are released by other publishers, and original games, such as the series of *Fuga: Melodies of Steel* (*Senjō no fūga*, 2021-), self-published by CyberConnect2.

Niizato is a game designer, game director and setting manager. During middle school, he used to play with adventure books and table-top role-playing games. While he was enrolled at a liberal arts university Nintendo released its first home video game console, the Family Computer (*Famirī konpyūta*), commonly known as Famicom (*Famikon*). Niizato started playing the digital versions of his favourite table-top RPGs and simulation games, and as such became ‘more and more addicted to video games’ (*dandan konpyūtā gēmu ni hamatte ita*). Noguchi is a game designer and scriptwriter. He attended a technical high school and a college of technology, but he quit after three years and then re-entered a junior college specialising in art. During high school he had the aspiration of creating games like a programmer. However, as extracurricular activity, he became involved with a club, where he would draw pictures, manga, and played table-top RPGs with his clubmates. As such, he started thinking that drawing pictures and creating screenplays would be more interesting than programming, and thus he decided to attend art college. There he found a job vacancy information and joined Taito, an arcade game company. Similarly to Niizato, Noguchi too ‘got hooked on computer games’ (*pasokongēmu ni hamatta*) after playing table-top RPGs. Both developers have always been great fans of ‘subcultures’ (*sabukaru*) like games, manga, and anime. The following answers of the developers are based on their own personal and subjective opinions, and do not reflect any specific policy or guidelines of CyberConnect2.

Regarding the use of non-human characters in their games, Niizato says that, when it comes to entertainment, the theme needs to be conveyed in a manner that is easy to understand. In such cases, one of the strengths of employing anthropomorphic characters is that their characteristics can be exaggerated and emphasised. In the case of *Senjō no fūga*, the enemy army is composed of Dobermanns: as this breed of dogs possess a ‘fierce’ (*dōmō*) and ‘ferocious’ (*kyōbō*) feel, the scene where Dobermann soldiers are attacking is exaggerated to convey how fierce and scary the enemy is. Conversely, it is easier to create a contrast when the allies are other breeds than Dobermanns. According to Niizato, there could be other factors in the choice, such as simply because there are people who like those animals, but he personally thinks that the main reason is to make the theme easier to understand. Noguchi agrees with Niizato, adding that it is an advantage to be able to omit a certain amount of explanation about certain characters because it is easy to establish the impression that everybody has of that animal. For example, variations can be found among dog-like and cat-like figures, as certain breeds of dogs are

regarded as more ‘amiable’ (*yasashii*), while tigers and lions also belong to the category of felines like cats. Noguchi thinks that he uses this kind of character which are easy to explain based on the mental image of an animal. He also finds that most characters in games, anime and manga are fundamentally humans, and that the addition of anthropomorphic animals makes it easier to distinguish them. He is aware that certain players will not like it, but he still thinks that this particularity is one of the strengths of their games.

Both Noguchi and Niizato agree that the overall setting of the game and the appearance of each character is created, and then dialogue is developed to match the atmosphere. For Niizato, setting is a requirement. First, a character is needed for a role in the story. Then, when he thinks about the specific character, he comes up with its graphic depiction, and then with its ‘manner of talking’ (*kuchō*). For example, he first creates a character that looks scary and then thinks about how it should talk. Noguchi also believes that video game characters need to be differentiated by their appearance, and as a further option the way of speaking will come into play in their characterisation. The setting of the game comes first, then he writes the script, and then the dialogues.

Regarding language use in games, Noguchi claims that he tries to write dialogue so that the player would understand which character is talking just by looking at the text, even without pictures. He finds that in Japanese it is rather easy to differentiate between different manner of speaking, such as ‘serious’ (*majimeppoi*), ‘delinquent-like’ (*furyōppoi*), or ‘stubborn’ (*ganko*), and as such it is also easier to show differences in personality through language. Niizato links language use to ‘thematic exaggeration’ (*tēma-sei no kochō*). A character’s position is ‘symbolised’ (*kigō-ka sareru*) through its language use, for example *desu wa* for a ‘lady’ (*ojōsama*), or *ja nō* for an ‘elderly person’ (*rōjin*). For Niizato, this symbolisation is taken for granted in Japanese manga, and the moment a character ‘speaks with these symbols’ (*sono kigō de shabetta shunkan ni*), it is easy for readers to understand the position of that character. Niizato thinks that this is probably a big part of Japanese culture, and that creators take advantage of this.

Language appears to also be used for additional purposes other than characterisation. Noguchi notes how the name of the addressee is often used in video game dialogue, and he sometimes goes out of his way to employ this technique to clearly show to whom each character is talking in the conversation. Niizato notes a strong tendency for video game characters to be explanatory, such as when an in-game destination is mentioned and characters repeat its name one more time, for example *kore kara ... ni ikō* ‘now let’s go to...’. Developers *intentionally* (*itoteki ni*) use such expressions to tell users what they must do afterwards in the game, and they are aware that this use of language does not happen very often in reality. Second-person pronouns are also

often used besides their potential as linguistic indexes, as they are ‘deliberately explanatory’ (*waza to setsumeippoi*) in showing to whom each character is speaking. This pragmatic use of pronouns is also reported to being done consciously as a technique, and because this is how Japanese manga and anime culture is structured.

When using sentence-final expressions for characterisation, Noguchi sometimes follows some patterns, but when these are not enough, he would also employ some ‘strange’ (*chotto kawatta*) suffixes. In this context he cites the case of *Senjō no fūga*, which features twelve children as main characters: in this case, different suffixes are used to avoid ambiguity and to clearly show which character is talking. For example, the character of Socks Million (*Sokkusu*) always ends his sentences with the expression *na no desu*: according to Noguchi, besides differentiating him from the other protagonists, he added this specific suffix to create a ‘doctor-like’ (*hakaseppoi*) characterisation, like somebody who is serious and often explain things to other people. Noguchi intentionally uses different suffixes for different characterological figures, such as *da ze* for a ‘rough-mannered’ (*arappoi*) character, or ‘soft’ (*yawarakai*) suffixes like *desu* and *da yo ne* for a serious character. Niizato adds that, if a game has three main characters, these can be differentiated with more natural dialogue and just subtle differences in their manner of talking. However, if the main characters are five or ten, they will be remembered in any case as players pay much attention to them, but side characters need very strong peculiarities to be memorable and distinguishable. Niizato claims that this is also done intentionally.

On the use of first-person pronouns, Noguchi thinks that their large number and their different kinds, like *watashi*, *ore*, and other dialectal expressions like *washi*, are unique to Japanese. This repertoire of first-person pronouns is employed in different ways for the purpose of characterisation: a serious character would use *watashi* or *boku*, while a rough one would use *ore*. Noguchi also deliberately uses different scripts for different purposes, as *ore* written in kanji, katakana or hiragana gives a different nuance. For example, *ore* in katakana would sound like a rough, delinquent type, or like a kid with a ‘mischievous’ (*yancha*) personality, but *ore* in kanji would be used by older characters. A serious character would use *watashi* written in kanji, while a kind girl would use *watashi* in hiragana: the developer chooses all these different language choices intentionally. As for suffixes, this is also done to differentiate between characters, like in *Senjō no fūga*, where the differentiation between twelve different main characters is essential.

As mentioned previously, CyberConnect2 has developed licensed games based on a pre-existing media mix, and original titles. Noguchi says that in games belonging to latter category, such as the aforementioned *Senjō no fūga* with its numerous main characters, serious characters

need to be separated from naughty characters, and among these categories character need to be separated by gender. Noguchi argues that in this case it is necessary to come up with different ‘costumes’ (*kosu*), in order not to create characters that look similar. Then, he devises how to differentiate them in text through first-person pronouns and sentence-final expressions. However, games based on manga and anime need to adhere strictly to the source material, and this can be a hardship for the scriptwriter. However, Niizato adds that, in his view, rules and patterns for exaggerated expressions of comic-like dialogues do not change between licensed games and original titles, as both he and Noguchi are great fans of manga and anime. As such, according to Niizato, he creates original characters by outputting and combining all the interesting things he has *absorbed* (*kyūshū shita*) from those sources.

Even though original titles can give a greater degree of freedom to their creators, developers still appear to follow some kind of rules in their scriptwriting. According to Noguchi, there should be a balance and a distribution between how different characters speak: for example, it would not be advisable to have all the characters use *ore*. Freedom can be expressed in other ways, and, for example, it would be interesting to have a young girl using *ore*: such devices can be deliberately devised to create gaps and subvert the expectations of players, for example creating a character with a rough manner of talking, but who is actually kind.

Throughout the conversation, Niizato and Noguchi have often used binary gender terms to describe a feeling that certain words and expression would convey, like *josei* and *onnappoi* for ‘feminine’, or *otokoppoi* for ‘masculine’. As a last question, I asked the developers their opinion about gender roles in video games, and if they had seen a change in attitude towards normative female and male character roles in recent years. Noguchi cannot say that he intentionally takes into consideration such issues, but he is at least aware that it would not be strange to have such a focus in a game. Niizato adds that he is not particularly conscious of gender issues when he creates texts in Japanese. However, when the company localises a product to sell it worldwide, developers are careful to respond to any points and suggestions that come up from the localisation staff at their own company. I then asked whether such concerns would depend on the setting of the game, as, in theory, a fantasy game would be less affected by the current discourse about gender. Niizato says that probably “the range is too wide”, and it would be difficult to make assumptions about it from the stage of game creation. At first, they try to create their texts swiftly and spontaneously, and then they take in objective opinions from the localisation team. Noguchi also thinks that, since Japanese has many words that sound feminine or masculine, they could also be employed by someone of the opposite gender, and that would be in itself a characterisation and a way of establishing a personality. This may not have been a problem in

the past, but if it is done poorly, it could become a problem in the future, so Noguchi thinks that more attention is necessary. However, the most important thing is to portray something that is interesting, and if the situation is too explanatory, he does not think that such elements are worth putting inside games.

In summary, Niizato and Noguchi share a strong appreciation for subcultures, including games, manga, and anime, which influence their work. Both developers prioritise the setting of their games before developing characters and writing their dialogues, and in doing so they strive for variety, creating NPCs that are visually and thematically distinct, to create a more engaging experience for the player. In writing dialogues, they aim to write lines that allow players to identify characters without visual cues, utilising the nuanced differences in Japanese speech to convey personality traits effectively. Both developers also employ techniques like repeating names and using second-person pronouns to clarify dialogue and actions within the game, while being aware that such pragmatic use of language is less widespread in actual conversations. Different first-person pronouns reflect character traits, and they are chosen deliberately to enhance characterisation, as are suffixes to differentiate between characters, especially in games with multiple protagonists: while main characters can be easily remembered, side characters require distinct traits to stand out. Finally, Niizato and Noguchi feel that, in original titles, developers can express greater freedom, but they still need to adhere to a balance in character speech patterns, to maintain narrative coherence. Both developers acknowledge the importance of not falling into predictable patterns in character representation, aiming for fresh, engaging portrayals.

4.5. Interview with developer: Moa (pseudonym)

The interview with Moa was conducted in written form, and the questions were sent by email to her personal address. Moa is a freelance manga artist, illustrator, scriptwriter, translator from English to Japanese, and game developer. She is the developer of *Hatoful Boyfriend* (*Hātofuru kareshi ~kibō no gakuen to shiroi tsubasa~*, PigeoNation Inc., 2011), a visual novel in which all the characters other than the protagonist are sentient birds. The game was first released as freeware in 2011 and was translated to English in 2012. A high-definition commercial remake was released in 2014 with a wider distribution on multiple services, such as Steam, PlayStation 4, and PlayStation Vita. Moa has a university degree in law, and is self-taught in illustration, cartooning, scriptwriting, and game development. She started developing her game out of curiosity, and when she tried her hand at the game-making engine, she found it easier than she initially thought.

Regarding the use of anthropomorphic NPCs, Moa thinks that it is natural for writers to want to express things that do not exist in reality, not only in games, but also in the world of fiction overall. In the case of games, the good thing about non-human characters is that it is ‘easy to give them noticeable characteristics’ (*medatta tokuchō o tsukeyasui*) through their design silhouettes and actions. The reason why only birds appear in *Hātofuru kareshi* is simply because she likes birds and wanted to create a world where only birds appear. When writing dialogues, Moa often decides first on the appearance of the characters and the overall setting of the scene. She is aware of using fictional speech, and notices that this also happens very frequently in Japanese media, as ‘many Japanese anime, games, and manga are full of manners of talking that are not used in everyday life’ (*ōku no Nihon no anime gēmu manga wa nichijō de tsukawanai kuchō de afurete imasu ne*). For example, the endings *no da* and *na no da* are used by many fictional characters (she gives the example of the character Zundamon, a recently developed mascot character for the Tōhoku region based on *zundamochi*, a regional confectionary), but Moa claims that she has never met anyone who speaks in this way in real life.

Moa also recognises a parodic element in her dialogue writing. For example, one of the characters of *Hātofuru kareshi* uses the idiolectal *kyara gobi desushi hatoshi*: Moa explains that this is a deliberate parody of the *Final Fantasy XI* (*Fainaru fantajī nain*, Square, 2000) internet meme *desushi osushi*. As the NPC in question is ‘the wildest character’ (*mottomo yaseiteki na kyarakutā*), she tried to keep the dialogue as free and chaotic as possible, with a lot of improvisation. Finally, between appearance and role in the story, she thinks that in-game is more strongly connected to language use. Strictly speaking, however, what is important when deciding on a character’s language and tone of voice is the setting of the character. In other words, ‘what kind of life they have led and what position they are in now’ will show in the way the character speaks. Another important factor to consider is whether all the characters speak in the same way, and if there is no ‘character overlapping’ (*kyara-kaburi*). For example, if all the villains who appear in the game speak in elegant honorifics (like Master Freezer from *Dragon Ball*), it would not be balanced at all. As far as the main characters are concerned, it is standard practice to differentiate between “rough”, “polite”, “childish” and so on, as clearly as possible.

At the end of the first email, Moa mentions that ‘stereotypical language in games, anime and manga is called “role language”’ (*gēmu ya anime, manga ni okeru sutereotaipu na kotobazukai wa “yakuwarigo” to iimasu*), and recommends checking out some resources on the topic, among which the book *Vācharu nihongo: Yakuwarigo no nazo* (Kinsui, 2003). In addition, she also mentions how Japanese has a ‘huge variety of first-person address terms’ (*bōdai na shurui no ichininshō*), such as *watashi*, *watakushi*, *atashi*, *atai*, *boku* (differentiated based on being

written in kanji, katakana, or hiragana), *ore* (differentiated between kanji and hiragana), *warawa*, *washi* and many more, and how this seems to contribute heavily to ‘fiction-specific language use’ (*fikushon tokuyū no kotobazukai*).

As this was the first instance in which a game developer was already and explicitly aware of the term *yakuwarigo*, I then asked Moa how she knew the term, and if she thought that role language was used in her game, *Hātofuru kareshi*. Firstly, she notices how the word *yakuwarigo* itself has a rather short history, with a paperback edition of *Vācharu nihongo* published in 2023,² and as such, she does not think that very many Japanese know the term. In her case, as she also works as a translator and has a strong interest in linguistics, she found out about role language a few years prior from social networks or articles on the Internet. Nevertheless, even though they may not know the concept itself, Moa thinks that many people are aware that stereotypical manners of talking, which are not found in everyday speech, often appear in fiction. Also, from a feminist perspective, she adds how there has also been a lot of discussion over the past few years on why female characters in TV dramas uniformly use unrealistic female language. As for her games, in the episodic sequel *Hatoful Boyfriend: Holiday Star* (*Hātofuru kareshi HolidayStar*, PigeoNation Inc., 2011), two characters use the suffix *no da*, which for her is a way of speaking often used to describe characters as ‘childish, juvenile, innocent, ignorant’ (*kodomoppoi, osanai, mujaki, muchī*). Incidentally, Moa was born and raised in Ōsaka and still lives in the Kansai region. As such, when she writes scripts, she is always making up lines that are far removed from everyday speech, because ‘dialect is predominant in Kansai’ (*Kansai de wa hōgen ga yūsei*) and very few people speak in the standard language in their daily conversations, although she also states that, in business and formal situations, the language becomes *keigo*, which is quite close to standard Japanese.

In short, Moa believes that using non-human characters allows writers to express ideas that do not exist in reality. She emphasises that anthropomorphic characters can have distinctive traits, which can be effectively communicated through their design and actions. When writing dialogue, she prioritises the appearances of the NPCs and the overall setting, often employing fictional speech that mirrors common practices in Japanese media, also for a comedic and parodic effect. Due to her interest in linguistics and translation studies, Moa is also aware of the metapragmatic concept of *yakuwarigo* and its presence in contemporary Japanese pop culture. She also suggests that, while not many may know the term, the concept of unrealistic speech in fiction is widely recognised by native speakers.

² The 2023 edition of the book mentioned by Moa is a reprint of the original 2003 edition.

4.6. Interview with developer: Ryūkishi07 (pseudonym)

The interview with Ryūkishi07 was conducted in written form. The questions were sent by email to the personal address of Seto, another member of 07th Expansion, the *dōjin* circle founded by Ryūkishi07 specialised in the creation of visual novels and sound novels. Ryūkishi07 is the pen name of a Japanese writer who is the leading member for the *dōjin* circle, and the creator of the *When They Cry* (*Higurashi no naku koro ni*, 07th Expansion, 2002-2022) visual novel series. He went to an art school, and he studied computer graphics, which came in very handy later when he was creating the text, characters, and backgrounds for *Higurashi no naku koro ni*. The desire to create something has always been there since he was in primary school. One day his younger brother found a tool called NScript that made it relatively easy to create visual novels and invited him to try it. He recalls that the experience of creating a visual novel was the most fulfilling among all the things he had tried up to that point, and that he would continue to work in that genre from then on. However, he has loved games since he was a child, and he would also like to work on action games and RPGs.

Regarding the use of language inside video games, Ryūkishi07 thinks that two points can be made. The first is to make it easier to understand the character's personality in written media such as scripts and novels. For example, looking at a text with the line *konnichiwa* 'hello', the reader cannot imagine who pronounced it. Only when the text before and after it is supplemented with expressions like *rō-shinshi wa itta* 'the old gentleman said' or *go-reijō wa itta* 'the young lady said', the reader can imagine the speaker and the tone of voice. Conversely, by adding endings in the 'language of old men' (*rōjin kotoba*) or the 'language of young ladies' (*go-reijō kotoba*), there is the advantage of being able to imagine the person and the tone of voice from the lines alone. Furthermore, since only dialogue is used to explain things, the effect of reducing the amount of text and improving the pacing can also be expected. However, too much of this will make it sound strange. Ryūkishi07 provides two different examples of this: *Oya, okyakusama ja na?* 'Oh, a customer?', and *E? A, anata wa tensai butsurigakusha no Suzuki hakase?!* 'Oh, are you the genius physicist Dr. Suzuki!'. In the first example, by adding the suffix *ja na*, the reader can understand that the speaker is likely to be an old person. However, the second sentence is clearly explanatory and is not used in everyday conversation. Ryūkishi07 calls such utterances 'explanatory lines' (*setsumei serifu*) and adds that such dialogue is not considered very good. The second purpose of this kind of language is to give the characters their own individuality. Ryūkishi07 finds that there are many characters in Japanese anime and manga who use unrealistic language, and by adding unique phrases and endings one can express

a strong individuality just through dialogue. Also, by having the characters use words that are different from how they look, the writer can create a gap and show a strong individuality, such as a young girl speaking in the language of old people, or an intelligent young man who speaks in a language reminiscent of the Edo period. These techniques were a ‘last-ditch effort’ (*kuniku no saku*) for a medium that consisted only of text, without pictures or voices. Nowadays, however, it is common for anime and games to be accompanied by pictures and voices. In this sense, Ryūkishi07 thinks that the first point, which is to let the audience imagine what a character looks like, will gradually become obsolete, and language use will become more and more specialised only towards characterisation, as said in the second point.

Regarding the use of non-human characters, Ryūkishi07 argues that in Japan there is a long-standing culture of anthropomorphism, as since ancient time, abnormal weather, epidemics, and other phenomena with which humans cannot interact have been anthropomorphised and deified. By viewing incomprehensible phenomena as the whims of beings with which humans can interact, they tried to understand irrational situations. In contemporary Japan, this culture has changed from anthropomorphism to *bishōjo* ‘cute girls’, where any phenomenon can be made into a cute and lovable object (cf. Wee & Goh, 2019). Ryūkishi07 gives the example of *Kantai Collection* (*Kantai Korekushon*, DMM.com, 2013-), a free-to-play web browser game popular in Japan featuring warships personified as beautiful girls with personality characteristics reflecting the history of each ship, which triggered a “*bishōjo* boom”. Nowadays, a wide range of things have been made into *bishōjo*, from firearms to food to railway stations. These trends have led to the frequent appearance of anthropomorphic, non-human beings in Japanese games and anime. Furthermore, in the contemporary ‘business based on anime and manga characters’ (*kyarakutā bijinesu*), characters with an unusual appearance are probably better received.

When writing dialogues, Ryūkishi07 thinks that he uses a lot of special language that is not encountered in the real world to personalise the characters. For example, quoting from characters in *Higurashi no naku koro ni*, the character of Ryūgū Rena uses *kana? kana*, a special way of repeating the interrogative particle *kana* twice. Another character, Sonozaki Mion, uses *ojisan* ‘uncle’, as first-person pronoun. This implies an affectionate composure and condescending attitude, like that of an uncle towards his adult nephews and nieces, even though women do not appear to generally refer to themselves as *ojisan* in real life. A third character, Hōjō Satoko, attaches oddly used *ojōsama kotoba* ‘young lady speech’ at the end of her conversations (such as the expression *kudasai desu no yo*). As a result, Ryūkishi07 finds that it does not sound elegant at all, but rather provocative, and of course, no one speaks like this in real life. Finally, a fourth character, Furude Rika, expresses her joy in an unusual way, saying,

mi~☆nipa~☆ when she is in a good mood. In all these cases, Ryūkishi07 claims that his aim is to impress the reader with the unique personality of each character. Regarding the use of unique words in his games, Ryūkishi07 states that it is ‘a conscious decision for the purpose of characterisation’ (*kyarazuke o mokuteki to shita ishikiteki na kettei*). He also believes that, by giving characters ‘outstanding characteristics’ (*togatta tokuchō*) and making a deeper impression, such characterisation can invite the audience to empathise with the NPCs. However, this only applies to media like anime or games, while in the case of narrative dramatic fiction (*hyūman dorama* ‘human drama’) based on real society, such outstanding character development can “destroy” the setting. Finally, Ryūkishi07 considers language to be tied to both the appearance of the character and its role in the story. In his own words, ‘when appearance and language are linked, the personality of the character is created, while when role and language are tied together, the thoughts of the character are created’ (*gaiken to kotoba ga musubitsuite, kyarakutā no kosei ga umare, yakuwari to kotoba ga musubitsuite, kyarakutā no shisō ga umaremasu*). In this sense, he believes that appearance and role are also strongly linked. However, a bad appearance combined with a bad role and bad words does not make for a fascinating villain. Similarly, a pleasant appearance, a righteous role and exemplary language will only result in a clichéd image of a hero. How to combine these elements in an interesting way is the secret to creating an appealing character.

To summarise, Ryūkishi07 considers language in written media as a tool for understanding the personality of a given character. Using specific registers and linguistic items helps convey personality and tone without excessive exposition, as over-explaining through dialogue can feel unnatural. Unique phrases and speech patterns can also define characters’ identities, allowing for unexpected contrasts: historically, these techniques compensated for the limitations of text-based storytelling before the advent of visual and audio elements. The use such unique words is intentional for character development, aiming to evoke empathy from players, and are better received due to the nature of the video game medium. In contrast, such techniques might disrupt the realism in narratives set in contemporary society. Regarding non-human characters, Ryūkishi07 thinks that Japan has a rich tradition of anthropomorphism, where abstract concepts and phenomena are personified to make them relatable, and such trend has evolved into the creation of *bishōjo* characters representing various entities, leading to a broader acceptance and appeal for anthropomorphised characters. Language is intertwined with a character’s appearance and narrative role. Effective character creation requires a harmonious blend of these elements, while poor combinations result in clichéd characters, and the success of a game lies in creatively combining these traits to craft compelling and memorable characters.

4.7. Discussion

From the interviews with four independent developers, Laineus, D., Pop, and Ryūkishi07, and with two commercial developers, Niizato and Noguchi, it appears that none of these six developers was explicitly acquainted with the definition of role language before the conversations. However, they all acknowledged the use of specific linguistic registers for the characterisation of certain in-game personae, deeming it “useful” and in line with the presumed expectations of the audience. Laineus also admits that these linguistic styles were not products of personal invention but were instead borrowed from well-recognised and consistently reproduced pre-determined models. Conversely, Moa was already familiar with the concept of *yakuwarigo*, due to her work as a translator and her self-reported strong interest in linguistics. However, regardless of their previous acquaintance with the term, when explaining categories of fictional characters and their language use, all the developers made references to common archetypes and character types, such as *rōjin* or *ojōsama*, and their registers. In particular, the attention given to widely established character tropes points to their ubiquitous presence in the media-mix of Japanese cultural products, and hints to a somewhat intuitive knowledge of “role language” and the mechanisms of enregisterment of language variations and its indexical properties in the medialect of popular fictional works. Despite Ito (2007) arguing that «[s]ince amateur game-designers do not intend to make money, they do not have to conform to mass tastes» (Ito, 2007: 138), interviews suggest that amateur game developers still often adhere to established characterological figures and their associated linguistic registers. Aoyama & Izushi (2003) had first suggested that «[c]artoons and animation films provided an important foundation for the emergence of Japan’s video game industry» (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003: 439), arguing that «many in the video game industry refer to their interest in cartoon/animation films as being the primary motivating factor for pursuing current occupation» (Aoyama & Izushi, 2003: 440). Such preliminary speculations have been confirmed by the interviews, when developers have referenced their exposure to manga and anime, thus attesting to the intertextual nature of the contemporary media mix. As previously expressed by Moretti (2025a: 138), borrowing the terms proposed by Squires (2014: 43), a linguistic feature is *adopted* from the mass media by consumers of the media: in this case, consumers of the Japanese media mix are exposed to fictional registers of language, or role language. Linguistic features are then *circulated* through their use in practice: the game developer can then be seen as acting as social actors with their (un)conscious *stancetaking* (Spitzmüller, 2022: 258), by positioning themselves regarding the nature of the video game medium, their own creativity, and the expectations of players.

Such stance emerges from all the conversations. The diegetic description of what is going on in the scene, and the non-polarised allocation of dialogue turn quoted by Laineus are conscious strategies that game developers implement to overcome certain limitations they feel in their games. When a character remains silent in video games, there are limited additional methods available for portraying their personality, due to limitations in the structure of the medium. This is the case for so-called “silent protagonists”, player characters who are purposefully left with little to no dialogue throughout the entire game, to ease identification and immersion for the player (Domsch, 2017: 253). Consequently, developers often strive to ensure that dialogues between NPCs are balanced: if a character remains mute, they can easily be overlooked by players, and without communication among characters, their diegetic function is lost. Metapragmatic stancetaking emerges also as D. recalls his struggles at schools, when he implies that *kokugo* is the ideologically correct usage. While he denies competence in such structured forms of communication, his intuitive (and somewhat self-deprecating) approach toward scriptwriting instead appears to draw on other creative sources of virtual Japanese. Finally, when Pop mentions how specific features are used creatively, the absence of honorific speech functions as a higher order of indexicality in the address of the poor upbringing of a character, as he implies that players would know the correct use of language, even in a virtual environment. Thus, Pop appears to grant the expected audience a metapragmatic competence in making sense of creativity in fictionalised orality. In short, all developers highlight the deliberate use of language to match the personality of a character. Linguistic tokens such as pronouns, final particles, and specific speech patterns are used to reflect character traits, and these choices are rarely accidental, with developers consciously crafting dialogue to enhance characterisation while referencing an intertextual repertoire of characterological figures and their enregistered linguistic styles.

Laineus and Pop also mention the creative use of script choices as part of written language use in dialogue writing, particularly the use of katakana. However, rather than indexing a supposed sense of foreignness, one of its most recognised connotations (Robertson, 2021: 62-63), katakana appears to be used more often as an index of personal characteristics, such as innocence or mysteriousness. The indexical field of potential meanings of katakana here is shaped by the video game medium, and by the creativity of developers. In a fantasy setting, where the distinction between fluency and disfluency is not important, the ideological meaning of ‘non-nativeness’ or ‘foreignness’ is not activated. Instead, developers craft their texts so that other, more useful indexical meanings are activated for the purpose of characterisation.

This chapter has mainly focused on the experiences of *dōjin* game developers, as the non-economical rewards are likely to produce a higher level of creativity inside the final product (Hichibe & Tanaka, 2016). However, while Pop is also an independent developer, his past experiences at a game company and the commercial aim of his projects make him aware of the importance of the expectations of the audience towards language in video games, for the product to be both commercially viable and positively received by players. Creativity in such cases is restricted, especially when the game is based on a pre-existing media mix, like *FAIRY TAIL*. When Pop refers to the use of anthropomorphic characters to cater to certain user demographics and to produce merchandise, he is aware that economic motivations influence and restrain the creativity of developer. Niizato and Noguchi also add that the use of anthropomorphic animals, such as dog-like and cat-like figures, is a deliberate choice to appeal to certain demographics. As such, through ideologies of communication, the distinction between human and non-human character collapses, as these are justified and rationalised through the use of specific media and by routinised forms of communication (Spitzmüller, 2022: 262-263), in this case “the extraordinary world of gaming”.

Non-human character types and their associated stereotyped registers appear to serve as tools to express ideas or simplify complex human traits. These characters often have distinct, simplified, or exaggerated personalities that can be effectively conveyed through dialogue. Developers find that such characters make it easier to engage players and avoid the complications of depicting more nuanced human traits.

4.8. Conclusions

Through semi-structured interviews, this chapter has investigated language ideologies in the linguistic characterisation of non-human NPCs, with a focus on *dōjin* game developers. In the context of amateur scriptwriting, it appears that developers shape their texts through a process of iconization (Irvine & Gal, 2000), wherein they perceive linguistic styles borrowed from popular culture as their default source of inspiration, due to their likely exposure to anime, manga, and other games as first-hand users, before becoming creators themselves. Subsequently, certain clichés are systematically reiterated and transposed onto characterological figures through a process of indexical regimentation (Bucholtz, 2011: 257), whereby a linguistic trait assumes a highly ideologised meaning. Through an ideology of creativity, the actions of the developer also appear to assume ideologised meaning. In contrast to the multiple and flexible social meanings associated with language variation by real individuals, linguistic performances by fictional characters in scripted media are regimented, leading to the portrayal and the reproduction of

fixed stereotypes. Developers rely on pre-existent linguistic styles, rather than inventing their own registers for their games, with virtual Japanese drawing on virtual Japanese. Creativity then emerges in the writing process, with the equal allocation of turns for Laineus, or the *tori-aezu* approach of D. Personal communications with developers suggest that they engage creatively, and to some extent also consciously, with different registers. In their writing, they are influenced by the processes of iconization and indexical regimentation, and the supposed essentialising nature of the linguistic trait. Media ideologies (Gershon, 2010), such as expected audience, production constraints, and ideas of how dialogues should be structured in games, also appear to shape their beliefs about what is appropriate and possible in the *extraordinary world of gaming*.

The medialect can be defined as a parallel repertoire of language and associated linguistic ideologies and semiotic meaning, encountered by native speakers in the intertextuality of pop culture products (cf. Hill, 2005). Native speakers perceive and understand the medialect and its indexical meanings, but they do not appear to use it in actual daily verbal communication, expressing a different domain of uses and connotations. In Chapter 5, I will analyse an ad hoc corpus of video game dialogues, to explore the use of language inside the medium. As such, trends and commonalities will be investigated, to verify whether they adhere to pattern already established in other products of pop culture, and to gain insight into language variation considering the first-hand accounts and responses of the developers presented in this chapter. In Chapter 6, I will present the results of the questionnaire survey, focusing on metapragmatic commentaries and on the intertextual nature of linguistic characterisation.

Chapter 5: The Text-Oriented Approach

This chapter examines linguistic representation in a target corpus of written dialogues from Japanese-language video games, analysing how language choices index character roles and fictional identities, and addressing underlying language ideologies.

5.1. Introduction to the analysis of the target corpus

This chapter features an in-depth analysis of linguistic features in a corpus of 24 contemporary video games, both commercial (AAA) and independent (*dōjin*), published from 2000 to 2020. As explained also in 2.4, the games taken into consideration are presented in the Table 2, together with their genre, the overall setting of their narrative, and the date of their release (cf. Ma, 2023). Furthermore, Kinsui (2003: 188) specifically mentions how products aimed at children feature a greater use of *yakuwarigo*. Therefore, as the intended age range of users would provide valuable context for understanding the linguistic choices in the dialogues, when available I have also referenced the rating by the Computer Entertainment Rating Organization (*Tokutei hieiri katsudō hōjin konpyūta entāteinmento rētingu kikō*, CERO), a non-profit organization informing customers about the characteristics and suitable age range for the product. The ratings are as follows: A for *Zen nenrei taishō* ‘All ages’, B for *Jūnisai ijō taishō* ‘Ages 12 and up’, C for *Jūgosai ijō taishō* ‘Ages 15 and up’, D for *Jūnanasai ijō taishō* ‘Ages 17 and up’, and Z for *Jūhassai ijō nomi taishō* ‘Ages 18 and up only’ (CERO, 2025).

Genre	Game	Year	Setting	Type	CERO
Action	<i>Ikachan (Ikachan)</i>	2000	Contemporary	<i>Dōjin</i>	A
Action	<i>Dōkutsu monogatari (Cave Story)</i>	2004	Science fiction	<i>Dōjin</i>	B
Simulation	<i>Oideyo Dōbutsu no mori (Animal Crossing: Wild World)</i>	2005	Contemporary	AAA	A
RPG	<i>Mazā 3 (Mother 3)</i>	2006	Contemporary	AAA	A
RPG	<i>Rusettia – Aitemu-ya-san no hajimekata (Recettear: An Item Shop's Tale)</i>	2007	Fantasy	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating
RPG	<i>Perusona 4 (Persona 4)</i>	2008	Contemporary	AAA	B
Action	<i>Oboro Muramasa (Muramasa: The Demon Blade)</i>	2009	Fantasy	AAA	B
RPG	<i>Ni no kuni Shiroki seihai no joō (Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch)</i>	2011	Fantasy	AAA	A

Action	<i>Shippū no Usagimaru Megumi no tama to fūma no shirushi (Ninja Usagimaru: The Gem of Blessing)</i>	2012	Fantasy	<i>Dōjin</i>	A
Action	<i>Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito (HarmoKnight)</i>	2012	Fantasy	AAA	A
Simulation	<i>Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori (Animal Crossing: New Leaf)</i>	2012	Contemporary	AAA	A
RPG	<i>Perusona Q: Shadō obu za rabirinsu (Persona Q: Shadow of the Labirynth)</i>	2014	Contemporary	AAA	B
Adventure	<i>Puchi noberu Kyōiki no ichigatsu (Petit Novel: Boundaries in January)</i>	2014	Contemporary	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating
Action	<i>Tobidasu! Nyanko daisensō (Jump Out! Nyanko Great War)</i>	2015	Science fiction	<i>Dōjin</i>	A
Adventure	<i>Nikki no tabisuru kuizu (Nikki's Travel Quiz)</i>	2015	Contemporary	<i>Dōjin</i>	A
Action	<i>Pinku awā (Pink Hour)</i>	2015	Science fiction	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating
Action	<i>Pinku hebun (Pink Heaven)</i>	2015	Science fiction	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating
RPG	<i>Taiko no tatsujin Dokodon! Misuterī adobenchā (Taiko no Tatsujin: Dokodon! Mystery Adventure)</i>	2016	Contemporary	AAA	A
Adventure	<i>Gurumin 3D (Gurumin 3D: A Monstrous Adventure)</i>	2016	Contemporary	AAA	A
Adventure	<i>Meitantei Pikachū (Detective Pikachu)</i>	2018	Contemporary	AAA	A
Simulation	<i>Atsumare Dōbutsu no mori (Animal Crossing: New Horizons)</i>	2020	Contemporary	AAA	A
RPG	<i>Sakyubasu no Abi wa yūwaku dekinai (Succubus Abi Can't Seduce)</i>	2020	Contemporary	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating
RPG	<i>Ansangu kingudamu (Unsung Kingdom)</i>	2020	Fantasy	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating
Adventure	<i>Ribura no mita yume (The Dream Libra Had)</i>	2021	Fantasy	<i>Dōjin</i>	No rating

Table 2: Primary sources (video games)

As noted also by Ma (2023) in his own corpus (which he defined more recently as the JGC), it is hard to create a balanced corpus, like the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ), with video games dialogues. As such, the purpose of the target corpus taken into exam in my research is to reflect representative characteristics of video game characters across different games, different genres, different settings, and diachronically. I have chosen

both commercial, “triple-A” games developed by larger professional studios, and *dōjin* independent games developed by small teams, or by just one person. This will provide the opportunity to research whether internal variation in the corpus between AAA games and *dōjin* games can be found, or if both follow the same (unwritten) rules of employing widely recognised categories of characters and linguistic registers, thus aligning more with their supposed conservative nature (cf. Fiadotau, 2019). Additionally, the games taken into consideration can be regarded as belonging to different genres and production types, as these variables can influence how language is used and how character tropes are portrayed in-game. For instance, as also noted in 2.4, RPGs and simulations often rely on extensive dialogue, while action games may use language more sparingly, thus influencing linguistic representation. In the analysis I will reference the games by their original Japanese titles.

The target corpus is composed of the dialogues of 346 non-human NPCs: 199 NPCs (58%) are framed as male speakers, 47 NPCs (14%) are framed as females, while 100 NPCs (29%) are not clearly characterised in terms of gender. In the analysis, I have also divided the characters in broad categories based on their role in the story in the video game where they are featured. Namely, the categories that will be referenced in the analysis are “ally”, “good”, “neutral”, and “villain”. In choosing such terms, I reference Ensslin (2015: 3), who argues that NPCs in video games largely follow widely established character tropes and archetypes, such as “hero”, “villain”, or “helper”, and who explicitly employs the categories of character types and associated actantial roles as proposed by Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp (1895-1970), as referenced in 2.2. I also based my choices on the terminology proposed by Kinsui (2020), who associates classes of characters with the likelihood of characters of said class to employ role language in their speech:

クラス1：主人公および準主人公。登場頻度が高く、また内面描写も豊富である。すでに見たように、受け手の自己同一化はこのクラスのキャラクターに誘導しなければならないので、あまり奇抜な特徴付けは行われない場合が多い。従って言葉遣いも、標準語を基調とする、役割語度の低い話し方となることが多い [...]。

クラス2：メンター、同調者、敵対者、トリックスター、変貌者、影といったアーキタイプに属する重要なキャラクターがここに位置する。個性的であるが、内面描写はクラス1の人物よりも少なく、「他者」として立ち現れる人物たちであると言える。

言葉の面では、典型的な役割語（標準語を含む）が用いられる場合が多いが、一方で、通常の役割語からずらしたり、重ねたり、あるいはまったくそれまでに例のないユニークな話し方をさせる場合もある。

クラス3：ほぼ1回登場したらそれっきりの人物であり、従って名前が現れることもまれである。あらゆる属性において、環境になじんで目立たないことが一番の特徴である。

言葉の面では、役柄に応じた一番無難な（典型的な）役割語（標準語を含む）を使用することが基本である。(Kinsui, 2017: 257; now in Kinsui, 2020: 68-69)

Class 1: Protagonist and Deuteragonist. These characters appear frequently and have rich inner portrayals. As we have already seen, since the audience's self-identification needs to be guided towards these characters, they are often not given overly eccentric traits. Consequently, their language use tends to be based on standard language, with a low degree of role language [...].

Class 2: Mentor, Ally, Antagonist, Trickster, Shapeshifter, Shadow. Important characters that belong to these archetypes fall into this class. They are individualistic, but their inner portrayal is less pronounced than that of Class 1 characters, and they can be described as figures that appear as “others”.

In terms of language, typical role language (including standard language) is often used, but there are cases where the language deviates from typical role language, overlaps with it, or is entirely unique and unprecedented.

Class 3: Minor characters. These characters generally appear once and are rarely named. Their main characteristic is that they blend into the background and remain unremarkable in every attribute. In terms of language, they typically use the safest (most typical) role language (including standard language) appropriate for their role. (Translation mine)

Specifically, I define “ally characters”, taking inspiration from its Japanese counterpart *mi-kata*, as NPCs who actively help the protagonist in the game, often being deuteragonists or companions to the player character, and who help them either in combat or by giving them guidance and advice. I define characters as “good” when they help the protagonist but appear for a shorter period of time on screen, often being mentors to the protagonists but not accompanying them throughout the game. Subsequently, I define “neutral” characters as minor characters who briefly appear on screen and who have few lines of dialogues. Finally, I define “villains” as characters who antagonise the player character in their journey, usually being boss characters that need to be defeated in combat sequences to progress in the game.

The register of each category of character will then be described based on common aspects in the dialogue of each character belonging to the same category, to ascertain whether specific linguistic features are more commonly associated to specific characterological figures. As mentioned in 3.3, previous scholarship has often focused on a small number of items, such as male-associated first-person pronouns (cf. Dahlberg-Dodd, 2018). In this chapter, I will instead take into consideration a greater number of linguistic variables.

As mentioned also in Chapter 4, borrowing the terminology proposed by Stein (2023: 1047-1049), this sociolinguistic analysis will mainly follow a stylistic approach. Throughout the analysis, I will also make references to a field approach (metalinguistic and metaludic discourse among native speakers on online forums and websites) and a questionnaire approach (analysed in detail in Chapter 6), when such approaches would be deemed necessary to investigate the associations of linguistic features to language attitudes and characterological figures. As for the analytic perspective, borrowing the terms used by Stamou (2014: 121-122), I employed mainly a macro-level, so-called repertoire analysis, with occasional micro-level scene analysis of specific dialogues, and occasional meso-level character analysis.

Repertoire analysis is a macro-level approach, by referring to a study of the linguistic repertoire of an entire film and/or series and so on, namely to an account of the total of the linguistic codes depicted in a fictional text and their allocation to fictional characters. In this way, through repertoire analysis, associations can be established between certain dimensions of sociolinguistic style and the socio-demographic and narrative (e.g. protagonist or peripheral role) profile of characters. In contrast, scene analysis is a micro-level perspective, focusing on the analysis of specific interactions of particular sociolinguistic (e.g. instances of miscommunication due to code contrasts) or narrative interest (e.g. conflicts). Standing between the two is ‘character analysis’, which is a meso-level approach, by accounting for what linguistic choices particular characters make, and how they may differentiate their linguistic repertoire across scenes. (Stamou, 2014: 121)

As expressed also in 3.3, the methodology for the analysis of the dialogues is also informed by a similar approach by Hiramoto (2010, 2013) in her research on gendered expression and identities in the original Japanese version and in the English American translation of the anime series *Cowboy Bebop*. The linguistic features examined in this chapter will include first-person pronouns, second-person pronouns, copular expressions, forms of request such as the imperative form (*meireikei*), negative forms, auxiliary verbs (*jodōshi*), sentence-final particles and expressions (*shūjoshi*), interjections (*kandōshi*), vocabulary and register. Additionally, other

features, such as auxiliary particles (*setsuzokujoshi*) and lexical choices will be included and discussed, when certain items are used as indexes and employed for purposes of characterisation. In the metalinguistic introduction to each linguistic item, before the analysis, I will at times reference two contemporary dictionaries, the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (Shōgakukan, 2002) and the *Dejitaru Daijisen* (Shōgakukan, 2002), to explore normative views of language use for specific features, and to investigate whether fictionalised orality adheres to said normative patterns. When relevant, results in the video game corpus will then also be compared with results found in the Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation (CEJC; National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, 2022) and the Corpus of Japanese Dialects (COJADS; National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, 2020), accessed through the online tool Chūnagon (<https://chunagon.ninjal.ac.jp>). The CEJC and COJADS corpora serve as real-world baselines, allowing for a comparative analysis of video game dialogue and everyday language use. By referencing these corpora, I aim to identify how game dialogue diverges from or aligns with natural language patterns.

These methodological choices aim to illuminate how fictional social identities, character roles, and ideologies intersect in the language of Japanese video game NPCs. Thus, with this analysis I aim to shed light on the broader role of language in mediated character portrayal, drawing on *yakuwarigo* to explore the distinct language styles associated with character roles in the medialect, while positioning the results within frameworks of enregisterment, indexicality, and iconization to investigate broader sociolinguistic implications.

5.2. First-person pronouns

This section will consider first-person pronouns, both in the singular and plural form. Plural forms will be discussed under each sub-section together with the respective singular form. Personal pronouns have been widely analysed in previous research related to role language, due to their large number and differences in pragmatic use. Among them, Kinsui (2003: 205) states that the most significant for *yakuwarigo* are first-person pronouns, while Irwin & Zisk (2019) argue that:

First person pronouns exhibit the greatest variation, running the gamut from highly formal to highly informal, with subtle gradations in between. Further complexity is introduced by the fact that, within each register, first person pronouns can be heavily skewed to specific media, restricted to certain social classes, or imbued with a particular flavour. (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 147)

5.2.1. *Watashi*

Watashi is considered the default first-person pronoun, used by both female and male speakers in formal situations (Shibatani, 1990: 371; Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148), and in written language as well as public (formal) speech style (Kinsui, 2017: 75).

Watashi written in kanji is employed by 29 characters. 10 of these can be regarded as females, while 14 can be regarded as males. Among the male characters, there is a tendency for neutral characters with social recognition to employ this pronoun, as it is used by a medic penguin and by another penguin called Anton-sensei in *Ribura no mita yume*, by the feudal lord Ferdinand and by the learned dragon Zi in *Ansangu kingudamu*, by the scientist Doc in *Gurumin 3D*, and by the tutorial-like guide Kajitsu, again in *Ribura no mita yume*. When used by male characters who also employ other pronouns such as *ore*, *watashi* is reserved for dialogue addressed to a superior, while *ore* is reserved to dialogue towards the player character. In such cases, the use of more derogatory pronouns would appear to be a creative device used to increase the degree of intimacy between NPC and player, thus potentially creating a more engaging experience. The most common second-person address terms and suffixes used by these male characters are *anata* (both in hiragana and kanji) and *kimi* (both in katakana and kanji), and *-san* and *-dono*.

Watashi in hiragana is instead used by 12 NPCs, 6 of which are framed as female speakers, 2 as male speakers, while 4 characters do not present overly identifiable indexes of gender. Finally, *watashi* in katakana is used by 6 characters, two of which are framed as female speakers and whose dialogues also feature *watashi* written in hiragana and kanji. The remaining 4 characters are framed as male speakers, and 3 of them are depicted as middle-aged men. The remaining NPC is characterised as a foreigner and his speech feature ample use of broken Japanese and *katakana-go*, and the use of *watashi* in katakana is consistent with the association of katakana with foreigner speech (Robertson, 2021: 62-63). Ultimately, the indexical association between script choice and identity appears to be reinforced by the routinised association of kanji to index male identities, and hiragana as index of femininity (cf. Robertson, 2017: 500-501).

5.2.2. *Watakushi*

Watakushi, literally ‘private, self’, is considered a neutral pronoun belonging to the highest register of formality, used by both male and female speakers (Shibatani, 1990: 371; Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148). In works of fiction, *watakushi* when used by male speakers can index the characterological figure of the butler, while, if it used by female characters, it is regarded as belonging to the registers of middle-aged women (*okusama kotoba*) or upper-class lady-like young females (*ojōsama kotoba*) (Kinsui, 2014q: 204-205).

In the corpus, *watakushi* is used by 4 characters, one fairy, one frog, one mouse, and one ghost of a former prostitute, who all have a positive role in the story, either as ally to the player character, or as neutral NPCs. Three characters are explicitly framed as female speakers, due to the graphical depiction (the spirit of a dead woman, a female fairy) or to the content of the dialogue (a mouse introducing herself as the mother of 7 offsprings). *Watakushi* is used by 3 characters in hiragana, and in the case of the ghost, *watakushi* is written in kanji and pronunciation is provided by *furigana*, to distinguish it from *watashi*. The 4 characters each appear belong to greater category of characters in their own game, as 17 frog characters and 19 mice characters appear in *Mazā 3*, while two ghosts appear in *Oboro Muramasa* and two fairies in *Rusettia*. Thus, *watakushi* appears to be used for internal variation, to differentiate between the different characters who share the same graphical depiction, and to create a greater variety and a more engaging experience for the player, as suggested by game developers in Chapter 4. In line with normative views of *watakushi* as belonging to a very formal register, the tone of the utterances of the NPCs is very formal and polite, with the use of the auxiliary *-masu*, the copular expression *gozaimasu*, the presence of *sonkeigo* and *kenjōgo*, and the use of *bikago*, while no sentence-final expressions are used.

5.2.3. *Atakushi*

Atakushi is considered an averagely formal and very feminine variation of *watakushi*, with deletion of the initial *w-* considered as marker of femininity (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148-149), while in works of fictions it is regarded as being used by the same categories of speakers as those using *watakushi*, namely middle-aged women or upper-class young ladies (Kinsui, 2014q: 204).

In the corpus *atakushi* is used only by one character, Yukidarumama from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*, who is characterised in-game as a middle-aged female speaker. Her other address terms of choice are *anata* as second-person pronoun towards the player, and *darling* (*dārin*) as third person when referring to her snowman husband. This choice of address terms, together with other indexes of female language, such as the overall high level of politeness, the use of *bikago* (see 5.10.2) concur to the characterisation of the speaker as female, thus reinforcing the ideological association of certain linguistic features with a «reserved, polite, and gentle type of femininity» (Nakamura, 2023: 111).

5.2.4. *Atashi*

Atashi is considered an informal and very feminine first-person pronoun, as it is a truncation of *watakushi*, with the shortened form expressing increased informality, and with deletion of the initial *w-* considered as marker of femininity (Shibatani, 1990: 371; Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148-149). In the medialect of fictional works, *atashi* is regarded as characteristic of vigorous, cheeky, and tomboyish female speakers (Yoda, 2014a: 8-10).

Atashi is used by two characters in two different games, both times in katakana. Both characters are framed as unpolite and somewhat transgressive females, as both use *anta* and *ojōchan* as second-person address term, and one character is a self-proclaimed *okama*, literally ‘pot’, but widely used as a derogatory term to address effeminate gay men (Maree, 2020: 16). This appears to be somewhat in contrast with *atashi* being metapragmatically defined as a feminine, “girly-girly”, and somewhat formal self-address term (Miyazaki, 2023: 149) but instead appears to be more in line with the definition by Yoda (2014a: 8-10) as index of roughness in female fictional characters.

5.2.5. *Uchi*

Uchi, literally ‘inside’ or ‘in-group’, is regarded as an informal and feminine term of address, whose use as a personal pronoun until recently was restricted to Western Japanese (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148). The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* states that it is used specifically in the Kansai region. The association of *uchi* with Kansai speakers and especially with young female speakers is also attested in fictional works, but since the latter part of the 1990s its use is also being progressively more associated to *gyarugo* ‘gal’s language’, the sociolect associated to the *gyaru* ‘gal’ subculture and to young women in Tōkyō Prefecture (Fujimoto, 2014b: 25-27). *Uchi* is also often used to denote one’s home or one’s family.

In the corpus *uchi* is used exclusively in hiragana by two characters, both of which are framed as middle-aged female speakers, as they both refer to having offsprings (*uchi no ko* and *uchi no kodomotachi*). In these cases, *uchi* do not clearly function as subject pronoun, but is used to denote the in-group of the user. Nonetheless, as both NPCs are not characterised as speaker of dialect, and because both are framed as mothers, *uchi* in the target corpus may also be considered on a higher order of indexicality as index of older female speakers, a usage with is not acknowledged by other sources. However, as the games were released in 2000 and 2006 respectively, they may also reflect a diachronic evolution in the usage of *uchi*, which has now broadened not only geographically (from Western Japan towards the capital) but also in terms of age of the speaker, which now comprises young girls as well (cf. Nakamura, 2021a). The

association between *uchi* and female speakers can be also found in the CEJC, where 164 out of 182 occurrences are found in the utterances of female speakers. However, 115 occurrences are found in the speech of girls and young females aged 10-24 years, which contrasts with *uchi* as index of older females in the video game corpus. Similarly, with 128 occurrences of *uchi* in the utterances of speakers from Tōkyō Prefecture and Kanagawa Prefecture, *uchi* appears to be consistently used outside of Kansai, and thus potentially losing its indexical association with the register of elderly females.

5.2.6. *Boku*

Boku is an informal pronoun, which Shibatani (1990: 371) considers to be used only by male speakers, while Irwin & Zisk (2019: 148) consider it to be mainly used by young boys and men, but also until recently by “tomboyish” young girls. The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* states that it is used either towards addressees of the same status as the speaker, or towards inferiors.

In the corpus, *boku* is used by 23 characters, who are all framed as male speakers. 20 NPCs are framed as positive characters, while 3 characters are villains in the game, but then have a change of heart at the end of the story and become allies and helpers to the player. Due to the association between *boku* and intellectual side characters (cf. Akizuki, 2014: 52-53), it appears that *boku* is reserved for supporting characters, while villains more often use *ore*. In 19 characters, *boku* is used together with plain speech, while 4 characters use *boku* with polite speech.

The variation *bokuchin* is used by one character in *Gurumin 3D*, who is depicted as a rich small boy. While *boku* is recognised as characteristic of educated and comparatively weak young males, compared to the more masculine and aggressive *ore* (Kinsui, 2014a: 166-169; Dahlberg-Dodd, 2018: 366), the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* adds that the suffix *-chin* is characteristic of baby talk. Thus, the idiolectal pronoun *bokuchin* appears to characterise the speaker from the point of view of age and personality.

5.2.7. *Ore*

Ore is considered as a very informal and masculine first-person pronoun (Shibatani, 1990: 371; Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148). In fictional works it is regarded as a counterpart to *boku*: while *boku* is used by intellectual and reserved male characters, *ore* is linked to an unrefined persona (Kinsui, 2014e: 64-65), or to a “hot-blooded” style of masculinity (Dahlberg-Dodd, 2018: 366).

In the target corpus, *ore* in kanji is used by 21 characters, all framed as male speakers and who employ a plain speech style. *Ore* appears to be predominantly associated to neutral NPCs in the corpus, as it is found in the dialogues of 16 characters who are not framed as either

positive characters or as villains, but who instead are side-characters and have a secondary role in the games, often appearing for a short time span and having very few lines of dialogues. In comparison, *ore* in kanji is used by 3 positive NPCs and by two villainous characters. *Ore* in hiragana is used by 12 NPCs framed as male speakers: however, 11 of these are featured in just one game (*Mazā 3*), and in this case the use of hiragana can be regarded as a stylistic choice of the game. However, *ore* in hiragana is not used by villainous characters, and this can be associated to hiragana being index of more refined identities than other scripts (cf. Robertson, 2017). Finally, *ore* in katakana is used by 14 characters, all framed as male speakers: 3 of these are characterised as villains, 4 as neutral characters, while 7 as positive characters despite the rough speech style.

On an additional note, the variant *oresama*, where the pronoun *ore* is used together with the honorific suffix *-sama* as an expression of self-importance, also appears in the corpus. While its presence is rarely attested in actual everyday language use, in the medialect of fictional works *oresama* is associated to the register of arrogant and vulgar male characters (Kinsui, 2014d: 66). In the corpus, *oresama* is used by 4 male characters, 3 of which are framed as villains. The other character is an ally and a helper to the protagonist of the story, and he uses *oresama* twice, and only when he first appears on the scene at the beginning of the game, when he introduces himself. The character then consistently uses *ore* and *watashi* during the actual gameplay. As the speaker employs many features of Kansai dialect in his dialogues, the use of *oresama* together with dialectal traits can function as additional index of gaudiness and vulgarity, which are characteristics that are often associated to the stereotype of Kansai speakers (Kinsui, 2017: 50).

The fact that *ore* and its variant *oresama* are used by both positive and negative characters is consistent with *ore* being recognised as index of both roughness and familiarity (Yee & Wong, 2021: 143-145). In the corpus, the distinction between the two indexical meanings appears to be operated through the concurrent use of other additional linguistic features: as such, the indexical field of “roughness” and its associated villainous characterological figure is activated when *ore* is used together with the second-person pronoun *kisama* (see 5.3.5) and with verbs in the imperative form (see 5.5.4). On the other hand, for rough yet familiar and positive NPCs, the indexical field of such associated meanings is activated with the presence of less derogatory second-person pronoun, such as *anta* (see 5.3.2) and *omae* (see 5.3.4), and with sentence-final particles like *ze* (see 5.8.4).

5.2.8. *Ora*

Ora is an informal masculine pronoun, considered as «country bumpkin talk» (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148). The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* as well specifies that it is currently a dialectal form. In fictional works, *ora* can function on a higher order of indexicality to address either the innocence and genuineness of the character, or on the hand to index the low social status and the lack of education of the speaker (Iwata, 2014c: 61-62).

Inside the corpus, *ora* appears exclusively in katakana, and it is used by 4 characters, all framed as male speakers: one *oni*, one *bakemono*, and two snowmen. The snowmen characters are presented as positive characters, while the *oni* and the *bakemono* are characterised as villains and boss characters, who need to be defeated by the main character to progress in the game.

The association of dialectal features with fictional rural identities is a common phenomenon, especially in the case of pseudo-Tōhoku dialect (cf. Hiramoto, 2009; Tanaka, 2022; Trowell & Nambu, 2023). Native speakers also appear to recognise the use of *ora* as being associated to stereotypical Tōhoku dialect and with the rural identity of the speaker, as explored with the questionnaire survey in Chapter 6. However, at the same time many respondents also added that this register can be associated to non-humans (see 6.3.11). This appears to be the case also for the 4 characters in the corpus: while their characterisation is tied to a rural identity, features of pseudo-Tōhoku dialect are also employed as a humorous device to frame the speaker as “not clever” and “not scary”, especially in the case of villains.

Other than belonging to these registers, *ora* is specifically associated to the character of Gokū, the protagonist of the manga and anime series *Dragon Ball* (Toriyama, 1984-1995), as it is recognised as such also by participants in the survey (see 6.3.11). As such, the use of *ora* appear to be well-established in the medialect and widely recognised by an audience of native speakers of Japanese. However, such association between *ora* and rural dialects does not appear to be reflected in the CEJC, where 54 out of 61 occurrences are found in the speech of speakers hailing from Tōkyō. On the other hand, the association between *ora* and male speech can be seen in the CEJC, where 46 out of 61 users of *ora* are males.

5.2.9. *Oira*

Oira is another informal masculine pronoun, also considered as «country bumpkin talk» (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148). The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* adds that it is an alteration of *orera* ‘we’ and is regarded as a rather rude and childish expression. In the medialect of fictional works, *oira* is associated to the same characterological figure as that of the user of *ore*, but *oira*

has a stronger association with childish and delinquent-like characters (Kinsui, 2014c: 35), rather than indexing rural characteristics.

Oira is used inside the corpus by 4 characters, all framed as male speakers. One character in the game *Oboro Muramasa* is a kappa and is referred to as ‘kappa youngster’ (*kappa kozō*), which would be consistent with the characterisation of *oira* as index of childish register. Another character is a mole in *Gurumin 3D*, who uses *be* (see 5.8.9) as final particle of choice: this juxtaposition of *oira* with the dialectal final particle reinforces the normative view of *oira* to be typical of the eastern varieties of Japanese, and then to its association to rural dialects. One other character is a monkey from the game *Mazā 3*: the dialogue for this character features various iterations of the onomatopoeia *ukiki*, and afterwards the utterance is presented in Japanese inside brackets. In translation, the character uses *oira* as first-person pronoun, and *desu* as copular expression. These can be regarded as linguistic devices to characterise the character as young, but also to differentiate in-game the NPC from his human companion, who is framed as a rougher persona and consequently uses *ore* and plain forms in his speech. The last character using *oira* is an alien from *Taiko no tatsujin*. However, instead of “alien register” (see 5.2.11), the character uses coarse language (see 5.10.3). In this case, where the age of the speaker is not mentioned, *oira* can function as an index of the rude personality.

Finally, the association between *oira* and young age appears to be somewhat reflected in the CEJC, despite the low amount of data in the corpus, as 5 out of 6 occurrences of *oira* are found in the speech of male kids aged 5-14 years born and raised in Tōkyō Prefecture.

5.2.10. *Washi*

Washi is regarded as a truncation of *watakushi* and is now mainly considered as a neutral pronoun used by elderly male speakers (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 148). The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* states that it was used in the past by female speakers towards intimate addressees but is currently used by male speakers towards inferiors. *Washi* is also considered as index of western varieties of Japanese (Kinsui, 2017: 4). In the medialect of fictional works, it is used to characterise elderly male speakers, Kansai people, or characters with a rural identity not tied to a specific geographical provenance (Fujimoto, 2014g: 202-203).

Washi is used by 13 characters inside the target corpus, 12 of which are framed as elderly males. The indexicality of *washi* as marker of elderly males appears to also be reflected in the questionnaire survey (see 6.3.9), where the sole female user of *washi* is not recognised as female by the majority of respondents, but rather as a male speaker. The copula *ja* is also used by 7 characters, while the negative auxiliary *-n* and *-nu* appears in the dialogues of 11 NPCs. *Washi*

is used by 3 villainous characters, while the remaining 10 NPCs are allies to the player character or have a neutral role in the story. *Washi* can also be regarded as index of blue-collar workers (Maynard, 2022: 203), and such association is also found in the corpus, particularly when *washi* is not used with other indexes of Kansai dialect or *rōjingo*: for example, *washi* with the copular expressions *da* and *desu* is found in the dialogue of one fisherman penguin in *Ribura no mita yume* (*washi wa kyō ryō ni itte kita n da ga...* ‘I went fishing today, but...’).

Regarding the occurrences of *washi* inside the corpora developed by the NINJAL, on the one hand, in the COJADS, out of a total of 3265 occurrences of first-persons pronouns in speakers of dialects from Western Japan (Kinki, Chūgoku, Shikoku, Kyūshū, and Okinawa), *washi* is found 161 times (5%), of which 150 occurrences in the speech of male speakers. On the other hand, out of 9845 occurrences of first-person pronouns in the CEJC, *washi* is found only 12 times (less than 1%), with 10 occurrences found in the utterances of male speakers. Besides this gender-based distinction, no significant tendencies can be found regarding the age or the geographical provenance of the speakers. As such, based on the occurrences in the target corpus and on real-word frequency data, *washi* appears to be much more attested in the medialect of fictional works than in actual colloquial use, as also suggested by the questionnaires (see 6.2.9), where it is recognised by the majority of the respondents as second-order index of the register of elderly males.

5.2.11. *Ware* and *wareware*

Ware is an obsolete neutral pronoun, overwhelmingly considered as literary, whose use is now regarded as archaic and is currently generally restricted to idioms (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 147-148). *Ware* is used in the corpus by two categories of characters: sentries (*bannin*) from *Gurumin 3D*, and the boss dragons (*ryūmyaku*) from *Taiko no tatsujin*. The archaic nature of the pronoun appears to be reinforced by other linguistic features, such as *nanji* as second-person address term, or *nari* as copular expression.

Wareware ‘we’ is the only plural form of a personal pronoun where reduplication can be seen (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 150), and it appears to be more common than both the singular form *ware* and the other plural form *warera*. According to the dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten*, *wareware* is more formal than other plural personal pronouns like *watashitachi*, *bokutachi*, or *warera*, but it lacks the literary impression of the singular form *ware*. According to the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen*, the form is instead considered as giving an impression of humbleness and can be used as a variation of *watakushi* to refer to a singular speaker.

Wareware is used by 4 characters, 3 aliens from *Ribura no mita yume*, and one dragon from *Ansangu kingudamu*. The fact that “alien register” features *wareware* as first-person plural pronoun in works of popular culture is a well-known phenomenon (Yoda, 2014m: 211-213), and as such it is also featured inside the corpus.

5.2.12. Others

Some pronouns appear only once inside the corpus. For example, *wagahai* is an obsolete formal personal pronoun used by male speakers, and it is regarded as being generally associated to the role language of kings and nobility (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 147-148). Both dictionaries *Meikyō kokugo jiten* and *Dejitaru Daijiten* also specify that *wagahai* gives an impression of arrogance. Conversely, in the medialect of popular culture the term is associated with learned male speakers and figures of authority (Kinsui, 2014p: 200-201). Inside the corpus, only one feline character is found to be using the personal pronoun *wagahai*, together with the copular expression *de aru*. Besides indexing personal characteristics of the speaker, the use of *wagahai* together with *de aru* (see 5.4.3) can be regarded also as a playful reference to the novel *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (*I Am a Cat*, 1905-1906) by Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916), where the protagonist is a cat and uses a high-register wording and phrasing.

Another such idiolectal pronoun is *sessha*, which the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* defines as a *kenjōgo* term historically used by warriors to humbly refer to themselves when speaking to superiors. *Sessha* is used once inside the corpus by one character, the spirit of a dead warrior in a fantasy setting in the game *Oboro Muramasa*, which reinforces the associated between the pronoun and “samurai register” (Kinsui, 2014j: 110-111).

Likewise, according to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, the pronoun *warawa* is a humble self-address term employed by females. It also appears to have a long history of being associated to female characters in fictional works (cf. Pappalardo, 2023). In the target corpus, *warawa* is used once by a female *kami* in the game *Shippū no Usagimaru*, also taking place in a fantasy setting, thus reinforcing the association of the index with older female authority figures and with a historical setting (Yoda, 2014l: 208-210).

Similarly, the first-pronoun *watchi*, which was historically attested as part of *yūjōgo* ‘courtesans’ speech’ of Edo period (Washi, 2004: 83), is now commonly associated to characters of prostitutes in the contemporary medialect of fictional works of popular culture (Okazaki, 2014e: 205-206), and is used once in the corpus, by the ghost of a former prostitute in *Oboro Muramasa*: the NPC also uses the copular expression *de arinsu* (see 5.4.7), thus further contributing to her characterisation as a courtesan.

Finally, 5 characters use their own name as first-person pronoun. Two of them are framed as small boys: use of personal names as terms of self-address by younger children is found to be a common phenomenon in Japanese (cf. Kurokawa, 1972: 232-233), and it appears to be also used in fictionalised orality for purposes of characterisation. Another NPC in *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori* is characterised as a foreigner, speaking broken Japanese (*katakoto nihongo*, see 5.10.5), and he alternates between his own name (*Jonī*, Johnny) and the use of *watashi* in katakana. One additional character is an anthropomorphic bear called Kuma, from the games *Perusona 4* and *Perusona Q*. His appearance is based on a stuffed teddy bear, and the NPC uses the word *kuma* ‘bear’, both as first-person pronoun and as sentence-final expression as *kyara gobi* (see 5.8.11). The last character is a *yōkai* from *Oboro Muramasa*, a spirit fox (*kitsune*) posing in a human form and who is graphically depicted as a young female. However, the dialogue of the character features archaic language and indexes of elderly speaker register, such as the archaic polite auxiliary *-masuru* and the negative auxiliary *-nu* (see 5.6.3). This contributes to creating a contrast with the graphical depiction of the NPC as a young female, but at the same time indexing the atemporal nature of the *yōkai* as a supernatural being. In light of these examples, use of the NPCs’ own personal names as first-person pronoun can be considered as a feature of “small children register” or “foreignised speech”, while no tendencies can be detected for the *yōkai*. Interestingly, the example of personal names as self-address terms of children characters shows how the repertoire of fictionalised orality can sometimes draw from actual contemporary everyday use of language as a source for characterisation.

5.3. Second-person pronouns

Kinsui (2003: 205-206) argues that, although second-person pronouns are also numerous and can be used in role language in a similar vein as first-person pronouns, nonetheless they are not equally effective for purposes of characterisation: in his views, since they depend on both the personality of the user and their relationship with the addressee, second-person pronouns are more variable in nature, and therefore more difficult to manage and analyse in the context of fictionalised orality. On the other hand, according to Irwin & Zisk (2019: 149), second-person pronouns exhibit the least gender variation, but express the widest range of register variation, from formal, to derogatory, to hostile. As such, second-person pronouns can still offer the chance for an analysis on indexical meanings and associations to character types in the media-lect.

5.3.1. *Anata*

Anata, originally meaning ‘yonder’, is «perhaps the most complex second person pronoun» (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 149). Yonezawa (2021: 6) quotes the linguist Jinnouchi Masataka in categorising *anata* as an address term which may contradictorily be used with respect, as a way of not indicating respect only used towards equals and inferiors, and as an obsolete honorific address term. Shibatani (1990: 371) regards it as a formal second-person pronoun used by both female and male speakers.

Inside the corpus, *anata* exclusively in hiragana is employed by 21 characters, who also overwhelmingly use *watashi* as first-person pronoun, 11 of which written in kanji and 3 of them in hiragana. No tendencies can be found regarding the graphical depiction of the characters, but *anata* appears to not be used by antagonising or villainous NPCs. Instead, it is used either by neutral characters (10 occurrences), or by positive characters who are ally to the player or who help the protagonist in their journey (11 occurrences).

Anata in kanji is instead used by 4 characters, two of which also use the form in hiragana, while two use exclusively the form in kanji. Tendencies appear to be similar to those observed for previous NPCs, where users of the pronoun are depicted as non-negative characters. However, a greater degree of politeness appears to be associated to *anata* in kanji, with the exclusive use of polite copular expressions *desu* and *de gozaimasu* and the first-person pronoun *watashi*. The related honorific form *anatasama* instead is used only in the game *Oboro Muramasa* by two female *kitsune yōkai*: in this case, the form indexes the submissive nature of the speaking NPC, together with the expression *de gozaimasu* and the self-deprecating address term *wataku-shime*.

5.3.2. *Anta*

Anta is a contracted and informal variant of *anata*, used more often by female speakers (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 149). Shibatani (1990: 371) argues that it is the most informal second-person pronoun used by female speakers, while in the case of male speakers it is more informal than *kimi* but more polite than *omae*. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* adds that in the Tōkyō area *anta* is considered a vulgar term, but not in Kansai, where instead it expresses a sense of affection towards the addressee. A more recent trend in the medialect is the association of *anta* with young female speakers, with the address term as an index of impertinency and strong will (Fujimoto, 2014a: 24).

Inside the corpus, *anta* is used by 19 characters. Specifically, *anta* exclusively in hiragana is used by 12 characters, 11 of which are framed as male speakers. The only first-person pronoun

associated to *anta* in hiragana in the corpus is *ore*, and the associated speech style is plain, which would be consistent with the depiction of the speakers as males. *Anta* in hiragana is not found in the speech of villainous characters, but is more strongly associated with neutral side characters, with 8 occurrences.

On the other hand, *anta* exclusively in katakana is found in the dialogues of 5 NPCs, 3 of which are framed as female speakers and 2 as males. Out of the 3 female NPCs, two use *atashi* as first-person pronoun, and no tendencies can be found regarding their role in the story, with one NPC being framed as positive, one as neutral, and one being a villain. The two remaining male NPC use respectively *oira* and *ore* as first-person pronoun, and both also use *omae* together with *anta*. Finally, 3 NPCs use *anta* both in hiragana and katakana: two of these as females using *watashi* as first-person pronoun, while one is a male using *oira*.

In summary, it appears that NPCs using *anta* in the corpus are framed similarly to previous depictions of similar characterological figures in popular culture: *anta* can be regarded as index of frankness and directness in fictionalised orality, but with no overt correlation between the pronoun and the gender of the speaker. However, this appears to be in contrast with naturally occurring language as described by previous literature on the term. This also appears to contrast with the data available in the CEJC, where *anta* occurs 196 times, out of 1409 total occurrences of second-person pronouns in the corpus: in the CEJC, *anta* is used by 149 females and 47 males. Such pattern cannot be found in the target corpus of video game dialogues. Furthermore, while Katō (2019) shows that *anta* is mainly used toward pets or younger family members in real-word occurrences, in the target corpus *anta* is used by NPCs towards the player character, and similar usage patterns based on interpersonal relationships between speaker and addressee cannot be observed.

5.3.3. *Kimi*

Kimi, originally ‘emperor’ (Shibatani, 1990: 471), is a slightly informal address term used by both male and female speakers towards subordinates (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 149), even though Shibatani (1990: 371) states instead that it is only used by male speakers. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* also specifies that it is considered *danseigo* ‘male language’. The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* adds that it is less polite than *anata*, but more polite than *omae*. However, according to Dahlberg-Dodd (2020), «*kimi* has a history of use among female speakers as well, especially as a subversive alternate to *anata*, which has often been imposed top-down by authority figures seeking to further reinforce hegemonic gender ideologies» (Dahlberg-Dodd, 2020: 363).

This stronger association of *kimi* with male speech appears to be reflected in the CEJC, where, out of 184 total occurrences, *kimi* occurs 136 times in utterances by male speakers, and 48 times in utterances by female speakers. However, the CEJC shows that it does not appear to be used solely by male speakers in natural occurring language, confirming the arguments proposed by Dahlberg-Dodd (2020) on the use of *kimi* also by female speakers.

On the other hand, inside the target corpus of video game dialogues, *kimi* is used by 19 characters, all depicted as male speakers. *Kimi* appears in the speech of only two villainous characters, compared with the greater use of *omae* in the speech of 6 villainous figures in the corpus. The first-person pronoun most often associated to *kimi* is *boku*, with 9 occurrences, followed by *washi* with 3, *watashi*, *ore* and *ora* with 2, and *wagahai* used by one NPC.

This association of *kimi* with somewhat gentler male figure may be due to the use of *boku* and *kimi* by learned male characters in works of fiction since the Meiji period, as part of *sho-seigo* (cf. Kinsui, 2017: 75). This also appears to be in line with the arguments by Shibatani (1990: 371) regarding its exclusive use by male speakers, despite the empirical findings in the CEJC. As such, language use in the medialect appears to be more somewhat more normative in nature than natural-occurring everyday spoken language.

5.3.4. *Omae*

Omae, literally meaning ‘front’, is a highly informal to derogatory address term, only used by male speakers (Shibatani, 1990: 371). *Omae* is also regarded as potentially offensive depending on contexts but may also be used for bonding (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 149). The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* states that in the past *omae* was towards addressees of higher social status by both male and female speakers to show respect, but it gradually became in use when referring to close friends, or when looking down at subordinates.

Inside the corpus, *omae* is used 36 NPCs, only one of which is framed as a female speaker. The pronouns associated with *omae* are *ore* with 19 occurrences, *boku* and *washi* with 5 occurrences, *watashi* and *ware* with 2 occurrences, and *oira* with one. Despite being under-represented in the corpus, villains are more likely to use *omae* in their dialogues, with 11 such characters occurring in the corpus. Characters using *ore* and *omae* are also the most likely to feature imperative forms in their dialogues (see 5.5.4). This reinforces the indexical associations of *ore* and *omae* with the rude registers of forceful characterological figures, which comprises also villainous NPCs.

5.3.5. *Kisama*

Kisama is regarded as a highly derogatory second-person pronoun, mainly used by male speakers (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 149). Ishiyama (2019: 32-33) explains that it was used in the past literally to show respect, with *-sama* as honorific suffix, but that it gradually lost its honorific meaning and began being used by male speakers when addressing subordinates or when verbally abusing the addressee.

Kisama is used by 5 characters inside the corpus, namely 2 male dragons from *Taiko no tatsujin*, one male dragon from *Ansangu kingudamu*, one male cybernetic alien from *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*, and finally, one female *kami* from *Kyōiki no ichigatsu*. While most of the characters who use *kisama* are framed as male speakers, it appears to be used more prominently as index of role in the story, rather than indexing the gender of the speaker. In fact, the aforementioned 4 male NPCs are characterised as villains, and they are the final bosses of the game in which they appear, being the archnemesis of the player character. On the other hand, the female *kami* is a neutral NPC but is characterised by a derogatory and condescending attitude throughout the game, such as by the repeated use of imperative forms (see 5.5.4). Therefore, *kisama* can be regarded as index of an abusive characterological figure, which is often displayed in-game as a male villain, but *kisama* by itself does not always frame the speaker as male.

5.3.6. *Onore*

The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* states that, as second-person pronoun, the term *onore* is used towards subordinates, or to look down and verbally abuse the addressee, being a synonym with *omae* and *kisama*.

Inside the corpus, *onore* is used by 6 characters. 4 characters have the role of villains inside the story, which is consistent with its widespread use in the medialect of fictional works of pop culture (Iwata, 2014b: 52-54). Conversely, *onore* never occurs in the CEJC, attesting to its association to fictional registers instead of contemporary everyday conversations.

5.3.7. Others

The archaic pronouns *onushi* and *nanji* are occasionally found in the corpus. The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* explains that the address term *onushi* was used from the Muromachi period (1336-1573) towards both male and female addressees who were equal or inferior in social status to the speaker. The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* also points out that it is now an obsolete expression. In the medialect of fictional works, *onushi* is found in the registers of feudal warriors (*bushi kotoba*) in period drama as an additional way to characterise the historical

setting, or in the register of elderly male speakers due to its perceived antiquatedness (Iwata, 2014a: 50-51). *Onushi* is used inside the corpus by two characters in two different games, one ghost from *Oboro Muramasa* and one female *kami* from *Shippū no Usagimaru*, both with a fantasy setting. Both characters are constructed as elderly, as the ghost uses *washi*, and the female *kami* uses *warawa* as first-person pronoun. In this cases *onushi*, rather than indexing a specific characterisation of the speaker in terms of role or gender, appears to be used to construct a language with a somewhat archaic impression, which serves the pseudo-historical setting of the games. Such use of specific linguistic styles that would be suitable for the setting of the story is acknowledged also by game developers, such as Laineus in 4.1, and Niizato and Noguchi in 4.4.

According to the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen*, *nanji* is a second-person address term used towards addressees of equal or inferior social status. Due to its use in the translation of the Bible into Japanese, the use of *nanji* in the medialect of popular culture is attested in the dialogue of god-like characters and authority figures who guide the protagonist of the story in their journey (Fujimoto, 2014d: 142-144). Inside the corpus *nanji* is used only in the game *Gurumin 3D* by the sentries, who also employ other archaic features of Japanese in their dialogues, such as lexical choices and adjectives ending in *-ki* in the *rentaikei* (*nanji no takeki chikara* ‘your fierce strength’). As these sentries guard the entrance to dungeons and issue orders and request to the players that need to be fulfilled to progress though the game, their role as authoritarian guiding figures appears to be also expressed through language use (see 5.10.4).

5.4. Copular expressions

Kinsui (2003: 205-206) suggests that so-called “sentence-final expressions” (*bunmatsu hyōgen*) should also be considered as important features of role language. The first category taken into examination here are copular expressions, which present diatopic variation (such as *da* for Eastern Japanese dialects in comparison to *ja* and *ya* for Western Japanese dialects), diastratic variation (between differing registers of politeness, such as the expression *de gozaimasu*), and diachronic variation (especially archaisms such as *de gozaru*). In fictionalised orality, these variations appear to be recontextualised, assuming different indexical meanings to frame specific characterological figures.

5.4.1. *Ja*

According to Frellesvig (2010: 341-342), the copular expression *ja* has the same origin as *da*, being another phonetic variation of *de-a*. Nowadays, it is found in Hiroshima dialect (Machi,

2025: 798), in Kagawa dialect (Nakai, 2025b: 854), in Kōchi dialect by older speakers (Iwaki, Ueno & Koga, 2025: 890), and in Kagoshima dialect (Kibe, 2025: 924). As such, it is mainly associated to Western varieties of contemporary Japanese. In popular culture, however, it is regarded as index of elderly speakers (Kinsui, 2017: 4), or as index of dialectal variation associated to a rural identity, or as the language of nobles (Kinsui, 2014i: 105-106). This can be regarded as an example of how a linguistic features can index various characterological features, and how the indexical meaning of the variant is shaped and influenced by the presence of other linguistic phenomena, concurring together to the activation of a determined indexical field. For example, *ja* when used together with the first-person pronoun *washi* (see 5.2.10) indexes the old age of the speaker. Conversely, *ja* together with the final particle *de* indexes the geographical provenance of the speaker as hailing from Western Japan: on a higher order of indexicality, this points to the recognised characterological figure of the Kansai person and its associated stereotypes, such as talkativeness, stinginess, or grittiness (cf. Kinsui, 2017: 50).

Inside the corpus, *ja* is used by 19 characters, 14 of which are depicted as males, 3 are framed as female speakers, while 2 cannot be defined in terms of gender. It appears to be disproportionately found in the speech of villainous characters, as it used by 7 villains, although 5 characters belong to the same category, being 5 demons from the game *Oboro Muramasa*. 6 characters in the corpus use *washi* as first-person pronoun with *ja*, and as such can be explicitly associated with *rōjingo*. 4 additional characters, although not using *washi*, are characterised as elderly speakers through the presence of other indexes, such as the negative auxiliaries *-nu* and *-n* (see 5.6.3), or through lexical choices, such as one frog from the game *Mazā 3* which stutters and misuses the word *shēbu* ‘shave’ instead of *sēbu* ‘save’ (*she she... shēbu desu kana?* ‘do you want to sha... shave?’). Consonant palatalisation is found to be semantically associated to a wide array of impressions, such as «childishness, immaturity, instability, unreliability, uncoordinated movement, diversity, excessive energy, noisiness, lack of elegance, and cheapness» (Hamano, 1995: 148). However, according to Shibatani (1990: 202), the palatalisation of the fricative /s/ before /e/, resulting in [ʃe], remains in contemporary Japanese varieties as an archaic relic in peripheral areas such as Kyūshū, Tōhoku, Hokuriku, Shikoku, and in Kansai. As such, it can be said that, in the case of the frog character, palatalisation reflects a stereotypical pronunciation of an older speaker, as it is associated with «features of an earlier stage of the language preserved in dialects» (Shibatani, 1990: 202), especially those of Western Japan. Other cases of *rōjingo* can be found for two female characters, one female kami from *Shippū no Usagimaru* and one ghost of a former courtesan from *Oboro Muramasa*, who respectively use *warawa* and *watchi* as first-person pronouns (see 5.2.12) and *ja* as copular expression. In these

cases, the use of archaic self-address terms can concur to the characterisation of the speakers as elderly females.

Besides the association with the register of elderly speakers, *ja* is found often also in the register of rural “country bumpkin” speakers, and in the register of figures of authority. In the corpus, 4 NPCs appear to belong to the first speech style, and are characterised by the use of *ora* as first-person pronoun for one NPC, and the phonological variation *omee* as second-person pronoun. For the second register, 3 NPCs are depicted in-game as figures of authority, with two NPCs being Buddhist deities in the game *Oboro Muramasa*, and another one being a feline king from *Ni no kuni*. While their dialogues do not feature a consistent use of first-person pronouns, the NPCs in question all use *omae* as second-person address term, *ja* as copular expression, and *-nu* and *-n* as negative auxiliary. As such, their register seems to be influenced by *rōjingo*, but its signs are used to create the indexical meaning of “authoritative figure”, rather than activating the indexical field of “elderly speaker” and its associated comedic characteristics.

5.4.2. *Ya*

Frellesvig (2010:335) suggests that *ya* may be derived from the conjectural particle *yarō* from Late Middle Japanese (1200-1600) and now used in Kansai as copular expression. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* adds that it considered *Kamigatago* ‘Kamigata language’, or Kansai dialect, starting from the late Edo period. Nowadays it is found in Kyōto dialect (Nakai, 2025a: 759) and other dialects of the Kansai area (Takagi, 2025: 390), in Gifu dialect by younger speakers (Yamada, 2025: 722), and in Kōchi dialect also by younger speakers (Iwaki, Ueno & Koga, 2025: 890). As such, it appears that *ya* is mainly used in Kansai, and it is spreading to neighbouring regions in the speech of younger generations.

Inside the corpus, *ya* is used by 7 characters, 5 of which are framed as males, while 2 NPCs can be considered as female speakers. All the speakers are characterised as users of Kansai dialect, due to the concurrent presence of other indexes of Kansai Japanese (see 5.10.1). One character is a cow from the game *Mazā 3*, and the use of *ja* in its dialogue can be considered as internal variation to set the character apart from the other cows that are graphically depicted with the same sprite. 4 characters are fairies (*yōsei*) in the game *Ni no kuni*, where all the fairies use this register. The very first part of the game is set in a city inspired by the USA, while the majority of the game is set in a parallel world (the eponymous *ni no kuni* ‘second country’) inhabited by fantastical creatures, most of which are non-human. As such, the use of Kansai Japanese by fairies does not index a geographical provenance. Instead, dialect is creatively used to set the creatures apart from the human characters and especially the protagonist, who is a

user of Standard Japanese. Moreover, the fairies are characterised as humorous and talkative creatures, and two fairies in the game are part of a *manzai* act (see 5.10.1 for more). This is consistent with Kansai dialect being commonly used to index comedic personae, typical of *owarai* comedians (Kinsui, 2017: 60).

Finally, the last two characters using *ya* and other features of Kansai Japanese are two mole brothers from the *Dōbutsu no mori* series, where they appear if the player turns off their console without saving. These mole characters wear a white shirt, blue overalls, black boots, and a yellow helmet, and are depicted as blue-collar workers. The characterisation of moles in *Dōbutsu no mori* as working-class can be compared to the use of features of rural Eastern Japanese dialects in the dialogues of mole characters in other games, such as *Gurumin 3D* and *Mazā 3*, to index their supposed lower social status (see 5.10.1 for more). In such fictional narratives, mole NPCs can be regarded as humorous embodiments of the characterological figure of the manual labourer, as moles are known to dig tunnels: the fact that many mole NPCs in the corpus are depicted as wearing the same attire, especially yellow helmets and pickaxes, points to such widespread characterisation.

Additionally, the fact that no speaker of Kansai dialect has a villainous role in the games where they appear can be compared to the attitude of participants in the survey towards the register, which is recognised as “funny” and not as “scary” (see 6.2.3).

5.4.3. *De aru*

The copular expression *de aru* started as a derivation from the classical Japanese expression *nari* during Early Middle Japanese (800-1200), then growing in use during Late Middle Japanese (1200-1600), when it gave also origin to the other expressions *ja* and *da* (Frellesvig, 2010: 341-343). *De aru* is currently used as direct style (*jōtai*) in written texts and official speeches and spoken addresses. In the medialect of fictional works, *de aru* is associated with the register of learned speakers, or with authority figures (Fujimoto, 2014c: 132-133).

Inside the corpus, *de aru* is used by 4 characters, who are all framed as male speakers. One character is a mouse from *Mazā 3*, and his use of a different copular expression compared to the other 16 mice characters in the same game can be associated to the creation of a greater variety inside the same category of characters with the same graphical depiction. One character is called *Doku* (Doc) from the game *Gurumin 3D*, and he and is an *obake* working as a scientist. While his speech does not feature characteristics of “doctor’s language” or *hakasego*, a kind of elderly male register associated to scientists and professors in the medialect (Kinsui, 2017: 4), the use of the expression *de aru* and the second-person pronoun *kimi* frames the NPC as a male

figure of authority, consistent with the archetype of the scientist. The one villain character using *de aru*, also from *Gurumin 3D*, is the Prince (*Ōji*), who is a ‘phantom’ (*fantomu*) and the leader of a group of 4 villainous phantoms (*Shitennō* ‘4 Heavenly Kings’). The character uses *oresama* as first-person pronoun and *omae* as second-person address term, indexing the speaker as an arrogant male (see 5.2.7), while requests are expressed through the imperative form of the verb and with the construction “*rentaikei + ga ii*”. *De aru*, together with these other linguistic items, can concur to the characterisation of the speaker as a villainous figure of authority.

The last character is a feline *yōkai* from the game *Ni no kuni*, who uses *wagahai* (see 5.2.12) as first-person pronoun and *de aru* as copular expression. While such register can frame the character as a male figure of authority, and can be considered as index of the role of the NPC in the story as a guide-like character, the use of *wagahai* and *de aru* can also be considered as humorous references to the novel *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, and thus also indexing the feline aspect of the *yōkai*, together with his supposed authoritativeness.

5.4.4. *De arimasu*

The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* considers *de arimasu* as the polite form of *de aru*. However, in the medialect of written video game dialogue, the two forms appear to be used in different contexts, as a specific use of *de arimasu* is found in military speech (Yoda, 2014e: 130-131), while *de aru* does not appear as index of *guntaigo*.

This use of *de arimasu* is exemplified in the corpus by the character of Aigis from *Perusona Q*, which is the only NPC whose dialogues feature the use of *de arimasu*. As will be further explained in 6.2.2, Aigis is an android “war machine”, specifically built to defeat antagonists in combat. In her dialogues the expression *de arimasu* appears 106 times as copular form. However, this is used a further 43 times in non-normative manner, with the presence of a verb in the non-negative plane form (e.g. *jōkan no meirei ni shitagau de arimasu* ‘I follow the orders of the superior officer’). This may be another example of how characterisation can occur not only at the lexical level, but also at the syntactic level (cf. Sadanobu, 2011a: 21-23). By contrast, the copula *desu* appears 18 times, and only once as a final expression in the function of an idiolect, as so-called *kyara gobi* (Kinsui, 2003: 188). Regarding forms of request, imperative forms are used twice towards so-called mobs, or in-game enemies (e.g. *kurae de arimasu!* ‘take [this]!’). Interestingly, on one occasion the imperative form is used towards the main character, in the expression *watashi o tsukae de arimasu* ‘use me’, which makes explicit a sense of the “subordination” of Aigis towards the protagonist. As argued by Moretti (2025b), compared to Curly Brace (*Kārī Bureisu*), another female robot character from *Dōkutsu monogatari*, the lesser

degree of linguistic variation in the tokens of Aigis, the monotony of her verbal choices, and the pragmatic level of her speech are linked to the characterisation of the NPC as a war machine (*watashi wa tai shadō tokubetsu seiatsu heisō nana-shiki Aigisu de arimasu* ‘I am the special anti-shadow suppression weapon type 7 Aigis’). The connection between *de arimasu* and military speech is also recognised by participants in the questionnaire survey (see 6.2.2), who also reference the intertextual nature of the index, which is widely used in contemporary pop culture.

5.4.5. *De gozaru*

According to the dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten*, *de gozaru* is an archaic expression, being the counterpart in *sonkeigo* (honorific language) to the expression *de aru*. According to Frellesvig (2010: 343), *de gozaru* started being used in during Late Middle Japanese and is still used in contemporary Modern Japanese (1900-), especially in its polite variation *de gozaimasu*. In the medialect of fictional popular works, the expression *gozaru* is associated to the register of feudal warriors (Akizuki, 2015).

Inside the corpus, the expression *de gozaru* is used in the game *Nikki no tabisuru kuizu* by two ally characters in very specific situations, and for comedic purposes. One of the NPCs, a cat, uses the expression *de gozaru* twice, once when the characters are in Aichi Prefecture, and another when they are in Kumamoto Prefecture and are dressed up as samurai. The other NPC, a panda, uses *de gozaru* only once, in Kumamoto Prefecture. Both regions are historically associated to samurai, as Owari (present-day Aichi) was the land of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616), and Kumamoto still has a castle dating back to the 17th century. As such, the association between the copular expression *de gozaru* and the characterological figure of the samurai is addressed twice in the corpus, and only in a humorous setting.

5.4.6. *De gozaimasu*

The expression *de gozaimasu* is a superpolite variation (*teichōgo*) of *desu* primarily used in speaking. On the other hand, according to Frellesvig (2010: 343), it is the superpolite variation of the copular form *de gozaru*.

In the corpus, 4 characters use the copula expression *de gozaimasu*, who are all framed as female speakers. 3 characters are *kitsune* fox-like *yōkai* from the game *Oboro Muramasa*, while one character is a mouse from *Mazā 3*. Pronouns used in this “superpolite” register inside the target corpus are *watakushi* as first-person pronouns, and *anatasama* and *dannasama* second-person pronouns. The fox characters are framed as allies of the protagonist, who serve as helpers

during the game, while the mouse character is a neutral figure who is asking the player for help in finding her 7 lost pups. As such, although the copular expression *de gozaimasu* is supposed to index a high degree of politeness rather than the gender of the speaker, it appears to be used in the corpus as index of submissive female speakers, due to the concurrent use of *teineigo* and *kenjōgo*. This in turn appears to follow the ideological association between female language and the supposed characteristics of grace and refinement of its speakers.

5.4.7. Others

Some idiolectal copular expressions appear only once in the corpus. For example, the expression *-ssu* is considered as a shortened form of the copular expression *desu* and is regarded as a “new male youth style” (cf. Nakamura, 2021b; Nakamura, 2022), used to increase intimacy towards the addressee like other tokens of youth language, but also maintaining its honorific functions (Akagi, Bryce & Suzuki, 2020: 506). However, despite the popularity of the expression in everyday language, *-ssu* appears only once in the corpus, in katakana in the expression *otsukaressu* ‘thanks’, by one pig in the game *Mazā 3*. So-called “*yā* style” (Nakamura, 2020), a peculiar register of the speech of young males, which can be related to “*-ssu* style”, appears in the speech of 5 male characters, to index the supposed young age of the speakers, together with the use of *boku* as first-person pronoun (see 5.2.6), *kimi* as second-person pronoun (see 5.3.3), and *da* as standard copular expression. Therefore, while such registers are thought to be widely used in other media and in daily natural-occurring conversation, they appear to be under-represented in the target corpus of video game dialogues.

Another dialectal copular expression is the polite *de gansu*, which is regarded as a dialectal abbreviation of *de gozaimasu* and is also associated to Western Japan, particularly Hiroshima, and to a stereotypical rural identity (Kinsui, 2014f: 72). *De gansu* is used only by the character of Iwao in *Gurumin 3D*, who is depicted as a male *yōkai* with his body made of stone.

The copular expression *de arinsu* was historically attested as part of the register of courtesans in the Edo period (Washi, 2004: 83). In the medialect, it is associated to prostitutes in fictional works set in historical pleasure quarters (Okazaki, 2014b: 19-20). In the target corpus, *de arinsu* is used once in *Oboro Muramasa*, a game with a historical setting taking place in a fantasy rendition of Edo period, by the ghost of a former prostitute, who also uses *watchi* as first-person pronoun (see 5.2.12).

5.5. Forms of request

Based on the genre to which they can be traced back, video games present so-called quests, missions in which an NPC directly addresses the player character, making a request and offering a reward in exchange. The dialogues of such quests can be particularly significant for an analysis of the pragmatic use of language aimed at characterising the characters, with a focus on forms of request employed by the NPCs and how they are creatively used as indexes to construct fictional identities.

5.5.1. *Kudasai* and variations

Kudasai is considered as the imperative form (*meireikei*) of the verb *kudasaru*, honorific (*sonkeigo*) version of the verb *kureru* ‘to give’ (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986: 210).

Inside the corpus, requests with *kudasai* written in kanji are used by 9 NPCs. However, 7 of these NPCs appear in just one game, *Ribura no mita yume*, and as such it can be assumed that it is either a stylistic choice of the developer, or a practical choice to reduce the number of characters in the dialogue and save space in the dialogue box.

Kudasai in katakana is instead used by 3 characters, one robot from *Mazā 3*, one phantom from *Gurumin 3D*, and one seagull from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. Regarding the first character, the use of katakana in robot speech is a known phenomenon in the medialect (Nomura, 2022), and such script choice appears throughout the dialogue not only in forms of request (the verb *tanomu* and imperative forms in *meireikei* are also expressed in katakana), but in all linguistic categories, such as personal pronouns *ore*, *omae* and *anta*, copular expression *da*, negative auxiliary *-n* and *-nai*, and sentence-final particles. The other two characters, while graphically different and with different roles in the games where they appear, are similarly characterised as foreigners, or as non-native speaker of Japanese. This is expressed both through katakana in non-standard, and with non-standard and irregular vowel lengthening. Both strategies appear in the token *kudasai*, which is also scripted as *kudasāi*. Other instances of foreignised speech in katakana shared by the two NPCs are found in the copular expressions *desu* and *dēsu*, and in the polite negative auxiliary *-masēn* (see 5.10.5). While all 3 characters are framed as male speakers, the use of *kudasai* in katakana serves as index of Otherness, either in the sense of foreignness, or for the non-biological nature of the robot.

Variations of *kudasai* are also present for additional purposes of characterisation. For example, the forms *kudasaimashi* and *kudasaimase* are two related imperative forms of the polite auxiliary verb *-masu*, and are used in the medialect of fictional works as index of upper-class polite middle-aged female speakers as part of *okusama kotoba*, or to characterise the polite

speech of maid-like and butler-like characters: while the forms are synonymous, the ending *-mashi* is considered more archaic than the form *-mase* (Fujimoto, 2014e: 182-183). *Kudasaimashi* appears only in the game *Oboro Muramasa*, where it is used by 3 *kitsune* characters who serve as helpers to the protagonist. As the game is set in a fantastical representation of Japan during the Edo period, the use of the archaism *kudasaimashi* is consistent with the tone of the work, other than indexing the politeness and the submissive nature of the NPCs (see 5.5.1). The expression *kudasaimase* instead is used only by the character of Yukidarumama in *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*, and it appears to be consistent with the overall register of the character, which indexes the speaker as a middle-aged and polite female speaker (see 5.10.2 for more).

Another form, *kudashanse*, is also used by one character in *Oboro Muramasa*, the spirit of a former prostitute. The auxiliary verb *shansu* is used to show respect towards the listener, and during the Edo period it was mainly used by women in the pleasure quarters (Schneider, 1989: 151). The form is consistent with the role of the character as a prostitute, and the archaic feeling matches the tone and the setting of the scene (see 5.10.4). Finally, the phonetic variation *kudachai* is used by the character of Yukinko, a child-like snowman from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*, and is consistent with the sound change associated to the register of toddlers (see 5.10.6).

5.5.2. *Chōdai*

The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* states that *chōdai* is an expression mainly used by female speakers and children when expressing an order or a request with a sense of familiarity. In the corpus *chōdai* is used by 9 characters, 6 females and 3 males. Inside the corpus, *chōdai* is used by 9 characters, 5 of which are framed as females and 4 as males. The 4 male characters all use *boku* as first-person pronoun, and the concurrent use of *chōdai* characterises the speaker as polite and reserved. Out of the female speakers, 4 use *watashi* as first-person pronoun. One female speaker, from the game *Gurumin 3D*, is a self-proclaimed *okama* and uses the overtly feminine expression *atashi* as first-person pronoun.

As such, similarly to *nasai*, the expression *chōdai* appears to be predominantly associated to female speakers, with 5 out of 8 users of *chōdai* being depicted as females. Male users of *chōdai* in the corpus exclusively use *boku* as first-person pronoun, reinforcing the association of *boku* with more polite and refined personae. The association between the term and female speakers can be seen also in the CEJC, where 73 out of 106 occurrences of *chōdai* are found in the speech of women.

5.5.3. *Nasai* and variations

The suffixoid *nasai* is the imperative form of the honorific *nasaru* ‘to do’, and it is attached to verbs in the *ren’yōkei* to express a light command. Inside the corpus, *nasai* is used by 6 characters. Despite the lower number of female characters, being only 14% of all NPCs featured in the target corpus, the form *nasai* is used by 4 characters framed as female speakers, together with the first-person pronoun *watashi* and *watakushi*, and with *anata* and *anta* as second-person pronoun. Such characters also use *desu* as copular expression, adding to the depiction of the speaker as a polite persona, consistently with the ideology of female language as more refined. The two male NPCs using *nasai* use *watashi* and *watakushi* as first-person pronouns, thus reinforcing the association of such pronouns with the polite register.

On the other hand, the form *nasare* is used only by two male characters, one in *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori* who is framed as a middle-age male speaker, and the other in *Taiko no tatsujin*, who is framed as an old man. Finally, the dialectal variation *nahare* is found in the speech of two NPCs, one mole in *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori* and one ghost in *Oboro Muramasa*, together with other indexes of Kansai dialect.

5.5.4. Imperative form (*meireikei*)

The imperative form is one of the six verbal forms (*katsuyōkei*) and is used when instructing an order. Compared to *nasai*, which is a more formal authoritative expression, the normal imperative is regarded as informal (Lee & Ogi, 2017) and may also come across as blunt and too direct. Inside the corpus, the imperative form is used by 47 characters, 40 of which are framed as male speakers, 3 as females, while 4 cannot be easily defined in terms of gender. Despite villainous NPCs being underrepresented in the corpus, comprising only 31 NPCs out of the total of 346 characters (9%), 11 characters out of 47 NPCs using imperative forms (23%) are framed as villains. The use of verbs in the imperative forms is found only in the dialogues of characters who consistently use the plain form, with only one exception, namely Yukidaruman from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. This character is a snowman and is represented as a middle-aged male, with thick black eyebrows and black moustaches and wearing a top hat: his dialogue features the use of *watashi* and *anata* in katakana as personal pronouns, and *desu* as copular expression together with sentence-final particles *na* and *zo*, with *desu zo* and *desu na* being recognised as indexes of middle-aged male speech (Maynard, 2022: 202-203).

5.5.5. *Ga ii* and *ga yoi*

The *rentaikei* form of the verb is used with the expression *ga ii* to indicate an order (such as *miru ga ii* ‘look!’). This form comes from classical Japanese and does not appear to be used in contemporary language, other than as an idiomatic phrase (Sadanobu, 2021: 163). It is however recognised as an old-fashioned expression, and a common phrase used in science fiction, period dramas, and classical plays (cf. Yahoo!Chiebukuro, 2010). In passing, the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* notes how the use of *yoi* is regarded as more formal than *ii*, and this may heighten the degree of characterisation of the speaker.

In the corpus, the expressions are used by 12 characters, 10 males and 2 females. No tendencies can be acknowledged regarding the graphical depiction of the speaking character. It is however interesting to note that the two female characters using the expression are two *kami*, from the games *Kyōiki no ichigatsu* and *Shippū no Usagimaru*. The first character has a neutral role in the story, while the second is ally to the player character: both female NPCs are thus framed as non-negative figures.

On the other hand, among the 10 male speakers, 5 of them are villains, and the other 5 are either neutral or ally characters but are depicted as old and as possessing some kind of authority in the story. This established pattern can be regarded as framing the speaker as a person of power and reinforcing the notion of *ga ii* and *ga yoi* as an old-fashioned expression.

5.6. Negative forms

Auxiliaries (*jodōshi*) are also found to become possible features of role language (Kinsui, 2003: 205-206). Among these, such as copular expressions (see 5.4), linguistic variation in negative auxiliaries appears to be reindexicalised, to point to specific character types in the medialect.

5.6.1. *-nai*

From the end of Late Middle Japanese, *-nai* has been in use mainly in Eastern Japanese dialects, and in contemporary Japanese it is the standard *jodōshi* to express the negative form (Frellesvig, 2010: 397-398).

Inside the corpus, *-nai* in katakana is used by 3 characters, two aliens in *Ribura no mita yume* and one robot in *Mazā 3*. The use of katakana in the dialogue of these categories of NPCs is consistent with the established tendency of *katakana-go* for alien-like and robot-like characters in the medialect.

On the other hand, *-nai* in kanji is present only in the dialogues of one character in the corpus, the female succubus Montana from *Sakyubasu no Abi wa yūwaku dekinai*. As such, this use can be considered as a stylistic choice of the game developer, rather than a creative device for purposes of characterisation of the NPC.

Finally, the more normative use of *-nai* in hiragana is by far the most prevalent, with 43 characters, and does not appear to be tied to any particular characterisation or identity of the fictional speaker.

5.6.2. *-nee*

The phonetic variation *-nee* in lieu of *-nai* is common in the coarse register (Irwin & Zisk, 2019: 172-173). According to Frellesvig (2010), in contemporary Japanese, «long syllables ending in /i/ are often monophthongized in casual speech» (Frellesvig, 2010: 324), with *nai* changing into [ne:]. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* also notes that the form *-nee* is associated to spoken *Edogo* (Tōkyō dialect). In contemporary Japanese, *-nee* (as in *tsumannē* ‘I’m bored’, or *iketenē* ‘that’s lame’) is often used in informal male speech with light or humorous connotations.

Inside the corpus, the form *-nee* is used by 12 characters, all of which are framed as male speakers. 11 characters are neutral or ally characters, and only one character has the role of a villain inside the story, one *oni* from the game *Oboro Muramasa*, who also uses other features of stereotypical Eastern Japanese (see 5.10.1). While the token is regarded as belonging to a coarse register, it appears not to be considered as index of villainous character in fictionalised orality. Instead, it can be regarded as index of a stereotypical male character and is not seen as depicting the speaker as scary or serious (see 6.2.6 for more).

This association between *-nee* and *danseigo* can be seen also in the CEJC, where 654 out 786 occurrences are found in the speech of males. Furthermore, 532 occurrences are uttered by speakers hailing from Tōkyō Prefecture, Kanagawa Prefecture, and Saitama Prefecture, which reflects the association of *-nee* with Eastern Japanese in general, and with Tōkyō dialect in particular.

5.6.3. *-nu* and *-n*

The auxiliary *-nu* is the *rentaikei* (connective form) of the negative auxiliary *-zu* used in Old Japanese (Frellesvig, 2010: 117). It then became used as the standard negative auxiliary for Western Japanese varieties in Late Middle Japanese (Frellesvig, 2010: 397). In contemporary Japanese *-nu* is mainly used in literary and idiomatic expressions, but it is still widely used in the dialects of Western Japan, especially in the Kansai region, together with its reduced variant *-n* (Frellesvig, 2010: 236). In fictional works, *-nu* is considered as part of elderly male register

when used with other indexes such as *washi* or *ja*, otherwise it is associated to the register of feudal warriors (*bushi kotoba*) and such characters do not employ other indexes of Western Japanese (Iwata, 2014e: 146-147).

Likewise, the negative auxiliary *-n* is associated to Western Japanese and specifically to Kansai dialect, to the register of elderly male speakers, and also to a stereotypical rural dialect, where it is used together with other features of Eastern Japanese to index a rural upbringing rather than address a specific geographical provenance (Kinsui, 2014r: 214-215).

Inside the corpus, *-nu* is used by 28 characters. 7 characters are villains, while 5 are allies to the player character. 16 characters, while not villains, are not helpers to the protagonist, and are framed as neutral characters. Most characters are graphically depicted as otherworldly figures, such as one Buddhist *nyorai* and two Shintō *kami*, or as creatures of folklore, like one *oni*, 3 *yōkai*, one fairy, and 3 dragons. Other characters who use *-nu* are framed as authority figures, such as 5 characters who are the ghost of dead feudal warriors from *Oboro Muramasa*, 9 sentries (immobile NPCs that function as guards to different in-game locations, consisting of a skeletal spinal column, a horned and fanged skull, and a leathery cape attached to a pair of crossbones) from *Gurumin 3D*, and one cat king from *Ni no kuni*. Only 4 characters using the auxiliary *-nu* are depicted as female speakers, two *kitsune yōkai* from *Oboro Muramasa* and two *kami* from the games *Kyōiki no ichigatsu* and *Shippū no Usagimaru*. Conversely, 11 NPCs are framed as male speakers, and the others do not present recognisable linguistic or graphical index of their gender.

The auxiliary *-n* is also used by 28 characters inside the corpus. However, the use of *-n* in set expressions and colloquialism is present also in the speech of NPCs who are not framed as elderly speakers and who do not use other indexes of *rōjingo* such as *washi* or the copular expression *ja*. For example, one bat character in the game *Ribura no mita yume*, who is linguistically characterised as a young male (*ore*, *anta*, the copular expression *da*), uses the expression *-cha ikan* ‘must not do’, a colloquial contraction of *-te wa ikanai*. In the same game, one frog uses once the verb *kanawan*, a colloquial form of the expression *kanawanai* ‘to be no match for’. In the game, one penguin uses *washi* as first-person pronoun, but his dialogues do not feature other indexes of “elderly speaker register”, and the negative auxiliary *-n* is found only in the colloquialism *suman* and *shiran*. Another similar-looking NPC, who is referred as *kōtan penguin* (miner penguin) also uses the expressions *suman* and *dō ni mo naran* ‘it’s no use’, but the use of *ore* as first-person pronoun, *da* as copular expression, and *sa* and *ze* as sentence-final expressions do not frame the speaker as an elderly male, despite the occasional use of the negative auxiliary *-n*. In the game *Mazā 3*, one ghost character who is framed as young male speaker,

using the greeting *yā* and the interrogative sentence-final particle *kai* (cf. Nakamura, 2020), uses once the expression *iran ka ne*, contracted form of the verb *iranai* ‘you don’t need...?’. In the games *Perusona 4* and *Perusona Q*, the character of Kuma uses the negative auxiliary *-n* 19 times, mostly in colloquialisms, such as 8 instances of *wakaran* and one instance of *shiran* ‘I don’t know’, and one instance of the expression *ka mo shiren* ‘maybe’. On the other hand, the form *-nai* is more common, with 47 occurrences in the idiolectal variation *-nai kuma*, and the concurrent presence of the first-person pronoun *boku* and second-person pronouns *kimi* and *omae* do not index the character as an elderly speaker. One other character, a shark from *Ikachan*, is framed as a male speaker with its use of *ore*, uses once the colloquial expression *suman* ‘sorry’. The form *ka mo shiren* is also used once in the dialogues of the character of a snowman in *Oideyo Dōbutsu no mori*. Finally, one character in *Oboro Muramasa* is referred to as *kappa kozō* (*kappa* youngster), and his dialogue features two instances of negative verbal forms ending in *-n* (*chikazukan* and *nukaren* in lieu of *chikazukanai* and *nukarenai*, respectively ‘to not approach’ and ‘to not be able to pull out’). In his case, the use of *-n* is concurrent with other indexes of young age (*oira*, see 5.2.9) and other dialectal features (such as *oru*, see 5.7.2), and all together they can be regarded as indexing the character as a rural figure of personhood.

As such, without these one-off instances, the number of NPCs regularly using *-n* for purposes of characterisation is actually 18. Out of this number, 17 characters are framed as male speakers. One character, a mouse from *Mazā 3*, does not possess identifiable linguistic or graphic indexes of gender, but due to the self-reference term *bāchan* ‘granny’ the NPC can be regarded as an elderly female speaker. Among the 17 male characters, 7 explicitly use the first-person pronoun *washi*, which is widely associated to the register of elderly males, while the copular expression *ja* is found in the utterances of 9 characters: all characters using *ja* also use *washi*, reinforcing the association of *-n* with the register of elderly speakers. However, the association between the auxiliary *-n* and the register of elderly speakers is not straightforward and unidirectional. Instead, *-n* appears to be used as index of multiple identities inside the corpus.

On a deeper level of characterisation, 7 NPCs have a villainous role in the game in which they appear. These have various graphical representations but can be ascribed to certain categories of figures of folklore, such as one *oni*, two dragons, one *yōkai*, one *obake*, one Buddhist deity (*myōō* ‘Wisdom King’, a kind of wrathful deity), and one cybernetic alien. The use of the negative form *-n* in the speech of these characters is concurrent with a prevalent of indexes of rough male language (*ore* and *oresama* as first-person pronoun, and *omae* and *kisama* as second-person address term) or a presence of archaic language (*ware* and *onore*). Such villainous characters also have a tendency of using the standard copular expression *da*, instead of the

expressions *ja* associated to elderly speakers, or *ya* as index of Western Japanese dialects. As such, in the dialogue of villainous character, *-n* serves as characterisation of their role in the story and can be considered as one index of the register of authority figures.

The other 10 characters who use *-n* as negative auxiliary are neutral characters or are allies who actively help the protagonist in the game. For these NPCs, two additional categories of figure of personhood can be detected, based on the presence of other indexes: the elderly male speaker, and the speaker of non-standard Japanese. 5 non-villainous figures of authority who are not graphically rendered as elderly men are depicted in-game as members of the nobility (one feudal lord in *Ansangu kingudamu*, and one feline king in *Ni no kuni*), as a learned dragon also in *Ansangu kingudamu*, or as two guarding otherworldly figures preventing the player from progressing through the dungeon in *Gurumin 3D*. These characters respectively use the neutral personal pronoun *watashi*, the idiolectal form *mī*, a loanword from the English object pronoun “me”, and the archaic expression *ware* as first-person address term, and *omae* and *onore* as second-person pronouns. The absence of overt indexes of age or geographical provenance, together with the presence of archaisms (including *-n*) in the dialogue of these characters, can be regarded as framing the speakers as figures of authority, consistently with their role in the story. One possible influence regarding this use of *-n* can also be ascribed to the historical uses of the register of learned male students during the Meiji period, the so-called *shoseigo* (Kinsui, 2014r).

The use of *-n* for the characterisation of elderly speakers appears twice in the corpus. On the one hand, one of the two character, from *Taiko no tatsujin*, is depicted an old man from Easter Island, whose body is made of stone like a moai, a stone statue from the island. The NPC is addressed in-game as *go-rōtai* ‘old man’, and he uses *-nu* only once, while the form *-n* is more common in his dialogues. In this way, his register appears to be more in line with the staples of *rōjingo*. This is also in line with the in-game characterisation of the NPC, who is not presented as an austere figure of authority but is often used as comic relief and is more in line with the characterisation of the speaker as an elderly male. The other character is called *Inishie no ki* ‘Ancient tree’ (translated in the English-language version of the game as “Old Father Oak”), from *Ni no kuni*. The NPC is a tree with much knowledge about magic and the game world, who acts as a guide for the protagonist and can be regarded as a prime example of the actantial role of the “helper” in Propp’s terms. Both characters share other common indexes of “elderly male register” apart from the negative auxiliary *-n*, such as the first-person pronoun *washi*, the copular expression *ja*, the final particle *nō* and the verb *oru*, which is in line with the prevalent linguistic characterisation of elderly males in the medialect.

Finally, for the remaining 6 characters, *-n* is used together with dialectal features to speakers of Western Japanese dialects, and often specifically Kansai Japanese speakers. As for the first category, 3 mice characters in *Mazā 3* are characterised as elderly speakers, being addressed as *bāchan* and *jīchan*. The 3 mice talk in Kyūshū dialect, and in the dialogue of two of them the negative auxiliary *-n* is found in the modal construction *-nba deken* ‘must do’. In their case, the idiolectal use of stereotypical Kyūshū dialect can serve the purpose of differentiating characters who share the same graphical depiction with a linguistic characterisation. However, as the 3 dialectal speakers are also framed as elderly speakers, the use of dialect serve as secondary index of the old age of the NPC. While the association between a stereotypical Western Japanese and *rōjingo* is well known, the specific use of Kyūshū dialect can be seen as a creative twist in this direction.

4 characters using *-n* explicitly use other tokens associated to Kansai dialect, such as copular expressions *ya*, the negative auxiliary *-hen* (in lower numbers than *-n*), sentence-final particles *de* and *nen* (see 5.8.10), and dialectal vocabulary specifically associated to the Kansai region, such as *ee* in lieu of *ii*, ‘good’ (see 5.10.1). Graphically, no tendencies can be found regarding the visual depiction of said NPCs, apart from two mole characters who share a similar characterisation as blue-collar workers, wearing a yellow safety helmet and holding working tools (a shovel for the mole character in *Mazā 3*, a pickaxe for Risetto in the *Dōbutsu no mori* series). Due to the association between Ōsaka dialect and grittiness (Kinsui, 2017: 50), in these cases it can be regarded as an enregistered form of role language for blue-collar workers.

On the other hand, the use of Kansai dialect by the fairy characters in *Ni no kuni*, and specifically in this case by the sidekick Shizuku, follows the staple characterisation of Kansai speaker as funny and energetic, but serves also the purpose of setting the otherworldly characters apart from the human ones also through linguistic means (see 5.10.1).

Finally, in the case of another mole character in the game *Mazā 3*, its dialogue features a mix of Western Japanese and Eastern Japanese tokens. For example, the syntax of the sentence *namakemono no mogura ga otta da yo* ‘there used to be lazy moles’ does not reflect the syntax of the normative standard variety of Japanese. Instead, the sentence features the verb *oru*, associated to Western Japanese, together with the sentence-final particle *da*, associated to Eastern dialects (Iwata, 2014d), which can frame the rural identity of the speaker. However, due to the presence of indexes of *rōjingo*, such as in the sentence *washi yoku shiran no ja yo* ‘I don’t know much’, the NPC can also be characterised as elderly rural speaker. Altogether, mole characters in the corpus appear to be characterised as blue-collar workers, and dialectal vocabulary is often

found in the dialogue of these NPCs for such purpose, rather than as index of geographical provenance (see 5.10.1).

5.6.4. *-hen*

According to the *Nihon hōgen daijiten*, the auxiliary *-hen* is the auxiliary used to express the negative form across various dialects. Frellesvig (2010: 402) explains that it is mainly used in the Kansai region, and it is probably derived from the negative form *sen* of the verb *suru* ‘to do’ when attached to the *ren’yōkei* of the verb with the topic marker *wa* (from *yomi wa sen* to *yomyasen* to *yomasen* to *yomahen*). The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* also specifies that the form *ika-hen* is more popular in the Kyōto, while the form *ikehen* (a further phonological variation) is more common in the Ōsaka area.

Inside the corpus, *-hen* is used by 6 characters. One of these is a bovine from *Mazā 3*, whose dialogue is presented first through the onomatopoeia *moo* and then translated into brackets (see 5.10.1). In this case, the speaker of Kansai dialect is used as internal variation against the other bovine characters in the game, to differentiate between the different NPCs and also for creativity purposes to make the experience less monotonous for the player, as pointed out by the developers in Chapter 4. The other 5 characters follow the staple characterisation of Kansai speakers in the corpus, as fairies from *Ni no kuni*, or as mole characters from the *Dōbutsu no mori* series. An international variation can be observed in the different characterisation of two mole brothers Risetto and Raketto in *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. While both characters use Kansai dialect, among which the negative auxiliary *-hen*, only Raketto uses the polite form *-mahen*, a regional variation of the expression *-masen*. This contributes to the characterisation of Raketto as a more polite figure, compared to his rougher brother Risetto.

5.7. Auxiliary verbs

Similarly to negative auxiliaries, auxiliary verbs can also be used for purposes of characterisation, especially in terms of pragmatics and politeness in relation to linguistic ideologies about gender (cf. Kinsui, 2023: 43-44).

5.7.1. *Yaru*

According to the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen*, *yaru* is normatively used when doing something for a person that the speaker deems as inferior in status. In the corpus, *yaru* is used by 6 characters, all of which are framed as male speakers. Although it does not appear to be gendered *per se*, *yaru* still functions as index of male language, due to the perceived higher degree of

bluntness and directness in the register of male speakers. This is achieved also with address terms, as the characters use *ore* or the arrogant variation *oresama* to refer to themselves and use *omae* or *kisama* when addressing the player character. Even when the form is used by neutral or positive character, is it recognised as an “oppressive” form (see 6.2.8). Such characterisation of *yaru* as an index of male speech, however, is not found in the CEJC: out of 622 occurrences, 290 are found in speech of females and 332 in the speech of males, without the gender imbalance seen in the video game corpus. This is another example of indexical regimentation (Bucholtz, 2011: 257) in the medialect, where a linguistic feature assumes a highly ideologised meaning: in this case, *yaru* can be considered as index of male speech in the target corpus.

5.7.2. *Oru* and *-toru*

The verb *oru* ‘to be’ is regarded as the neutral verb of existence with animate subjects in Kansai dialect (Frellesvig, 2010: 350). According to the dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten*, when used as auxiliary, the verb *oru* can assume two different normative meanings depending on context. The polite form *-te orimasu* is the *kenjōgo* or *teichōgo* for the progressive tense, such as *o-sewa ni natte orimasu* ‘thank you for your help’. The plain form *-te oru* is instead associated to an archaic feeling, or to the geographical provenance of the speaker from Western Japan. In the medialect of fictional works, the verb *oru* is associated to the register of elderly males (Kinsui, 2014d: 63). Conversely, the converbal form *-toru* is the contraction of the stative expression *-te oru*, used also for the progressive function (Frellesvig, 2010: 350-351). In the medialect, it is also recognised as index of slightly vulgar male speakers of Kansai dialect and as index of a stereotypical rural identity (Kinsui, 2014m: 140-141).

In the corpus, *oru* as verb of existence and the auxiliary *-te oru* for the progressive tense appear together in the dialogues of 10 characters. None of the characters have a villainous role in the game in which they appear. 8 NPCs are framed as male speakers, while two characters are depicted as females. For the male NPCs, 4 categories can be identified, based on the use of *oru* with other linguistic tokens. The first figure of personhood is that of the speaker of Kansai dialect, and two NPCs in the corpus belong to this category: their speech is shaped by the presence of dialectal vocabulary, and they are characterised in-game as talkative and energetic types, which is one of the stereotypes more commonly associated to people from the region (Kinsui, 2017: 50). On the other hand, when a character uses the first-pronoun *washi*, the copular expression *ja*, and the sentence-final particle *nō*, despite such linguistic items belonging to Western Japanese like the dialect of Kansai, the NPC is linguistically characterised as an elderly male speaker: in the corpus, two characters follow this pattern, and they are framed as helper to the protagonist.

Another use of *-te oru* is found in two characters, one young *kappa* from *Oboro Muramasa* and one mole from *Mazā 3*. In such cases, the use of *oru* and the use of the negative auxiliary *-n* would frame them speakers of Western Japanese, and that would index the respective figure of personhood associated to the register. However, their dialogues also contain linguistic features associated to other registers: pronouns *oira* and *omee*, associated to Edo language, for the *kappa*, and the use of *da* as sentence-final expression (*otta da yo*), associated to Eastern Japanese, for the mole. In such cases, the field of indexicality of *-te oru* is shaped by the presence of other indexes of Eastern Japanese in the dialogues of the two NPCs: while in real life this combination of features from vastly different geographical region would be considered unnatural, this instead appears to be common in the medialect, and particularly in the target corpus, where it is repeatedly used to characterise rural speakers. Finally, two NPCs do not appear to belong to the aforementioned categories: one is the ghost of a former samurai from *Oboro Muramasa*, and one is a feline king from *Ni no kuni*. Due to their in-game characterisation, and the presence of archaic language features in their dialogues, their speech style can be associated to the register of figures of authority.

Regarding the two female characters, one of them is a *kitsune yōkai* from *Oboro Muramasa*, while the other is a *kami* from *Shippū no Usagimaru*. The speech style of the *kami* follows more closely the staples of *rōjingo* (see 5.10.4), and as such it is also recognised by native speakers in the questionnaire, as investigated in 6.2.10. On the other hand, the *yōkai* is graphically depicted as a young woman, and in her case the use of archaic language can be associated to the setting of the game, which takes place during the Edo period. Additionally, the large use of polite language and *kenjōgo* by the character, with verbs like *itasu* ‘to do’ and *mōsu* ‘to say’, which are also associated to the register of samurai in the medialect (Kinsui, 2014b: 24-25; Iwata, 2014h: 187-188), serves the purpose of indexing the subservient nature of the NPC, which acts as a kind of servant to the protagonist.

On the other hand, the expression *-toru* by itself is found in the dialogues of 5 characters. Two characters are fairies from the game *Ni no kuni* and share the same register as the other fairies, with various tokens of Kansai dialect in their dialogues, and *-toru* as well. The fact that the two characters are presented in-game as a kind of *manzai* act (see 5.10.1) confirms the enregisterment of Kansai dialect, and specifically Ōsaka dialect, as the register of comedy. The other 3 characters in the corpus who use *-toru* are 3 *oni* from the game *Oboro Muramasa*. However, their dialogue does not feature a consistent use of Kansai dialect throughout the utterances. Instead, a mixture of tokens of different dialects can be found together in the same sentence, such as for example *nanda nanda, omee mada ikitoru ga, koko wa jigoku da ppe* ‘what, what?

You're still alive, but this is Hell'. In just one sentence, we can find features of rough Edo language like *omee* (phonological variation of *omae*), Western Japanese like the expression *-toru*, and Eastern Japanese like the sentence-final particle *ppe* (see 5.8.9). The mixture of various dialectal features in the speech of 3 *oni* does not appear to index the role of villains in the story, or the graphical depiction of *oni*. Instead, this creative use of dialectal features frames the NPCs as rural speakers and achieves a somewhat humorous gap between the graphical depiction of scary figures and their “country bumpkin” register.

5.7.3. *Yagaru* and *yoru*

The verb *yagaru* can be used as a pejorative suffix to show «the speaker's negative evaluation or feelings regarding a situation» (Takagi, 2025: 383). According to the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen*, *yagaru* is normatively used when expressing contempt or hatred towards the actions of the addressee or of a third party, and since the early modern period it has been used in casual conversations by male speakers, and it can be attached either to the *-te* form or to the *ren'yōkei* of the verb. The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* adds that it is used in vulgar speech. In fictional works, *yagaru* is associated with male speakers, and is found especially in the register of young and rowdy characters (Fujimoto, 2014f: 189-190).

Yagaru is used in the corpus by 4 characters, 3 males and one female. The one female speaker, Aegis from *Perusona Q*, is an android and a self-proclaimed “war machine”, specifically built to defeat antagonists in combat. In her case, the derogatory auxiliary *yagaru* is also used once towards mobs (*kuraiyagare desu* ‘eat this!’), in line with the definition of *yagaru* as an expression of hatred towards the addressee. The other 3 characters are male, whose role in the story is either neutral or good, and they use *yagaru* not towards the player character, but towards a third party. Even though their register is coarse, they are not framed as villains, because the object of their “contempt” (the addressee of the verb *yagaru*) is not the player, but another NPC, and as such their role appears as less confrontational.

This is partly in contrast with the use of another derogatory auxiliary verb, *yoru*. According to Takagi (2025: 381-382), *yoru* is a suffixed form of the verb of existence *oru* and is used in contemporary dialects of the Kansai area when talking to an addressee who is equal or inferior in status, when expressing negative evaluations or feelings, or as a rough expression used by male speakers. The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* also normatively confirms that the verb *yoru* (also *oru*) is mainly used in the Kansai region as the counterpart for *yagaru*, and it is attached to the *ren'yōkei* of the verb when the speaker is expressing contempt towards the addressee or a third party.

In the corpus *yoru* is used by 4 characters, all framed as speaker of Kansai dialect. Despite the derogatory nature of the auxiliary verb, it is used only by one villain in *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*, while the remaining NPCs are characterised as positive figures. Moreover, all users of *yoru* are males, thus also reflecting normative views on language use.

5.7.4. *Haru*

According to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, the auxiliary *haru* is derived from the honorific (*sonkeigo*) verb *nasaru* ‘to do’, and it is used to show respect, but it notes how recently *haru* is becoming more and more used also without such implications. Nowadays it is mostly associated to Kansai dialects (Takagi, 2025), among which Kyōto dialect (Nakai, 2025a). However, while originally *haru* was associated specifically with the register of people of Kyōto (*Kyō kotoba*), it is now used more broadly in the medialect of popular fictional works to characterise any speaker of Kansai dialect (Hirosaka, 2014d: 159).

Haru is used by two characters, a bovine in *Mazā 3*, and Raketto from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. In the case of the bovine character, as addressed above (see 5.7.4), the use of dialect has the function of setting it apart from the other bovines in game. As such, it uses highly iconised and highly regimented Kansai dialect, employing only a limited number of highly recognisable indexes, such as *haru*, the copular expression *ya*, the sentence-final particle *wa*, and the negative form *-mahan*. In the case of Raketto, *teineigo* is used in all instances where the NPC is talking to the player character, while plain dialect and larger use of dialectal tokens are used when the NPC is talking to his own brother Risetto, himself a speaker of Kansai dialect. The higher degree of politeness in the speech of Raketto is used as characterisation to set him apart from his brother Risetto. While Raketto is gentler and understanding, Risetto is rougher and more short-tempered, and this is also reflected at the pragmatic level in their dialogue.

5.8. Final particles

According to Shibatani (1990: 373), sentence-final particles (*shūjoshi*) are another class of lexical items that can reflect the gender of the speaker. Kinsui (2003: 206) also notes the potential for final particles to become features of role language.

5.8.1. *Yo*

Yo is a standard assertive particle, used by both male and female speakers. Shibatani (1990: 373) points out to the exclusive possession by female speakers of a syntactic rule, where the copular expression *da* is deleted, and the final particle *yo* is used in a zero copula construction,

such as *kirei yo* ‘it’s pretty’ instead of *kirei da yo*. As such, the construction “zero copula + *yo*” appears to be an index of the female gender of the speaker. The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* also states that in contemporary Japanese such particle is normatively considered as “male language” (*danseigo*) when it is attached directly to the *shūshikei* (conclusive form) of the verb, but is regarded as “female language” (*joseigo*) when it is used in combination with other particles (such as *no yo*, *wa yo*, *koto yo*, and *te yo*) or when it is attached directly to the stem of nouns and adjective verbs (*keiyōdōshi*). This normative view resonates with the zero copula construction as mentioned above by Shibatani (1990). This is also attested in the medialect of popular culture, where it is not regarded as index of any specific register (Yoda, 2014j: 191-193), but its indexical field and its association to specific characterological figures is determined by the presence of other linguistic features in the dialogue.

Such pattern is found also in the corpus, as *yo* is used by 92 NPCs: among these, 20 NPCs are framed as female speakers. Characters indexed as feminine use the final particle *yo* with polite copular expressions like *desu* and *de gozaimasu*, or in zero copula construction when using a plain speech style. On the other hand, 6 female NPCs use the expression *da yo*, usually perceived as more masculine. As such, the corpus appears to reflect normative views expressed by dictionaries and previous metalinguistic description of Contemporary Japanese.

5.8.2. *Ne*

Ne is a final particle used to ask or show agreement, and as exclamation. According to the dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten*, it is normatively considered as index of female speaker when it is used together with other female-associated particles such as *wa*, or when it is attached directly to a substantive or an adjective verb, that is in a zero copula construction like *yo*. The use of final particles in zero copula construction appears thus to be closely related to the characterisation of the speaker from the point of view of gender. In the medialect of fictional works, it is regarded as similar in function to *yo*, where its indexical field is shaped by the compresence of other linguistic features, but *ne* is thought to occur more often in the register of female speakers (Yoda, 2014f: 148).

In the corpus, *ne* is used by 74 characters, 49 framed as male speakers and 25 as female speakers. Out of these, 20 female characters use the particle in a zero copula construction. Similarly to *da yo*, the expression *da ne* appears to also be associated to stronger female speakers. 4 characters use both expressions, while one character uses only *da ne* and two characters use only *da yo*. Finally, 13 female characters use both *desu yo* and *desu ne*. Such characters, besides adhering to the characterisation of female speech as more polite, are also characterised in-game

as positive characters, with 6 NPCs being allies to the protagonists and two NPCs being good characters. Meanwhile, no villains are found using either *desu ne* or *desu yo* in the corpus.

5.8.3. *Zo*

Zo is an assertive final particle considered to belong exclusively to the rough speech of male speakers (Shibatani, 1990: 373). The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* adds that *zo* is used to exert a strong pressure on the listener. In the medialect of popular culture, *zo* is associated to the register of authority figures, predominantly males but also female speakers, and it is regarded as more forceful than *ze* or *yo* (Yoda, 2014d: 114).

Zo in katakana is used only by 3 alien characters in *Ribura no mita yume*. In this case the script choice for the particle is consistent with the script choice for the overall utterances of the speakers, as all dialogues for alien characters in the game is written in katakana, and katakana can be regarded by itself as a possible index of “foreignised Japanese” (see 5.10.5).

Zo in hiragana appears more frequently in the corpus, being used by 36 characters. Out of these characters, only 5 are framed as female speakers, while 28 are characterised as males, and 3 are not easily recognisable on the basis of gender. 17 characters are framed as ally characters in the story, while 9 characters are characterised as villain or function as bosses that need to be defeated by the player character to progress through the game. Villain characters using *zo* appear to be graphically depicted as creatures of the folklore (3 *yōkai*, two dragons, one *oni*) or as deities, namely one *myōō* and one *nyorai* from *Oboro Muramasa*.

5.8.4. *Ze*

Similarly to *zo*, *ze* is an emphatic and assertive final particle which is regarded as being found only in the rough speech of men (Shibatani, 1990: 373). According to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, *ze* expresses a feeling of imposing one’s statement on the listener, and because it has a familiar yet rough feel to it, it is not used with superiors, and it is not normatively used by women either. In the medialect of popular culture, *ze* is used to delineate pretentious male characters who try to look cool, and it has a more low-brow, vulgar but stylish expression than *yo* or *zo*, which makes it less forceful than the latter (Yoda, 2014c: 108-109).

Ze in katakana is used only by two characters in *Gurumin 3D*, the *yōkai* Bob and the mole Mogurō. Bob uses various anglicisms, and his speech features typical characteristics of *kata-koto nihongo* (see 5.10.5). In this case, the use of *ze* in katakana can be framed as additional index of the “foreignness” of the speaker. The speech of Mogurō also features anglicisms, but its use of foreignised speech can be regarded as index of a “cool guy” persona, which is also

reinforced by the graphical depiction as a mole wearing black sunglasses. In this case, *ze* can be regarded as index of male roughness, and the use of katakana is consistent with the characterisation of the speaker as a “cool guy”.

Ze in hiragana is more widely used, being featured in the speech of 11 characters, all framed as male speakers. Although apparently being regarded as more vulgar than *zo*, *ze* appears to only be used by positive character, either allies or neutral character, and is not used by villains inside the corpus. Due to this sense of “familiarity”, as commented by the dictionary, *ze* appears to be used when dialogues aim to index such sense of familiarity between the player character and the NPC. On the other hand, despite the sense of arrogance and its belonging to vulgar register, the fact that *ze* is not used in the speech of villainous characters can function as index of the distance between them and the player character, thus somewhat confirming the use of *ze* as index of familiarity in fictionalised orality. This connotation is also different from *zo*, which is used as a final particle with the pragmatic function of exerting pressure onto the listener, and as such is featured in the speech of villainous character. Although secondary sources claim that *ze* is less positive than *zo*, this pragmatic function and its negative attitude appear to not be present in the target corpus of video game dialogues.

5.8.5. *Wa*

Following the definition by Shibatani (1990: 373), the final particle *wa* needs to be pragmatically differentiated into two subcategories. With a rising intonation, *wa* is used exclusively by female speakers. Otherwise, with a falling intonation, *wa* is considered by Shibatani (1990: 373) to belong to the Ōsaka dialect, and it is used by both male and female speakers. In fictional works, it is found as part of female-associated language in the speech of female characters or characters who act as females, but not in the register of elderly female speakers (Yoda, 2014k: 198). One additional use of *wa* with a falling intonation, not tied to Kansai dialect, is found to be widely used across by both male and female characters, regardless of status, age, or geographical provenance: it is regarded as primarily conveying the feelings and intentions of the speaker, leading to an abrupt and careless tone, sounding rude when used by characters of lower status, and conveying arrogance when used by characters of higher status (Yoda, 2014k: 199-200). However, given that the target corpus consists only of written text, this prosodic distinction cannot be used to disambiguate between the three different pragmatic uses of *wa* in this research. As such, the 3 pragmatically different *wa* will be considered together with other linguistic features and other possible indexes.

Wa is used in the corpus by 24 characters. 13 NPCs are depicted as females, while 11 can be regarded as male speakers. Among male NPCs, additional features of Western Japanese can be found in the dialogue of 8 characters, such as copular expressions *ya* and *ja*, negative auxiliary *-n* and *-hen*, and lexical items such as *honma* and *ee* (see 5.10.1). As such, the use of *wa* in video game dialogues largely aligns with normative descriptive views, respectively on female language and on Kansai dialect.

5.8.6. *Kashira*

The dubitative final particle *kashira* is thought to be a characteristic of the language of female speakers (Shibatani, 1990: 373), something that is also normatively confirmed by dictionaries. In the medialect of fictional works, it is associated especially to middle-aged female women, or young lady-like characters (Okazaki, 2014c: 68-69).

In the corpus *kashira* is used by 4 characters, who are characterised as females and as positive characters, being helpers and allies to the player character. The NPCs in question are also characterised not as young girls, but rather as grown-ups or middle-aged women: among the 4 characters, one is a tutorial-like fairy in *Rusettia* offering guidance to the player character, one is a *senpai* in a company in *Sakyubasu no Abi wa yūwaku dekinai*, one is an octopus ballerina from *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*, and one is a snowwoman from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. *Kashira* is thus understood as index of female language but appears to be used to index specific types of female speakers, namely guide-like figures. The association between *kashira* and female speakers is also seen in the CEJC, where 197 out of 246 occurrences of the term are found in the utterances of women.

5.8.7. *Sa*

Regarding the final particle *sa*, Inoue (2025: 453) argues that it is used to mark assertiveness in an utterance. According to the *Meikyō kokugo jiten*, *sa* is normatively used mainly by male speakers when talking in direct speech towards intimates when talking freely about their own intentions or thoughts regardless of the hearer. However, the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* says instead that in the past *sa* was used by male speakers (especially warriors) but is now used by both male and female speakers in friendly and casual conversations. In fictional works, *sa* appears to be used to frame different characterological figures, especially when used together with other linguistic tokens: as index of coolness and independence in male speakers when used with the pronoun *ore* (see 5.2.7), as index of strong-mindedness and mannishness in female speakers,

or as index of confidence and boast with the pronoun *boku* (see 5.2.6) by kids (Yoda, 2014b: 92-93).

Sa is used by 20 characters in the corpus, 18 males and 2 females. All characters using *sa* do not use *teineigo*, but their dialogue is reported in plain direct style. When *sa* is used by female characters, it is used as index of masculinity, as it appears to be recognised as such by native speakers (see 6.2.5). This is also expressed in choice of address terms by the two NPCs. The first character is a young fairy from the game *Rusettia*, and she uses *atashi* in katakana as first-person pronoun, which, while being a female-associated address term, also has an informal feeling (see 5.2.4). The NPC also uses *anta* in katakana as second-person pronoun, a very colloquial term often associated to informal female speech (see 5.3.2), and *chimau* and *kunnai* as auxiliary verbs, which are informal and colloquial contractions. Even though the wording is regarded as masculine, the creative use of indexes of female language frames the speaker as a direct and frank character, and as such is recognised by native speakers (see 6.2.5). The second character is a female *kami* from the game *Kyōiki no ichigatsu*, but her speech does not feature recognisable indexes of female language. Instead, her register is more akin to the “elderly person” register, with *washi* as first-person pronoun, *ja* as copular expression, *-nu* as auxiliary for the negative form, and *-te oru* as auxiliary for the progressive tense. As such, participants in the questionnaire did not recognise the character as a female speaker, and *sa* appears consistent with the overall tone of the dialogues (see 6.2.9).

5.8.8. *No* and *nō*

The dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen* argues that, when used with a falling intonation, the final particle *no* is normatively used by female speakers in assertive sentences. This is different that when the particle *no* is used with a rising intonation in interrogative sentences, which is not thought to be related to the gender of the speaker. In fictional works, *no* is index of elderly speakers when it is used together with the first-person pronoun *washi* (see 5.2.10) and when it is used together with other particles, such as the interrogative particle *ka* in the expression *ka no*, or the copular expression *ja* (see 5.4.1) in the expression *ja no* (Yoda, 2014g: 151-152). On the other hand, when *no* is used in zero copula construction, and when it is used with other final particles such as *yo* and *ne* in expressions like *no yo* and *no ne*, it is regarded as index of reserved, young, or weak female characters (Yoda, 2014g: 152-153).

Inside the corpus, *no* in assertive sentences is found in the dialogues of 12 NPCs, all of which are framed as female speakers. 11 NPCs *watashi* as first-person pronoun, while one uses the feminine variation *atakushi*. *No* is used only in zero copula constructions, and it appears also in

combination with other final particles, such as *no yo*, *no ne*, and *no yo ne*, as noted by previous literature on the subject. As such, use of *no* in assertive sentences in the target corpus appears to be based on normative patterns, and is not innovative.

Conversely, according to the dictionary *Dejitaru Daijisen*, the final particle *nō* expresses the emotion of the speaker and is currently mainly used as a dialectal feature of Western Japanese. In fictional works, differently from its non-elongated form, *nō* is not used to characterise female speakers. Instead, it is used as part of the register of elderly people, or as index of the rural identity of the character, due to its presence in different dialects across Japan (Iwata, 2014f: 153-155).

Inside the corpus *nō* is used by 6 characters, 4 of which are framed as male speakers, one is characterised as female, while one character cannot be easily described in terms of gender. 3 of the male NPCs are characterised as users of “elderly male register” (*rōjingo*), as they use *washi* as first-person pronoun (see 5.2.10), *ja* as copular expression (see 5.4.1), and *-nu* and *-n* as negative auxiliary (see 5.6.3). Elderly male register can also be found in the NPC whose gender is unknown, as its first-person pronoun of choice is the neutral *watashi*, but tokens of *rōjingo* can be found in the copular expression *ja* and in the auxiliary for the negative form *-nu*. The other male character is a speaker of Kansai dialect and is not characterised in terms of age: as such, the use of *nō* in his case can be described as dialectal feature of Western Japanese, as normatively noted by the dictionary.

The one female character using *nō* is a female *kami*, Toyoukebime from *Shippū no Usagimaru*. Her speech features stereotypical items of *rōjingo* and archaic vocabulary, such as *onushi* as outdated second-person pronoun (see 5.3.7), *ja* as copular expression, and *-nu* as negative auxiliary. However, the use of the first-pronoun *warawa* sets the character apart from other users of *rōjingo*, who are mainly found to use *washi* (see 5.2.10). As such, despite other tokens of “elderly male language”, this character is recognised as female by native speakers (see 6.2.10).

5.8.9. *Be*

The final particle *be* (also *bei* and *bee*) is derived from the auxiliary *beshi* ‘possible’, and is used when expressing a conjecture, a volition, an order, or an invitation. In Late Middle Japanese, its use started being very common in Eastern Japan, so that it became a defining feature of Eastern Japanese (Frellesvig, 2010: 397). *Be* and variations were used in early modern works of fiction as the language of country bumpkins and rustic warriors from the Kantō region (*yakko kotoba*), but it was also used as vernacular language by Edo commoners and townspeople

(Clarke, 2000: 65-66). In contemporary Japan, it is found in Tsugaru dialect (Ōtsuki, 2025: 531), Fukushima dialect (Shiraiwa, 2025: 567), Ibaraki dialect (Sasaki, 2025: 592-593). Conversely, it is not found any more in Metropolitan Tōkyō dialect (Mitsui, 2025: 637-638). In the medialect of fictional works, *be* is often used together with other final particles, such as *sa* or *da*, and is especially common as index of low social status and unculturedness of the speaker (Iwata, 2014g: 163-165).

Be is used by the mole characters in *Gurumin 3D*, together with other features usually regarded as “rural Japanese”. In the dialogue of the character Mogurenu, the idiolect *un da* is used twice, where the interjections *un* ‘yeah’ is followed by the sentence-final particle *da*, associated to Eastern Japanese, especially Tōhoku dialect (Hiramoto, 2009: 255), and to rural dialects, especially as index of unculturedness and low social status of the speaker (Iwata, 2014d: 117-119). The final particle *be* is used in Eastern Japanese varieties to indicate speculation, volition, or invitation, but since it is used at the end of every sentence it can be regarded as an idiolect for the character, indexing and reinforcing the supposed rural identity of the speaker.

5.8.10. *De* and *nen*

The sentence-final particles *de* and *nen* are found in Kansai dialects (cf. Takagi, 2025: 382-383). Therefore, they are used as such in the medialect of fictional works, when the action takes place in Kansai, or when speakers of Kansai dialect appear on the scene (Kinsui, 2014l: 130; Kinsui, 2014n: 150-151).

In the corpus, the two particles appear to be associated almost exclusively to characters presented as speaker of Kansai dialect, even though no game actually takes place in the region, but instead as an index pointing to a specific character type and its associated stereotypical qualities, such as talkativeness. Specifically, the particle *de* is used by 7 characters, 6 of which are Kansai speakers: the other one is an elderly male, and although his register contains features of Western Japanese dialects, these are associated to *rōjingo*.

Similarly, *nen* is used by 7 characters, 6 of which are Kansai speaker: in this case, the remaining character is framed as an overtly feminine woman in *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*, being depicted as a dancer. In her dialogues, female-associated sentence-final expression like *kashira*, *wa yo* and *wa ne* are presented with an additional *-n* at their end, becoming *kashiran*, *wa yon* and *wa nen*. Such suffixes are associated to a humorous and exaggerated sense of femineity (cf. SanaeMiko, 2021), and in this case *nen* appears to not be associated with dialectal varieties.

The association between *de* and *nen* and speakers from the Kansai region is reflected also in daily conversations: according to the CEJC, 133 out of 183 occurrences of *de* and 156 out of

189 occurrences of *nen* are uttered by speakers born in the prefectures of the Kansai region, namely Kyōto, Hyōgo, Wakayama, Ōsaka, Nara, and Shiga. As such, the iconicity of these two sentence-final particles seems to be based on actual language use, rather than on the intertextuality of the medialect and its fictional nature.

5.8.11. *Kyara gobi* (character-associated idiolectal particles)

Kyara gobi can be associated to animal characters in those cases where the animals in question do not have a recognisable onomatopoeia on which to base their peculiar register, differently from widely established onomatopoeic suffixes such as *nya* for cats or *wan* for dogs (see 5.9.1).

For example, in *Taiko no tatsujin*, 8 penguins and one “penguin robot” (*Penginrobo*) are present. Dialogue for the 8 penguin consists of various iterations of the onomatopoeia *pen*, which is not meant to represent the actual sound of penguins but is borrowed from the name of the animal. The dialogues are then presented in translations in Japanese inside brackets, where some variation can be detected between the utterances of the 8 different penguins. On the other hand, dialogues for the “penguin robot” are presented in Japanese from the beginning, without onomatopoeias. *Pen* as final particle occurs then in the dialogue of the penguin robot only as idiolectal sentence-final particles, as example of *kyara gobi*. As the dialogue of the penguin robot is presented in standard Japanese, and its role in the game is that of a “museum guide” (*tenjihin ni wa te o furenaide kudasai da pen* ‘please do not touch the exhibitions *da pen*’), the humorous onomatopoeia indexes the visual characterisation of the NPC as a penguin, but differentiates the penguin robot from the other penguins on the basis of their different roles in the game. This pattern of sentence-final particles, where the name of the animal species becomes a suffix for the character, is found in contemporary popular culture for animals without a widely recognised onomatopoeia (Akizuki, 2012: 52-53). Interestingly, the speech of the penguin robot is not characterised by presence of katakana as indexes of “robot speech” (cf. Nomura, 2022).

Kyara gobi can also be associated to anthropomorphic objects, such as Kacchan and Donchan from *Taiko no tatsujin*. The characters are two anthropomorphic *taiko*, a type of Japanese percussion, and their dialogues do not specifically contain indexes of gender or age. However, the NPCs are characterised by the use of two idiolectal particles, *don*, and *ka*, which symbolise the sounds of drums being percussed. *Don* has also a pragmatic use as a form of request 8 times (for example *yameru don* ‘stop’, or *ki o tsukeru don* ‘be careful’), and as a marker for the volitional form 21 times (for example *issho ni sagasu don!* ‘let’s look for it together!’, or *iku don!* ‘let’s go!’). This can be seen as a practical example of how character-associated final particles

can influence and change the grammar of Contemporary Japanese, as suggested also by Sadanobu (2011a).

Some NPCs in the target corpus use their name as idiolectal copular expression, other than as *kyara gobi*. The character of Kuma from the *Perusona* series has the appearance of a robot-bear, but is a “shadow”, creatures which are the manifestations of people’s negative traits and emotions. His speech features many instances of the word *kuma* ‘bear’ being used as first-person singular pronoun, as idiolectal copula and final particle, and also as a pun (*kumatta na instead of komatta na* ‘it’s hopeless’, or *omatase shimakuma* instead of *omatase shimashita* ‘thank you for waiting’). The marker *kuma* is also used together with a verb to express the form of request (*miru kuma* ‘watch!’), another example of *kyara joshi* used pragmatically in lieu of more normative syntactic constructions (cf. Sadanobu, 2011a).

A similar *kyara gobi* based on the name of the NPC is present in the dialogue of the character of Poko from *Gurumin 3D*. The most interesting feature of the dialogues of this character is the heavy use of the final particle *po*, an idiolect derived from the name of the NPC, which is present at the end of every sentence and acts in lieu of other particles, both affirmative and interrogative (11 occurrences of *po?* as question marker). Such pattern of sentence-final particles, where the proper name of the character becomes a suffix by itself, is also regarded as common (Akizuki, 2012: 53-54), and is found also in local mascot characters, such as Kumamon or Nanshi (see 1.4).

Finally, idiolectal sentence-final expressions can also be borrowed from other grammatical categories, such as the copular expression *desu*, which are then reframed as *kyara gobi* (Sadanobu, 2011a: 21). The dictionary *Meikyō kokugo jiten* states that the expression *desu* can be attached as a final particle to the *shūshikei* of the verb as dialectal or archaic features, but whose use is regarded as inappropriate in current Standard Japanese. In fictional works, the use of *desu* and of its variant *de arimasu* as sentence-final expression is attested and can be regarded as idiolects of certain characters (Yoda, 2014e: 131; Fujimoto, 2014c: 133). However, despite the supposed popularity, *desu* as sentence-final expression is used by only two categories of NPCs in the corpus, one being the alien-like Mr. Saturn from *Mazā 3*, and the other the female robot Aigis from *Perusona Q*.

5.9. Interjections, ideophones, and other expressive sounds

Kinsui (2003: 207) suggests that paraverbal and phonetic elements, such as interjections (*kandōshi*) and laughter, are also found to be used as features of role language.

5.9.1. Animal onomatopoeia

In terms of linguistic characterisation, the most marginalised category of virtual speakers appears to be that of non-anthropomorphic, non-humanised animals. In video games, NPCs belonging to this category usually have a very limited amount of dialogue, usually just a few lines, and appear on screen for the least amount of time, usually just in one instance throughout the whole game. Such NPCs can be regarded as standing in direct opposition to that of anthropomorphic non-human characters, which are humanised, possess linguistic abilities and are often allies and sidekicks to the protagonists. Thus, non-anthropomorphic animal NPCs can be considered as “Others”.

As pointed out by Belmonte-Ávila (2024: 49-51), non-human sounds and noise in video games can be performative and can create identities in contrast with human characters. As such, non-human “grunts” can also be regarded as index in semiotic terms. In the target corpus such “non-human grunts” are present, for example, in the dialogue of Yeti from *Taiko no tatsujin*, where its dialogue consists only of various iterations of the onomatopoeia *ie*, derived from the name of the character in Japanese (*Ieti*). Such pattern can be associated to *kyara gobi*, where the name of the character is used as idiolectal sentence-final particle (cf. Akizuki, 2012). In *Taiko no tatsujin*, translations of Yeti’s dialogue into Japanese are then provided by another anthropomorphic NPC.

Differently from non-talking ones, animal characters in speaking role have historically been very prominent in popular media across different settings and cultures, from Disney movies in the United States (Lippi-Green, 2012) to contemporary Japan. As such, animals with speech ability are featured heavily also in video games, and in the target corpus.

The most common pattern of ‘animal character suffix’ (*dōbutsu kyara gobi*) originates from onomatopoeia representing the sounds of animals upon which fictional characters are based, such as *nya* for feline characters, *wan* for dog characters, *mō* for cow characters, *chū* for mice characters, and *bū* for pig characters (Akizuki, 2012: 51-52). For example, 5 characters in the corpus belong to the category of cat characters. One character in *Taiko no tatsujin* is not anthropomorphic, and his lines of dialogue are presented first through feline “noise”, and then translated, such as in the following example: *nya nya n? (shitteru nya?)* ‘meow meow? (Do you know it, meow?)’. In such cases, “feline register” appears to be so pervasive that it is hard to imagine a cat character speaking without employing the onomatopoeia *nya*, even when the utterance is translated into Standard Japanese (see 1.4 for another example).

In the game *Nyanko daisensō*, *nya* is used as copular expression together with a noun or an adjectival noun (*shuppatsu nya* ‘we leave’, or *taisetsu nya* ‘it’s important’). The use of *nya* as

form of request is also presented pragmatically through its use in context (*chūi nya* ‘pay attention’), or through its use as a variation of the imperative expression *no da* (*zōshi suru no nya!* ‘increase capital!’). On the other hand, the use of *nya* as sentence-final particles is expressed through its juxtaposition to verbs in the *shūshikei* (*sēbu wa neko kichi de dekiru nya!* ‘you can save at the cat base!’). One occurrence of the onomatopoeia *nya* is also found in an interrogative sentence, to express the surprise of the speaker. The comical and humorous nature of the game is also exemplified by the use of symbols in the dialogues of the feline characters, such as the musical note (♪) as a semiotic and graphemic means to express a certain intonation in the speaker. There are also instances of humorous wordplay with the onomatopoeia, such as *nyanto*, *nyani*, and *nyanda*, all “feline” counterparts of the standard interjections *nanto*, *nani*, and *nanda* ‘what’. One character also uses the interjection *nyāgo* once, derived from the onomatopoeia *nya*.

In the target corpus only one cat character does employ the cat register, Neko-kun from *Nikki no tabisuru kuizu*. As the title suggests, the game is a kind of quiz about the 47 prefectures of Japan, and Neko-kun acts as the announcer for the quiz game, providing correct answers and explanations. This is also referenced in-game by the NPC, when he says *boku wa kuizu no kaisetsu o suru yo!* ‘I’ll do the commentary for the quiz!’. As such, Neko-kun assumes two main personae throughout the game, with different speech styles to match the characterological figure. In dialogues with the main character Nikki and the side character Panda-kun, his speech style features the copula *da* and verbs in the plain form, together with direct forms of request in *-te* and wide use of final particles *ne* and *yo*. The imperative form of the verb in the *meireikei* is also used twice, albeit in the fixed expression *ganbare!* ‘good luck!’. Conversely, when the character assumes the persona of the quiz announcer, the speech style changes to *teineigo*, with the use of *desu*, the *jodōshi -masu* in the past and non-past non-negative forms, and no use of personal pronouns and final particles. This change in speech style serve as characterisation between the “informal” side of the character, when he travels the 47 prefectures of Japan, and the “formal” side, when he oversees the quiz game. On the other hand, the feline identity of the speaker appears to not be important for diegetic purposes throughout the game, and as such the stereotypical cat register is not used.

Mazā 3 in particular features a great number of animal characters. Their dialogues are usually presented first through onomatopoeia and is then translated into Japanese inside brackets, as shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Example of animal dialogue in *Mazā 3* (Nintendo, 2006).

For example, 13 bovines are present in *Mazā 3*, with most dialogue being composed of only one line for each character. Dialogue is usually introduced by the onomatopoeia *mō* (17 occurrences) and then translated inside brackets. Despite their very short length, the translated dialogues present a considerable amount of linguistic variation between the 13 different characters. Among these, the longest dialogical extract (just 91 characters) belongs to a bovine which is translated into Kansai dialect, with features like the *jodōshi haru* to express politeness (*ikaharimasu?* ‘are you going?’), the copular expression *ya* and the final particle *wa* (*jōzu ya wā* ‘you’re good’), and the negative form *-mahen* (*mō motemahen* ‘I can’t hold it anymore’).

Similarly, *Mazā 3* also features chickens, pigs, and mice NPCs with similar linguistic characterisation. For examples, 3 chicken NPCs express themselves through mimetics, using various iterations of the onomatopoeic expressions *koke* and *koko*, which ultimately derive from the sound of roosters. However, in the game, these characters offer the protagonist their eggs (*tamago hoshii?* ‘do you want eggs?’), and as such could be regarded as hens. This is reflected in their language use, with a predominance of indexes which can be traced back to feminine language, such as the use of final particles in zero copula constructions (*ippai ne* ‘it’s a lot’), the use of the final particle *no* both in assertive and interrogative sentences (*tamago kirai na hito mo iru no yo ne*, ‘there are people who don’t like eggs’), and the overall politeness of the utterances, with the use of the honorific *-sama* in reference to a third person.

Furthermore, 16 pigs are present in *Mazā 3*, with most dialogue being made of only two or three lines for each character. In a similar way to other animal NPCs discussed above, dialogue is usually introduced by various iterations of the onomatopoeias *buhi* (3 occurrences), *bui* (15 occurrences), or *bubu* (17 occurrences). The content of the dialogue is then translated in Japanese inside brackets. Similarly, the translated dialogues present a considerable amount of linguistic variation for purposes of characterisation, with features associated to different registers and different characterological figures for greater creativity inside the game, as pointed out by

game developers in Chapter 4. However, the degree of internal variation for pig-like NPCs appears to be lower than the one found in the dialogues of bovine characters.

As for mice NPCs, the category is composed of 19 different mouse characters. Similarly to other animal characters in the same game, 17 NPCs start their dialogue with various iterations of the onomatopoeia *chū* (90 times), and then their utterances are reported in Japanese inside brackets. Two mice characters instead talk directly in Japanese without the introduction with the onomatopoeia: this may be due to the fact that their interlocutor in these scenes is another animal (in this case, a monkey), instead of a human. Linguistic variation is found among the speech style of the different characters: for example, *boku* is used by 3 mice. *Uchi* and *wataku-shi* are instead used by another mouse, who also uses the second-person singular pronoun *anata-sama*, the copula *de gozaimasu* and the polite forms of request *kudasaimashi* and *kudasaimase*. These indexes, together with instances of *bikago*, *sonkeigo*, and *kenjōgo*, concur to the creation of a very polite register, and can be also regarded as indexing the feminine gender of the speaker, as examples of *onna kotoba*. The copular expression *desu* is used by 4 different NPCs, and the expression *da* by 6 others.

Differently from the other NPCs of this category, who all speak Standard Japanese with variations in politeness and gendered feature, 3 mice speak in a differently valorised register, which presents features associated to Kyūshū dialect. These characters are defined in-game as *bāchan* (literally ‘auntie’, a term of endearment for elderly females) and *jīchan* (literally ‘uncle’, its counterpart for elderly males). As such, rather than strictly geographical provenance (also probably due to the fact that *Mazā 3* is set in a fantasy world), this register can be regarded as a particular case of *rōjingo*, indexing the old age of the speakers, which is also reinforced by the use of *jaro* as copula in 3 instances. Features associated to such stereotypical Kyūshū dialect include the imperative *kinshai* ‘please come’, the construct *-nba deken* (*konba deken* ‘you must come’), the causal particle *ken* ‘because’ (cf. Sedlackova, 2023: 22), the final particle *bai* also as copular expression (cf. Shibatani & Nitta, 2025: 430), and the interjections *oryō* and *yoka*: in particular, the ending *-ka* is regarded as stereotypical of Kyūshū dialects (Frellesvig, 2010: 303). While the register appears to draw from actual dialectal usage, in-game association with NPCs depicted as elderly reinforces its indexicality in a diastratic sense, as the register of elderly speakers. This appears to be similar to the regimented pseudo-Kyūshū dialect used as rural dialect in popular works of fiction (cf. Ōtagaki, 2014b).

A different case can instead be made for mole characters. In *Mazā 3*, this category is composed of 12 different NPCs. Differently from other animal characters in the same game, the dialogue for each mole is presented in Japanese, with no onomatopoeia indexing the non-human

nature of the characters. Only one of the NPCs uses *teineigo*, while the other characters use plain language. One NPC uses *washi* as first-person pronoun, the *jodōshi -n* for the negative form, the copular expression *ja*, the verb *oru* both as verb of existence (*namakemono no mogura ga otta da yo* ‘there are lazy moles’) and as *hojodōshi* (*sesseto itte otta da yo* ‘they went in diligently’), and the copular expression *da* in a non-normative usage as sentence-final expression, which is recognised as index of pseudo-Tōhoku dialect and associated rural identities (cf. Hiramoto, 2009). The colloquial interjection *ttakumō* ‘good grief’, contraction of *mattaku mō*, is also used once. Consistently with other such characters in the target corpus, moles are characterised not in terms of their animal characteristics, but as blue-collar male workers, and often employ dialectal features, such as Kansai dialect in *Dōbutsu no mori*, Eastern Japanese “country bumpkin language” in *Gurumin 3D*, and “elderly male language” in *Mazā 3*.

Mazā 3 also features two different categories of animal characters, sparrows and frogs. 8 sparrows are present in the game, and they all act as in-game tutorials, explaining commands and mechanics. Apart from one sparrow, each utterance starts with the onomatopoeia *chun chun* (7 times), and then dialogue is presented translated in Japanese inside brackets. Each box of dialogue is then ended with the sentence *saigo ni suzume rashiku* ‘in the end, like a sparrow’, and then different variations of the same onomatopoeia *chun*. Compared to other animal characters in *Mazā 3*, sparrows present less linguistic variation between the 8 NPCs. Their dialogues are presented in *teineigo*, with the *jodōshi -masu* in both affirmative and negative sentences with the form *-masen* (13 occurrences), the polite second-person pronoun *anata*, the form of request *kudasai*, and very rare use of colloquialism with just two instances of contracted form (*-chau* in lieu of *-te shimau*, and *-nakya ikenai* instead of *-nakereba ikenai*). Because the NPCs act as a kind of tutorial to teach the player new game mechanics, language must be as clear as possible, and in such case linguistic variation for purposes of in-game characterisation is not considered priority. This is consistent with other “tutorial-like” NPC, like Kajitsu from *Ribura no mita yume*, who is depicted as a speaker of normative Standard Japanese: native speakers appear to recognise such tutorial-like speech style in the questionnaire survey (see 6.2.7).

Similarly, the category of frogs in *Mazā 3* is composed of 17 different characters, who serve as in-game save points, where the player character can save their progress. Differently from other animal characters in the same game, dialogues for the frogs NPCs are not presented first through onomatopoeia and then translated into Japanese inside brackets. Instead, utterances are presented in Japanese from the beginning, and the only onomatopoeias are *pyon* (13 occurrences) and *kero* (9 occurrences). There is internal variation among the different characters, but less so than other animal NPCs in the same game. This could also be due to the fact that the

frog characters have a technical function inside the game as save points. As such, the potential creative elements brought by a stronger linguistic characterisation are deemed as less important than their ludic function as in-game mechanics. As such, the examples of sparrows and frogs NPCs from *Mazā 3* show that, when the gameplay function of an NPC is regarded as more important than their diegetic and narrative functions, the degree of language variation decreases, and language choices tend to be closer to Standard Japanese.

5.9.2. Laughter

Among paraverbal elements, transcriptions of laughter have been regarded as having the potential to characterise the speaker (cf. Kinsui, 2003: 207). For example, in his analysis of several contemporary manga, Sumida (2018) has shown how different types of transcription are associated by native speakers of Japanese to different characteristics of the speaker, such as gender, age, and various attitudes and impressions. In particular, laughter is used for villains, as a way to mock the addressee, usually the player character.

Two examples of laughter (*guhaha* and *fuahaha*) that are thought to be associated to villainous male characters can be found in the target corpus, where they are associated to villains. For example, in the game *Oboro Muramasa*, the character of Fudō Myōō is a *myōō* (Wisdom King), a type of wrathful deity prominent in Buddhism, which acts as one of the bosses that need to be defeated by the male protagonist to proceed in the story. Another villain character, Bob from *Gurumin 3D*, uses various forms of laughter like *haha* and *gahahaha*, which can also be regarded as index of male character (Sumida, 2018: 148). The dragon bosses in the video game *Taiko no tatsujin* also use the laughter *guhahahaha* and *hahahahaha*, which are especially found in the dialogue of male villainous characters. Finally, the dialogue of the villain character of Gāgan from *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito* also feature the laughter *guhahahaha*. As such, the corpus confirms the findings of Sumida (2018), and these transcriptions are consistently used to index a male villain character, usually a boss. From this point of view, video game dialogues do not appear to differ from other examples of fictionalised orality, thus also suggesting the fossilised and conservative nature of the medialect.

5.9.3. Female-associated interjections

The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* states that the interjections (*kandōshi*) that are normatively more often associated to female language are *ara* and *mā*. In fictional works, *ara* is used in particular to characterise upper-class and affluent female speakers (Okazaki, 2014a: 16-17), while *mā* is considered as index of femininity, affectation, elegance, and grace (Yoda, 2014i: 176). However,

in the corpus, *mā* appears to be used by 10 male characters, and only one female character. The male characters are predominantly neutral characters or ally characters and are characterised as elderly male speakers. According to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, *maa* is a conclusive adverb, but can also be used interjectionally to convey a feeling of resignation or appeasement, and as such appears to be more common in the corpus (*demo mā omae soko soko wa yaru ja nai ka* ‘well, you’re quite good at it, aren’t you?’). The only appearance of *mā* together with *ara* is found in the dialogue of a middle-aged female speaker in *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. As such, it appears that inside the corpus *mā* is regarded as index of the old age of the speaker, and with the tendency of being associated to elderly males, rather than being exclusively associated to female language, as normatively argued by the dictionary. However, this is not reflected in the CEJC, where 39 out of 49 occurrences of *mā* are found in utterances by women, and are especially associated with middle-aged and elderly female speakers, with 28 occurrences found in the speech of women aged 40-79 years.

On the other hand, the interjection *ara* appears to be more closely related to *joseigo*, as it is found in the dialogue of 5 female ally characters. However, two elderly ally male characters also use this interjection. As such, there appears to be a sort of conflation between female language and elderly male language when it comes to the choice of interjection. The association between *ara* and female speakers is reflected in the CEJC, where 402 out of 554 occurrences are found in utterances of women. However, the association between *ara* and elderly male language is not reflected, as 111 out of 152 occurrences are found in utterances by males aged 20-44 years, and especially 79 out of 152 occurrences in utterances by males aged 20-29 years.

As for idiolectal female-associated interjections, *yatte oshimai* ‘beat him’ is used once by the character of Takorina from *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*: this expression is associated to female villains, particularly those belonging to the Time Bokan (*Taimu bōkan*) anime franchise by Tatsunoko (cf. Yahoo!Chiebukuro, 2022). The use of iconised and fossilised expressions, borrowed from previous popular works of fiction, points to the intertextuality of the medialect of contemporary pop culture in Japan: as argued also in 4.7, creators reference such shared repertoire of character tropes and linguistic styles. In 6.3, I will expand on the theme of intertextuality with the notion of “database” (cf. Azuma, 2007) as introduced in 1.4, to address how consumers of media recognise such established characterological figures and associated linguistic registers.

5.9.4. Male-associated interjections

The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* argues that some interjections are normatively associated to male speakers. For example, *oi* is used when addressing a peer or a subordinate. *Oi* is used by 13

characters in the corpus, all of which are either ally characters or neutral characters. The use of *oi* is paired with the use of *anta* or *omae* as second-person pronoun, and by a predominance in the use of *ore* as first-person pronoun. The dictionary states that such features together frame the speaker as male, and this would reinforce the image of *oi* as being part of *danseigo*. This linguistic norm appears to be reflected also in the CEJC, where 79 out of 123 occurrences of the interjections are found in the speech of male speakers. In this case, the indexical field of *oi* in video game dialogues appears to be regimented (cf. Bucholtz, 2011: 257). Whereas in everyday occurrences *oi* appears to be used more by male speakers, nonetheless the CEJC suggests that also female speakers make use of the interjection. In contrast, in the target corpus *oi* exclusively indexes male identity. This is an example of how, in the diffusion of a linguistic form, some of its social meanings can undergo a process of indexical bleaching (cf. Squires, 2014), being weakened or cancelled when they become features of fictionalised orality.

Due to the perceived directness and bluntness of male speech, expletives can also come to be associated to the register of male speakers. In the target corpus, such is the case for the character of Lord Ferdinand from *Ansangu kingudamu*. Several expletives are found in the speech of the NPC, like *kuso* ‘shit’ (3 times), *chikushō* ‘damn it’ (once), and *urusai* ‘shut up’ (once). In particular, *kuso* is regarded as index of male speakers due to its vulgarness and its potential use as an insult as well as an interjection (Kinsui, 2014h: 75-76). Forms of request in the *meireikei* form are also common, with 3 occurrences in the negative form (*fuzakeru na!* ‘don’t make fun of me!’), and two in the affirmative form (*yamero!* ‘stop!’), to add to the oppressive feeling of the dialogue. As the NPC is not an ally to the player, the use of expletives and imperative forms of request concur to frame the speaker as a non-positive figure.

Conversely, in the CEJC, 9 occurrences of *chikushō* are present and are found only in the speech of male speakers, while 34 out of 37 occurrences of the term *kuso* used as expletive are uttered by males, which appears to support the normative association of expletives with male speech.

5.9.5. Others

As pointed out by Bublitz (2017: 247-248), disfluency markers are an important index of spoken language in written media. As such, as suggested also by Locher, Jucker, Landert & Messerli (2023: 21), «linguistic features such as hesitations, fillers, false starts and overlaps, which are typical of spontaneous spoken interaction, are introduced into the written texts to create stylistic effects and to contribute to characterisation».

Inside the target corpus, such an example is found in the dialogue of the NPC Chasuka from *Taiko no tatsujin*. The dialogues of the character contain a high number of fillers and stuttering. These paraverbal elements of fragmentation, redundancy, and lack of cohesion can become indicators for the stylisation of a specific characterological figure. In the case of Chasuka, this contributes to her characterisation as a fearful NPC with a low self-esteem. Such disposition also expressed through verbal language use, as the expression *muri* ‘impossible’ occurs 3 times, and the synonymous verbs *dekikkonai* ‘never be able to’ and *dekinai* ‘cannot do’ occur respectively also twice and once. However, they all occur in the first portion of the game, as the character is introduced. As the game progresses and the character grows, the number of stuttering and the use of negative expression progressively disappears. This serves as an additional narrative device, to express the newfound confidence of the NPC in her abilities. Despite this evolution in characterisation, the tone of the utterance remains polite throughout the game, with large use of *teineigo* (the various forms of *-masu* occurs 59 times). Explicit tokens of female language are found sparingly, such as one use of the final particle *yo* in zero copula construction (*sonna muri yo* ‘that’s impossible’), two uses of the sentence-final expression *mono* (*nan datte dekiru hazu desu mono!* ‘they can do anything!’), and one use of the final particle *no* in an assertive sentence (*kono machi wa norowarete iru no* ‘this city is cursed’). On the other hand, the masculine particle *zo* is used once in the fixed expression *ganbaru zo!* ‘I’ll do my best!’ towards the end of the game, to epitomise such newfound self-confidence.

Other idiolectal interjections are used sparingly in the target corpus, to add a further characterisation to the speech of specific categories of NPCs. Such an example can be found in the interjection *urameshiya*, which is used as expression of sorrow and revenge. In the medialect, it is associated to the register of ghost characters in non-serious fictional works and ghost stories aimed at a young audience, often as a greeting (Hirosaka, 2014b: 27). In the corpus, *urameshiya* is used by 3 ghost characters in the game *Oboro Muramasa*, two female ghosts of former courtesans, and one ghost of a former feudal warrior. While the respective dialogues feature a greater number of indexes of more relevant registers (respectively “courtesan register” and “feudal warrior register”), the inclusion of the interjection at the start of the dialogue as an introduction and a form of greeting adds a further characterisation to the NPCs as sorrowful ghosts.

5.10. Vocabulary

Although indexes hold iconic and indexical significance, they are rarely used in isolation. Instead, they are combined with other indexes and linguistic features to form specific registers.

Consequently, they often co-occur together with other linguistic phenomena, contributing to the development of distinct linguistic styles that characterise specific in-game personae.

5.10.1. Non-standard vocabulary

The most present dialect inside the target corpus is Kansai dialect. For example, as introduced in 5.6.3, in the *Dōbutsu no mori* series, the two characters of Risetto and Raketto are two blue-collar workers mole brothers. In *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*, various tokens associated to Kansai dialect are present in the speech of Raketto: *ee* ‘good’ (4 occurrences), *hona* ‘then’ (two occurrences), *kannin* ‘pardon’ (one occurrence), *shitatte* (contraction of *shite agete* ‘do for me’), *yoroshi omasse* ‘that’s good’, 3 occurrences of the honorific *jodōshi yasu* (*o-ki o tsukete okaeriyasu* ‘take care and goodbye’) and 3 occurrences of the polite *jodōshi haru* (*mata kiharimashita ka* ‘did you come back?’) (cf. Takagi, 2025; Nakai, 2025a). The honorific *-han* is used towards the player character, while the second-person pronoun *omae* is used once towards his brother, Risetto. In general, *teineigo* is used in all instances where Raketto is talking to the player character, while larger use of dialectal tokens is featured when the NPC is talking to his own brother, which is also a speaker of Kansai dialect. The higher degree of politeness in the speech of Raketto is used as characterisation to set him apart from his brother Risetto. While Raketto is framed as a gentler and understanding figure, Risetto is characterised as rougher and more short-tempered, and this appears to also be reflected in their dialogues.

In the case of Risetto, he is a mole whose role in the *Dōbutsu no mori* series is to remind players to save before quitting the game, and to give a lecture if they do not. In *Oideyo Dōbutsu no mori* he very first time the character comes to warn the player, while still using tokens associated to Kansai dialect, he tries to employ a more polite tone, with the use of the formal first-person pronoun *watakushi* twice (even correcting himself once: *washi... iya, watakushi ga...*), and 12 occurrences of the *jodōshi -masu*. From the second appearance onwards, the character switches to *washi* and drops the formal tone of his first encounter. Various tokens associated to Kansai dialect are present: *ee* ‘good’ (19 occurrences), *hona* ‘then’ (5 occurrences), *shitatte* (contraction of *shite agete* ‘do for me’), *nanbo* ‘how much’, *akan* ‘no good’ (7 occurrences), *honma* ‘really’ (5 occurrences). Transcriptions of phonetic variation are also present, such as *morote* instead of *moratte*, *yūte* and *yūta* instead of *itte* and *itta*, and *dēhenkatta* instead of *denakatta*. Regarding verbs, we find 13 occurrences of the *hojodōshi -toru*, contracted form of *-te oru*, for the progressive tense, and 3 uses of the verb *chau*, dialectal counterpart to the Standard Japanese verb *chigau* ‘to be different’, used in Kansai dialect as an interjection in tag questions (“isn’t it?”), which in turn is used in the medialect as index of Kansai speakers or when

the work is set in the region (Hirosaka, 2014c: 124-125). In *Oideyo Dōbutsu no mori*, the character of Raketto had not yet been introduced, and as such no “gentler” counterpart to the “rough” persona is presented in-game.

Fairies in *Ni no kuni* also talk in Kansai dialect, such as the character of Shizuku. The NPC is a fairy (*yōsei*) and is an ally to the player character. On the lexical level, we find *hona* ‘then’, *honma* ‘very’ (cf. Ōtagaki, 2014c: 174-175), *nanbo* ‘how much’ (3 occurrences), *ee* ‘good’ (23 occurrences), *akan* ‘not good’ (cf. Hirosaka, 2014a: 1-2), *donai* ‘how’ (5 occurrences), *aho* ‘stupid’ (cf. Ōtagaki, 2014a: 14-15), and *gyōsan* ‘much’ (one occurrence). Likewise, we find transcriptions of phonetic variants, such as, for example, *yūte* instead of *itte*, *morota* in lieu of *moratta*, *waroteru* instead of *waratteru*, *hayo* instead of *hayaku*, and *hore* and *honde* in lieu of *sore* and *sore de* (cf. Nakai, 2025a). Regarding verbs, we find 20 occurrences of the expression *-toru* for the progressive tense, 6 occurrences of the expression *-taru* (contraction of *-te yaru*), and 5 uses of the verb *chau*, dialectal counterpart to the Standard Japanese verb *chigau* (cf. Hirosaka, 2014c).

The association between Kansai dialect and comedy is also made evident in a cutscene in *Ni no kuni*. The dialogical exchange between the two fairies is structured as a *manzai* act. *Manzai* is a form of comedy that typically involves two performers, a straight man (*tsukkomi*) and a funny man (*boke*), exchanging jokes based on mutual misunderstanding, double-talk, puns, and other verbal gags. In recent times, *manzai* has often been associated with the Ōsaka region, and *manzai* comedians often speak in the Kansai dialect during their acts. A large number of tokens associated to Kansai dialect are present in the dialogue, such as *ee* ‘good’, *chau* ‘isn’t it’, *honma* ‘really’ (3 occurrences), *hona* ‘then’, and dialectal verb forms like *yūte* ‘saying’ (instead of the normative form *itte*) and the progressive converbal form *-toru* in lieu of *-te iru* or *-teru* in two occurrences. The comic nature of the dialogue is also expressed through wordplay, such as a pun regarding the owner of *bukiya* ‘weapon shop’ who does actually not know nothing about weapons because he is *bukiyō* ‘incompetent’. The first-person pronoun *watashi* is used only once by the *boke* when he assumes the persona of the *oyaji* (‘middle-aged man’, but also ‘owner’) of the weapon shop. The polite copula *desu* is used twice at the beginning of the act, and then 4 times during the comedy skit involving the weapon shop, as the two comedians impersonate the joke (with the *tsukkomi* acting as the customer, and the *boke* as the shop owner), while the copula of preference appears to be the dialectal form *ya*. The indirect form of request *-te hoshii* (*buki misete hoshii n desu kedo* ‘I’d like to see some weapons’) is also used only in the comedy skit. The other forms are used “out of character” by the NPCs and are associated to Kansai dialect.

Among other features associated to Western Japanese in the target corpus, *washi* is more commonly regarded as index of the register of elderly speakers and to Western Japanese. The polite copula *de gansu* is regarded as a dialectal abbreviation of *de gozaimasu* and is also associated to Western Japan, particularly Hiroshima (Machi, 2025). In the target corpus *de gansu* is used by the character of Iwao in *Gurumin 3D* as idiolectal sentence-final particle (*washira obake datte, moto wa ishi ya ki dattari suru de gansu* ‘even we phantoms were originally made of stone or wood’), together with first-person pronoun *washi* as additional index of Western Japanese (see 5.2.10). Furthermore, as also shown in 5.9.1, In *Mother 3* three mice character speak in a recognisable register with features associated to Kyūshū dialect, where the register can be regarded as a particular case of *rōjingo*, indexing the old age of the speakers, which is also reinforced by the use of *jaro* as copula in 3 instances.

The overlap between “old male register” and Western Japanese appears to be evident also in the speech of Makemake from *Taiko no tatsujin*. The character is an old man from Easter Island with the body made from stone, inspired by a moai, monolithic human figures from the island. As an old man, his speech style features many indexes associated to *rōjingo*, such as the first-person pronoun *washi*, the copular expression *ja*, the use of *oru* as verb of existence and as auxiliary for the progressive form, and the final particle *nō* in assertive context. Many other tokens are associated to Western Japanese, and especially to Kansai dialect, such as the phonetic variants *hate* ‘then’, *hore* ‘that’ and *shimōta* (*wasurete shimōta* ‘I ended up forgetting’) in lieu of *sate*, *sore*, and *shimatta*. The derogatory auxiliary *yoru* (*jaakuna mamono ga araware yoru* ‘[damned] evil monsters are appearing’) is also associated to Kansai dialect (cf. Takagi, 2025), as is the expression *-n to* (*murabitoachi o sukuwan to* ‘we need to save the villagers’).

An overlap of dialectal features associated to different diatopic varieties of Japanese is present in the dialogue of Izasaō, a *bakemono* (monster) from *Oboro Muramasa*. For example, features of Western Japanese are found in the expression *-te oru* (in this case in the verb *hohoendoru* ‘to be smiling’) and the negative auxiliary *-nu*, also characteristically associated, on a higher order of indexicality, to the register of elderly speakers. However, the character also uses *ora* as first-person pronouns and its speech features phonetic variation of *-ai* into *-ee* (such as *kudasee* and *mitee*), linguistic features which are widely associated to Eastern Japanese (cf. Hiramoto, 2009).

A similar non-normative overlap of dialectal features is also found by demons in *Oboro Muramasa*. This category is composed of 5 different *oni*: 3 *ko-oni* ‘small demons’ as small fry enemy, one *ō-oni* ‘great demon’ functioning as boss, and one *aka-oni* ‘red demon’, also functioning as boss. Among the 5 NPCs differences can be observed in their respective dialogues,

to differentiate their characterisation. *Washi* is used exclusively by the *ō-oni*, while *ora* is used by one *ko-oni*. As for second-person pronouns, *omee* is used by the 3 *ko-oni*, while *omae* is used once by the *ō-oni* and once by a *ko-oni*. The address term *musumekko* ‘young girl’ towards the player character is used once by the *aka-oni*. Regarding third-person address terms, *oyabun* ‘boss’ and *oyabin* (phonetic variation of *oyabun*) are used exclusively by the *ko-oni*. The copular expression *da* is used by one *ko-oni*, the *ō-oni* and the *aka-oni*, while the copular expression *ja* is used by all characters at least once. The imperative construction “*rentaikei* + *ga ee*” (*iku ga ee* ‘go’) and the *meireikei* (*kuwasero* ‘let [me] eat’) are used once by two different *ko-oni*. Among the different negative auxiliaries, *-nee* is used only by the *ko-oni*, *-nai* is used by the *ō-oni* and by one *ko-oni*, *-nu* is used by the *ō-oni*, and *-n* is used only by the *aka-oni*. The converbal form *-toru* (contraction of *-te oru*) and its negative form *-te oranu* are used by two *ko-oni* and by the *ō-oni*. The auxiliary *-n* for the volitive form (*iza kuwan* ‘now let’s eat’) is an archaism and is used once by the *ō-oni*. Dialectal features associated to Western Japanese, such as the verb *oru* and the derogatory *hojodōshi yoru* (*musume ga sanbiki hodo oriyoru* ‘there are even 3 [damned] girls’) occur in the dialogue of the *aka-oni*. On the other hand, final particles associated to Eastern Japanese varieties, and especially with rural registers, such as *pe* and *be* to indicate speculation and volition, or *da* to express assertion, are used only by the *ko-oni* and are used together with tokens associated to Western Japanese varieties (*ee da* ‘it’s good’, *oru da* ‘[they] are’). Rather than indexing a specific geographical provenance, this creative juxtaposition indexes the “ruralness” of the *ko-oni*. In turn, this characterisation as rural speaker makes the *ko-oni* more comical and humorous, compared to the more serious tone of their superiors, the *ō-oni* and the *aka-oni*.

Features of dialect of Eastern Japan are associated to the rural identity of the speaker. In the dialogues of the mole character Mogurenu from *Gurumin 3D*, among the interjections, the idiolect *un da* is used twice, where the interjections *un* ‘yeah’ is followed by the final particle *da*, associated to Eastern Japanese and to rural dialects (cf. Iwata, 2014d). The final particle *be* (see 5.8.9) is used in Eastern Japanese to indicate speculation, volition, or invitation. However, since it is used by Mogurenu at the end of every sentence, regardless of the actual pragmatic meaning of the utterance, it can be regarded as an idiolect for the character, indexing and reinforcing the “rural identity” of the NPC.

Similarly, the snowmen NPCs (*yukidaruma*) from various instalments of the *Dōbutsu no mori* series refer to themselves as *inakamono* ‘country bumpkin’, and many linguistic features in their dialogues index this ruralness: the first-person pronoun *ora*, the copular expression *dasu* (cf. Takagi, 2025) appearing also as marker for the form of request (*matsu dasu* ‘wait’), the

final particle *zura* which is used in the Tōkai-Tōsan dialect of Chūbu region for the dubitative mood (Onishi, 2018: 564), and the greeting *arigatosan* ‘thanks’. Some of these tokens are associated to Western Japanese (*dasu*, *arigatosan*), while others are linked to Eastern Japanese (*ora*, *zura*), and altogether they appear to be used to index a supposed rural identity, rather than a precise geographical provenance.

Different dialectal features can be used to set apart characters belonging to the same characterological figure, to have more variety inside the game, like in *Oboro Muramasa* for the characters of the spirits of the dead. This figure of personhood comprises 3 different characters: two of them share linguistic features, while another is differently characterised. The first two characters use *ee* (two times), various forms of the copula *ya* (5 times), variations of the *-te* form (*omōte*, *rashūte*, and *yayakoshūte* instead of *omotte*, *rashikute*, and *yayakoshikute*), *yō* instead of *yoku*, and *nen* and *wa* as the preferred final particles. One of the two characters also uses *washi* as first-person pronoun. These characteristics are associated to Western Japanese, and especially Kansai. However, the other character does not present features associated to Western Japanese, but instead uses features associated to standard male language, such as *ore* as first-person pronoun and *yo* as final particle. There is one instance where the diphthong *-ai* is reduced to *-ee*, originally stemming from the Shitamachi dialect of Edo (cf. Mitsui, 2025: 623), but now commonly associated to informal masculine speech (Hiramoto, 2013: 61). *Onushi* is used together with the address term *hime* ‘princess’ to address the female player character. The verb *yagaru* is used once. This character also uses the phrase *nasakenakutte tōchan namida ga dete kurā* ‘I’m so ashamed of my son I could cry’, which appears to be a quote from the TV series *Abare hacchaku* (cf. Oreryū, 2015). This non-standard verb ending in *-rā* in lieu of *-ru* is used once more in the form *-shite yarā* in lieu of *-shite yaru* (*ore ga kotteri shioki shite yarā na* ‘I’ll give [him] a tough punishment’). Together, these features appear to give the character an image of roughness and vulgarness. In turn, this register serves to set the speaker apart from the other ghosts, who use dialectal and sociolectal features associated to Western Japanese and to elderly speakers. Moreover, the use of an iconic sentence from a well-known TV series again suggests the intertextuality of the medialect, where previous works of pop culture are often referenced for comedic or parodic purposes.

Finally, in the dialogues of one character, Tanukichi from *Atsumare Dōbutsu no mori*, a tanuki merchant, the most occurring features in his speech are the expressions *danamo* and *damo*. The expressions are thought to come from Nagoya dialect (cf. Yamada, 2025: 720), but are now associated to this single character, functioning as idiolect and being recognised as such by consumers of popular culture.

5.10.2. Polite language and *bikago* (refined speech)

According to the *Nihon kokugo daijiten*, refined speech (*bikago*) is regarded as one type of *keigo*, and it refers to communicative strategy where the language is rendered more elegant through the use of prefixes (such as *o-kome* ‘rice’ instead of *kome*) and appropriate vocabulary (*oishii* in lieu of *umai* for ‘good’), and this is associated to *joseigo* (female language).

One example is the of Yukidarumama from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*, who is depicted as the mother in a family of 4 snowmen, which is also made explicit in her name, a wordplay with *yukidaruma* ‘snowman’ and *mama* ‘mom’. Her speech style follows pattern widely associated to *joseigo*, such as the first-person pronoun *atakushi* or the third-person address term *dārin* ‘darlin’ referring to her husband Yukidaruman. The expression *damasu*, likely coming from the contraction of *de gozaimasu*, is an idiolect, but is reminiscent of the expression *zamasu*, used by middle-aged feminine speakers in the world of fiction (cf. Sadanobu, 2021: 161). The final particle *no* is used both in interrogative and affirmative sentences, the latter of which is thought to be index of *joseigo*. The final particle *koto* is also associated to female speakers in the medi-alect, especially together with features of polite speech (Okazaki, 2014d: 83-84). Instances of *sonkeigo* and *kenjōgo* are also present in the corpus, such as the verbs *kudasaru* and the converbal forms *-te rassharu* used towards the player character and *-te orimasu* used when referring to herself.

Another different example of female language is the speech of stereotypical feminine gay men, such as Rasshi from *Gurumin 3D*. The character self-identifies as *okama*, a colloquial expression referring to feminine gay men (Maree, 2020: 16). While the term is being regarded as derogatory, its use in popular media is still very common. The interjection *ara ara* is commonly associated to female speakers. The character also uses one time the adjective *sukapontan* (*sukapontan na musume* ‘stupid girl’, which is used by the female villain in the *Time Bokan* (*Taimu Bokan*) anime franchise by Tatsunoko (cf. Pixiv hyakka jiten, n.d.). There is a large use of graphemic notation to index elongated vowels in non-standard cases (*chottō* ‘hey’, *mattē* ‘wait’), and especially in final particles to index a particular swinging intonation. This is emphasised also by the insertion of the particle *-n* at the end of sentences: this feature is also observed in the dialogue of the character of Takorina, another flamboyant female NPC from *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*. In her dialogue, copular expressions are used only once, while *taigendome*, a type of zero copula construction where the sentence is ended with a noun or an adjectival noun, and the copular expression or the adjectival predicate are omitted, appear to be much more prevalent.

Depending on the setting of the story, games can also feature archaic female-associated language. For example, the game *Oboro Muramasa* features two different ghostly characters called *yorō mitama* ‘spirits of prostitutes’. The first one uses *watchi* (see 5.2.12), a first-person pronoun associated to the speech of courtesans of Edo period (Washi, 2004: 83). The second character instead uses *watakushi*, which is particularly associated to an overtly polite manner of speaking, or to an upper-class feminine character.

5.10.3. Coarse language

Coarse language is usually associated to male speakers, especially younger males. A common feature of this register is the phonetic variation *-ee* instead of *-ai* or *-oi*, such as the vernacular variant *sugee* in lieu of the standard version *sugoi*, which is closely tied to a masculine persona (Hiramoto, 2013: 60-61), or the negative auxiliary *-nee* (see 5.6.2). Other such pattern of changes is found in *kudasee* instead of *kudasai*, *mitee ni* in lieu of *mitai ni*. In the target corpus, the use of coarse masculine language is especially interesting in the case of Pikachu from *Meitantei Pikachū*, where the popular character from the Pokémon franchise assumes the persona of a detective in the game, on a variation from the usual presentation of the character as the cute mascot of the series. His language is direct and with a low register of politeness, and this is tied to the creative characterisation of the NPC as a detective (see 6.2.6 for more).

Coarse language is also a strategy to depict the speaker as arrogant, such as for the character of the Prince in *Gurumin 3D*, as introduced in 5.4.3. Expressions reflecting the self-perceived superiority of the speaker include the arrogant first-person pronoun, the expression *gokurō* ‘thank you for your efforts’ used towards subordinates, and the expletive *urusai zo* ‘shut up’. Such register appears to be widely used for the characterisation of villains. For example, for the character of Gāgan from *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*, the overall tone of his dialogues is derogatory towards his opponents, the player character and his allies. The arrogant and self-aggrandising first-person pronoun *oresama* is paired with the derogatory second-person address terms *kisama* ‘you’, *waga shimobe* ‘my servant’, and with the derogatory suffix *me* (*orokadomo me* ‘you damned fools’). The exclusive use of verbs in the imperative form is consistent with this persona. The derogatory auxiliary verb *oru* (*jamamono-domo ga oi kakete kiotta ka* ‘you [bastard] nuisances have come after me?’) is the Kansai counterpart to the standard verb *yagaru*. However, such an over-the-top register can actually achieve a comedic effect and is recognised by native speakers as belonging to an enemy who is not very intelligent or strong, but who is actually regarded as a laughingstock by the audience (see 6.2.8).

5.10.4. Archaic language

In the target corpus, archaic language appears to be associated to NPCs who are framed as important figures, such as deities, or to imponent villains who are not depicted as comedic. For example, archaisms can be found in the speech of the Buddhist deities Fudō-myōō and Amida-nyorai from *Oboro Muramasa* who act as two of the bosses that need to be defeated by the male protagonist in order to proceed in the story, such as the copula *ja*, the negative *jodōshi -n* and *-nu*, and the concessive suffix *-do* after the *mizenkei* (irrealis form) of the verb for the adversative clause. While these indexes are usually thought to belong to the register of elderly speakers (*rōjingo*), its use here can refer to the atemporal nature of the divinity. Similarly, the use of archaic language together with vulgar language as index of villainous character is found also in the characters of the Ryūmyaku from *Taiko no tatsujin*. This category of characters consists of 7 different NPCs, who are all dragons, villains, and who are bosses that need to be defeated by the player to proceed in the game. Vulgar expressions are regularly used, such as the derogatory suffix *me* to refer to the player character and his allies, the construction *-te yaru* and the *keiyōdōshi koshaku* ‘impudent’, similarly to other villains in the corpus. Archaic language is also used, such as the suffix *gotoki* (*kisamara gotoki* ‘like you [bastards]’), and the *jodōshi -shi*, the *rentaikei* of the *jodōshi -ki* used for past tense in Classical Japanese (*watashi wa sekai o horobosu tame ni umareshi sonzai* ‘I was born to destroy the world’). The final particle *yo* is only used as a vocative (*ningen yo*, ‘humans’), never as sentence-final particles with verbs. In these two cases, with deities and dragons, the use of archaic language instead of an over-the-top coarse register (like the one used by Gāgan and mentioned in 5.10.3) appears to be used to give a more serious characterisation to the NPCs.

Another category of character who use archaic language is that of the guardians (*bannin*) from *Gurumin 3D*. This category is composed of 9 different NPCs, who function as sentries (*bannin*), preventing the player from proceeding further in the dungeons unless certain conditions are met. At the start of their dialogues, the NPCs all assume the persona of grave and severe guardians, and their language choices are in line with such characterological figure. Indexes of this include *ware* as first-person pronoun, *nanji* and *onore* as second-person pronouns, and a large use of forms of request in the *meireikei* (*onore ga sonzai o ryōashi de waga zujō ni shimese* ‘show your presence above my head with both feet’), in the literary form *-te miyo* (*nanji no takeki chikara... misete miyo!* ‘show me your fierce power!’), and in the construction “*rentaikei + ga ii*” (*kono saki ni susumu ga ii* ‘proceed’). Other archaisms include the *jodōshi -n* for the volitional mood of the verb (*saki ni susuman to hossuru naraba* ‘if you wish to go on’), the *jodōshi -nu* for the negative form, the use of *beshi* in the *shūshikei* form. However, if

the player character fails to meet such requests, the sentries then offer help and hints in exchange for a fee. During these exchanges, the NPCs let go of their “guardian persona” and assume a more relaxed and less archaic tone of speaking. In these dialogues, different linguistic features are used, such as the final particle *be* (also used twice as a non-standard form of request: *ki o tsukeru be* ‘be careful’), the polite form of request *-te hoshii*, and the greetings *maido ari da be* ‘thank you for your continued patronage’ and its abbreviated form *maido da be* when the monetary transaction in exchange for in-game hints is concluded, with such greetings framing the speaker as a kind of merchant or shopkeeper (cf. Shukuri, 2015: 62). This change of register suggests how developers play creatively with the expectations of players and with the established linguistic norms in popular media. On the one hand, the audience would expect a guard-like character in a dungeon to speak in a fantasy-like, archaic language. Conversely, such austere persona is then “broken” in a humorous way when the characters ask for money to overcome the trials, subverting the expectations of players: this change in characterological figure, from “the guardian” to “the merchant”, appears to be indexed also through a change in language use.

A similar “break of character” occurs in the speech of Madoi from *Kyōiki no ichigatsu*. The NPC is a very young god (*kami*). Similarly to other young characters in other games and media, the first-person address term is the character’s own proper name (see 5.2.12). Regarding the address terms *totosama* and *kakasama*, used by Madoi to refer to his parents, the player character gives the following comment: *sore ga fubo o imi suru hōgen da to rikai suru made sūbyō kakatta* ‘It took me a few seconds to realise that these were dialectal words for “father and mother”’. The other address term *nenesama* is used both by itself and together with the name of the protagonist of the game (*Miho-nenesama* ‘big sister Miho’). Despite the young age of the NPC, his speech style is polite, with many instances of the copula *desu* and the *jodōshi -masu*, and 3 occurrences of the *kenjōgo* verb *orimasu*. In this case, between the characterological figure of the “divine figure” with its own archaic and severe register, and the figure of the “small children” with its own childish register, the second one appears to be prevalent in the characterisation of Madoi, albeit indexes belonging to the first register can also be found, such as two instances of the negative *jodōshi -nu*.

In the same game, the speech of the character Shiro appears to be more aligned to the archaic register. The NPC is a female *kami* ‘goddess’, but her dialogues do not present obvious indexes of female speech. Rather, linguistic features commonly occurring in her utterances can be instead associated to *rōjingo*, such as the first-person pronoun *washi*, the copula *ja*, the use of *oru* as verb of existence, and as *hojodōshi* for the progressive form. Linguistic features associated

to Western Japanese are also present, such as 4 instances of the verb *yūte* instead of the standard form *itte* (*yūte mii* ‘try to say [that]’). The use of archaisms is in line with that of other NPCs of divine nature, such as the negative *jodōshi -nu*, imperative forms of request in the construction “*rentaikei + ga ii*” and “*rentaikei + ga yokarō*”. As such, the character has not been recognised as female by the native speakers in the questionnaire (see 6.2.9).

A similar character that gives a different perception to native speakers is the character of Toyoukebime from *Shippū no Usagimaru*. The character has the appearance of a bunny and shares the name with the Shintō goddess of agriculture. However, rather than belonging to “divinity register” as other god-like characters, the speech-style of this character appears much closer to *rōjingo*, with the expression *ja*, the form *-te oru* for the progressive tense, the final particle *nō*, and the phonetic variation *shimōta* (associated to Western Japanese) instead of *shimatta*. Archaisms can also be found, such as the first-person pronoun *warawa* (*kenjōgo* and associated to female language), the second-person pronoun *onushi*, and *-shi*, the *rentaikei* of the *jodōshi -ki* used for past tense in Classical Japanese (*hōgu to yobareshi tama ja* ‘they are spheres called treasure-instruments’). In the questionnaires, native speakers recognised the “elderly male register”, but due to the use of female-associated pronoun *warawa* the majority recognised the character as a female speaker (see 6.2.10). It is interesting to note that *warawa* is also the pronoun of choice of female characters in *kyōgen* (Pappalardo, 2023: 606), and as such appears to have a long history as a linguistic marker of gender in works of fiction.

5.10.5. Foreignised language and *katakoto nihongo* (broken Japanese)

As argued by Yoda (2011) and as further investigated by Ito & Bisila (2020), characters depicted as ‘Westerners’ (*seiyōjin*) in fictional works of popular culture are linguistically characterised by the misuse of sentence-final particle *ne*, non-standard mora insertion or deletion, and native language insertion. Such speakers of foreignised language, also defined as *katakoto nihongo* ‘broken Japanese’, can be found in video games, too. Specifically, speakers of foreignised Japanese are featured not only in video games that actually take place in Japan, or which actually feature characters depicted as “Japanese” or as “Westerners”, but also in games with a fantastical setting and featuring non-human NPCs. In such cases, as will be expressed below, features of foreignised speech function on a higher order of indexicality, to address specific characteristics of the speaker.

For example, in the target corpus, and as also analysed by Dahlberg-Dodd (2022), the character of Johnny from the *Dōbutsu no mori* series is a seagull, and his only function in-game is to reward the player with special items of furniture, usually artefacts from around the world if

the player answers his question about where he is going, which would suggest that the NPC is an explorer or a traveller. Dialogues by Johnny feature many instances of broken Japanese. English-language words and interjections are also used, transcribed in the Latin alphabet (*rōmaji*), such as “But”, “No”, “Wow!”, “Hummm...”, “Ah...”, “Oh!”, and “Tasty!”. As pointed out by Dahlberg-Dodd (2022), in the case of Johnny «chaotic switching between hiragana and katakana can be interpreted as a reflection of his haphazard, careless lifestyle» (Dahlberg-Dodd, 2022: 76). Similarly, the ample use of anglicisms can be regarded as indexing to the migratory and “foreign” identity of seagulls upon which the characters is graphically based.

Another example of so-called “broken Japanese” is present in the dialogues of Bob from *Gurumin 3D*. Shifts in the politeness register can be found, with *-masu* forms being used alongside verbs in the *shūshikei*, *desu* with *da*, and various examples of *taigendome*. Non-normative long vowels (*chōon*) and mora insertions are also present, such as *deesu* instead of *desu*, or *kudasāi* instead of *kudasai*, which are regarded as indexes of foreignised speech (Yoda, 2011; Ito & Bisila, 2020). The copular expression *desu* is also used incorrectly after a verb in the *shūshikei* form (*sore de kono ato dō suru desu ka?* ‘so what to do next?’). Non-standard variation in the script usage is also present, with many words written in katakana instead of hiragana, especially inflectional verb endings. All these features are commonly associated with non-native speakers of Japanese, and especially with English speakers. The laughter *gahaha* and the interjection *hei* ‘hey’ are also recurring: *hei* in particular is often used in the medialect of fictional characters together with final particles such as *sa* or *ze* as index of pretentious young male characters (Yoda, 2014h: 160-162), while *gahaha* can be considered as index of a villainous role in the story (see 5.9.2). On the other hand, despite non-normative shifts in the speech style, the NPC appears to have a certain pragmatic competence in the use of honorifics: most polite forms and the *kudasai* form of request are reserved for dialogue with his superior, the Prince (*Ōji*), while non-polite forms and verbs in the *meireikei* are used towards the player character, also concurring to the creation of a villainous identity of the speaker (see 5.5.4).

The use of anglicism can also index a “cool guy” persona, such as the character of Mogurō from *Gurumin 3D*, a mole who wears black sunglasses. Together with the use of *ore* and *anta*, dialogues by Mogurō feature characteristics of spoken language, such as *warī warii* in lieu of *warui* ‘bad’ as informal apology, *oretacha* in lieu of *oretachi wa*, and *-rerya* in lieu of *-rereba*. Anglicisms are present in the address terms *yū* ‘you’ and *beibi* ‘baby’, as well as in the interjections “okay”, “great”, “yay”, and “no problem”, all in katakana. Differently from Johnny, Mogurō is portrayed as fluent in Japanese, and his occasional foreignised speech does not index him as a non-native speaker, but rather as a tough and cool guy. This is also addressed in-game,

where at the end of *Gurumin 3D* another NPC explains that Mogurō ‘has gone on a journey to become a rock star’ (*rokkusutā o mezashite tabi ni deta n da be*), further reinforcing the indexical association.

This is similar to the character of Pierre, also from *Gurumin 3D*. Pierre is described on the official website of the game as a ‘French-wannabe monster’ (*Furansu-kabure no yōkai*, Falcom, n.d.), and is a self-proclaimed ‘gentleman’ (*shinshi*). As such, his dialogues feature French loanwords in katakana, like *bonjūru* (*bonjour* ‘good morning’) as greeting, *madomoazeru* (*mademoiselle* ‘Miss’) as second-person address term towards the player character, *musshu* (*monsieur* ‘Sir’, one occurrence) as third-person address term towards another male NPC, and *danje* (*danger* ‘danger’, one occurrence) as an interjection which is then translated by the character as *abunai* ‘watch out’. The tone of Pierre’s utterances is also polite and appropriate to his gentleman-like characterological figure, with the first-person pronoun *watakushi* (although written in katakana to also emphasise the supposed foreignness of the speaker), the use of the copular expression *desu*, the *jodōshi* *-masu* (34 occurrences between affirmative and negative sentences), and various instances of *bikago* (*o-ki o tsukete* ‘take care’), *kenjōgo* (*o-kikase shimashō* ‘I will tell you’) and *sonkeigo* (*go-kigen ikaga desu ka* ‘how are you?’).

As also suggested in 4.7, the indexical field of potential meanings of katakana and foreignised language in the aforementioned cases of Johnny, Bob, Mogurō, and Pierre is shaped by the fantastical setting of the game in which they appear, where the distinction between fluency and disfluency is not important, and the ideological meaning of “non-nativeness” or “foreignness” is not activated. Instead, American-like and French-like vocabulary is creatively employed to construct the characters as either “cool” or “refined”, playing with the attitudes of players and referencing established ideologies about languages and their speakers.

5.10.6. Other registers and idiolects

A widely recognised sound change occurs in the speech of so-called ‘toddler characters’ (*yōji kyara*), where the copular expression *desu* is reported as *deshu* or *dechu* also in non-normative use as idiolectal sentence-final particle (cf. Sadanobu, 2011a: 21). Such sound change from the alveolar fricative [s] to the alveolo-palatal affricate [tɕ] is considered cute and is associated to the register of fictional toddler-like characters (cf. Sadanobu, 2011b: 150-151). This pattern occurs also in the target corpus and is not restricted to *desu*. For example, the character of Yukinko from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori* is a toddler-like snowman. The aforementioned sound change can be found in copular expressions (*dechu* and *dechita* in lieu of *desu* and *deshita*), in auxiliary verbs (8 occurrences of *-machu* and 4 occurrences of *-machita* in lieu of *-masu* and -

mashita), in the form of request (*kudachai* instead of *kudasai*), and in one use of the apology *gomen nachai* ‘I’m sorry’ instead of *gomen nasai*. As idiolect of toddlers, *dechu* occurs also 5 times in non-standard usage as *kyara gobi* (*yoroshiku decchu* ‘regards’, *arigato decchu* ‘thank you’, *dōmo decchu* ‘thanks’, *oshare shichatta decchu* ‘it’s fashionable’, *shinakucha decchu* ‘I have to’). The same register can be found in the dialogues of Pino from *Gurumin 3D*. As a toddler, dialogues of the character feature graphemic variation to express a supposed “childish” pronunciation, such as the suffix *-tama* instead of *-sama*, the copular expression *deshu* instead of *desu*, and the polite auxiliary *-mashu* instead of *-masu*. Almost every sentence ends with *deshu*, either as copula expression, or as non-normative sentence-final particle (*annai suru deshu yo* ‘I’ll show you around’), another example of *kyara gobi*.

Finally, in specific cases, rather than by the presence of specific tokens, characterisation in fictionalised orality appears to be carried out through the *absence* of most linguistic features expected to occur in natural language. Such an example can be found in the target corpus in the dialogues for the character of Aruma from *Rusettia*. The NPC is depicted in-game as a female golem living in a dungeon and appears to not possess any knowledge of the outside world. This presumed ignorance is also conveyed in-game through a lack of pragmatic competence in communication. For instance, when another NPC addresses her as *Aruma-san* using an honorific, she responds by correcting her name to *Aruma*, failing to recognise the pragmatic function of the suffix *-san*. Similarly, instead of using forms of request, Aruma simply states *kore* ‘this’ when asking for items.

5.11. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of how fictional identities are linguistically constructed in the corpus, no discernible diachronic variation can be found: despite the technological advance of the hardware in the 21 years that span between the first game taken into examination (*Ikachan*, 2000) and the most recent one (*Ribura no mita yume*, 2021), no changing tendencies in how NPCs are characterised can be observed. Instead, the medialect of video game dialogues appears to reflect a fossilised array of registers and associated characterological figures, which are routinely reiterated in works of pop culture, and which collectively reinforce established tropes in popular culture. Despite Ryūkishi07 noting that ‘an evil appearance, combined with a bad role and bad language don’t make for a compelling villain’ (*warusō na gaiken to, warui yakuwari, warui kotoba ga musubitsuite mo, miryokuteki na akuyaku ni wa narimasen*), as pointed out in 4.6, video games appear to be rather conservative in these regards, thus empirically confirming the arguments first proposed by Fiadotau (2019) on the conservative nature of independent

Japanese video games. This stability suggests that characterological portrayals in games are informed less by innovation in language use than by adherence to a shared medialect. Such consistency implies a conservative use of the medialect, where language reinforces familiar identities and expected narrative roles.

Within the medialect, particular attention appears reserved to Kansai dialect, where more consistency and a greater variety in the choices of indexes is found. Conversely, in the target corpus other dialectal features appear more sparingly, and they are used to index a rural identity of the speaker, regardless of the actual geographical distribution of the dialectal features in its dialogues. As also argued by Yamashita (2019: 225), «[d]ialects may be assigned to characters in order to stress a geographical connection or to evoke an association with regard to their personal character. Ultimately, the interpretation of this rests with the audience, and they may come up with different conclusions according to their own language repertoires and language uses». In this sense, fictionalised orality in video game dialogues does not appear to be deviating from established patterns of linguistic stereotyping in other media, as presented in 3.3.

Animal characters and minor neutral characters appear to be consistently characterised throughout the target corpus, even across games. For example, mole NPCs appear in four different games, but regardless of the setting they are consistently depicted as manual labourers, wearing yellow construction helmets, working tools like shovels or pickaxes, and donning blue overalls. Such graphical characterisation appears to be reflected in their linguistic stylisation, with the use of expressions of both Kansai dialect and Eastern Japanese varieties as indexes of lower social status, or with regimented features such as *washi* and *ja* as indexes of middle-age male speakers. The use of these highly iconised markers allows players to quickly identify character roles based on conventionalised attributes. Conversely, extemporaneous use of role language in the dialogues of NPCs sharing the same in-game names and with the same graphical depiction (such as animal characters, see 5.10.1) can be interpreted as having the purpose of differentiating between the characters, as is also argued by Niizato and Noguchi in their interview in 4.4.

In examining pronoun usage, two different formulaic registers are found to be associated to the first-person pronouns *boku* and *ore*, which expand on previous findings by Dahlberg-Dodd (2018) on the linguistic representation of masculine gender ideologies in anime adaptations of manga. To the first register, together with *boku*, are associated the second-person *kimi*, the use of verbs in the *-te* form for requests, and the in-game role of characters employing this register tends to be positive. On the other hand, the second register features, together with *ore*, the use of *omae* as second-person pronoun, the imperative form of the verb (*meireikei*) for expressions

of request, and mainly by either neutral side characters or by villains. Thus, fictionalised orality in the target corpus appears to draw on ideological associations between language and characterological figures as an easy tool for the characterisation of NPCs on the basis of in-game actant role. Such association between registers and character types appears to be based on the existing medialect of fictional works of pop culture. Due to such intertextuality, it is also widely recognised by native speakers, as will also be explored in Chapter 6.

Using the terminology proposed by Kinsui, linguistic items like *watashi*, *boku*, or *ore* do not have a high “degree of role language”, or *yakuwarigo-do* (Kinsui, 2003: 67–68), meaning the «extent to which a speech style (literary style) conjures up the image of a speaker with distinctive characteristics» (Kinsui, 2019: 41). On one hand, linguistic features that are heavily used in spontaneous conversations and in daily life appear to have a low degree of role language and need to be employed contextually with other items to characterise the speaker. On the other hand, linguistic items rarely encountered in non-scripted environments, like the first-person pronoun *warawa*, appear to often possess a high degree of role language, as they are immediately recognised as pointing towards a specific characterological figure, in this case an elderly female speaker, as analysed in 6.2.10. Borrowing the terms used in linguistic anthropology, lesser-used signs possess a higher degree of iconicity, and by themselves are used to point to specific character types: as such, a feline character using *sessha* is characterised as a samurai, due to the high degree of iconicity of the personal pronoun. On the other hand, terms like *boku* and *ore* possess a lower degree of iconicity, and they are bundled together with other signs to create meaning: the indexical field of possible interpretations of such linguistic items is shaped by the concurrent presence of other linguistic items. Therefore, linguistic items appear to be used to point to different characterological figures based on their order of indexicality. For example, the first-person pronoun *washi* is used on a first order of indexicality to point to the geographical provenance of the speaker, as *washi* is associated to diatopic varieties spoken in Western Japan: in the corpus, when *washi* is used together with the copular expression, *ya*, the speaking character is framed as a speaker of Kansai dialect. As also suggested by Agha (2024), «register’s tokens are never experienced in isolation during communicative activities; they are encountered under conditions of co-textuality (co-occurrence) with other signs—both linguistic and non-linguistic signs—that form a significant context, or co-text, for the construal of the token performed» (Agha, 2024: 7).

Gender ideologies are also reproduced through linguistic means, such as the association between overtly feminine linguistic items and the characterisation of the speaker as submissive and ready to help the protagonist in their journey. Such normative gender roles are present not

only in games that deal with relationship or in so-called “intimacy games” (Bruno, 2023), such as visual novels or dating simulators, but also in RPGs and adventure games not featuring such themes. In the target corpus, different forms of femininity are presented, but most characters framed as female speakers adhere to the stereotype of females as more polite than men, and this is reflected in NPCs framed as females being overwhelmingly associated to non-villainous roles. Even when female NPCs do not adhere to the stereotype of the “polite woman”, the associated linguistic register features linguistic items already widely established in the medialect, such as personal pronouns *atashi* and *anta* even when used with a “masculine wording”, as pointed out by participants in the questionnaire survey (see 6.2.5). Dialogues for female characters in the corpus also do not feature the breaking of traditional norms between gender and language, like the one analysed by Miyazaki (2023) regarding the use of male-associated first-person pronouns by middle school girls. Moreover, such gender stereotypes are applied also to non-human characters, who would otherwise not present an explicit characterisation in terms of gender. Thus, ideologies are projected, and non-human characters are rationalised and traced back to established characterological figures through the use of widely known linguistic registers and their associated indexes. Despite the potential for non-normative representations in works of popular culture (Ting, 2019: 317), the medialect appears to be conservative compared to other forms of mediated language, like the one found on social media. Despite the strive for creativity and engagement by the game developers, as pointed out in Chapter 4, such creativity is expressed with already-established norms and relationships between linguistic signs and character types, rather than creating new norms like speakers do in non-scripted communication.

Chapter 6: The Player-Oriented Approach

As argued at the beginning of Chapter 4, previous research on language ideology and characterological figures in Japan has mainly focused on perceptions and attitudes on the use of role language by fictional characters, which were often created ad hoc solely for the purposes of questionnaire surveys (cf. Shukuri, 2012; Baba & Komatsu, 2017). This approach, while valuable in its own right, often relied on idealized or simplified representations of character speech. After the textual metalinguistic analysis in Chapter 5, this chapter instead features a questionnaire survey regarding metapragmatic stereotypes and discourses among native speakers of Japanese, featuring real examples of “character speech” as extracted from the target corpus. This allows for a more direct examination of how linguistic features are interpreted within actual media consumption, potentially revealing deeper insights into the language ideologies at play.

6.1. Structure of the questionnaire

Questionnaires were conducted anonymously via Google Form from December 2022 to April 2023, and 120 responses were collected, mainly around the areas of Kyōto and Nagoya. Among the 120 respondents, 59 defined themselves as male, 60 as female, while one person did not answer. The study included participants across a range of age groups: 10 participants (8%) were under the age of 19, 52 participants (43%) were in their twenties, 22 participants (18%) were in their thirties, 23 participants (19%) in their forties, and 13 participants (11%) aged 50 and above. Finally, self-reported frequency of playing video games by the respondents showed a varied distribution: 29 participants (24%) reported to never play with video games, 27 participants (23%) to play rarely, 40 participants (33%) to play sometimes, and 24 participants (20%) to play often.

The survey was designed to explore perceptions of language use in video game characters, and it comprises eleven sets of questions, with eleven dialogue extracts collected from eleven different characterological figures. These NPCs were selected to represent a variety of linguistic registers, as this approach would allow to investigate the respondents’ awareness and knowledge of these registers, and the speaker stereotypes associated with them. Table 3 provides an overview of each characterological figure, the enregistered variety of language which they employ, and the iconised linguistic features that have become indexes of that character.

Characterological figure	Register	Linguistic features
Company president	Forceful, condescending	<i>Omae</i> , imperative
Robot	Military language (<i>guntaigo</i>)	<i>De arimasu</i>
Dialect speaker	Kansai dialect	<i>-n, ya, de, hona</i>
Feline <i>obake</i>	Learned male (<i>shoseigo</i>), feline	<i>Wagahai, de aru, ga ii, nyago</i>
Young girl	Feminine, forceful	<i>Atashi, anta, sa</i>
Rough male	Masculine, forceful	<i>Ore, omae, zo</i> , imperative
Standard language speaker	Standard Japanese (<i>hyōjungo</i>)	<i>Watashi, anata, desu, -masu, -te kudasai</i>
Villain	Condescending, vulgar	<i>Kisama, -sama, -n, -oru, ga ii, zo</i>
Young-looking female <i>kami</i>	Elderly male-associated speech (<i>rōjingo</i>), idiolect	<i>Washi, kisama, -nu, ga ii</i> , imperative, <i>sa, sa ne, no yo, no sa, ka ya</i>
Old female <i>kami</i>	Elderly female-associated speech (<i>rōjingo</i>), archaic	<i>Warawa, ja, -nu, oru, na, -yo</i> , imperative
Country bumpkin	Eastern Japanese varieties	<i>Ora, dasu, zura</i>

Table 3: Characterological figures and associated registers in the questionnaire.

In the questions, the respondents are asked to associate a given dialogical extract with various physical and characterological characteristics, without the aid of illustrations and with no explanations regarding the source of the statement, as exemplified in Figure 8.

言葉遣いからキャラクターのイメージへ

次の①～⑪のセリフはどんなキャラクターが話しているでしょうか。

それぞれのキャラクターのジェンダー、世代と役割を選んで下さい。

また、①～⑪のセリフを話しているキャラクターのイメージを、5段階で評価して下さい。

Figure 8: Outline of the questionnaire.

Regarding the graphical depiction of the characters, they were asked to answer closed questions concerning the presumed gender (*jendā*), the presumed age (*sedai*), and the presumed role of the character within the story (*yakuwari*). The parameters for the variable *jendā* were *dansei* ‘male’, *josei* ‘female’, or *wakaranai* ‘not sure’. Video games have been found to be capable of featuring non-binary and gender fluid NPCs (Frelik, 2023). However, the characters presented in the questionnaire are clearly defined in-game as either male or female speakers, with one

exception (see 6.7). As such, the question about gender was presented with answers in a binary form, with a third option in case the respondent was not sure. The parameters for the variable *sedai* were *shōnen* - *kodomo* ‘child’, *seinen* - *sōnen* ‘young age’, *chūnen* - *otona* ‘middle age’, *kōnen* - *rōjin* ‘old age’, and *wakaranai* ‘not sure’. Finally, the parameters for the variable *yakuwari* were *mikata* - *herupā* ‘ally’ or ‘helper’, *akuyaku* - *tekiyaku* ‘villain’, *itazuramono* - *torikkusutā* ‘trickster’, *nyūtoraru* ‘neutral’, and *wakaranai* ‘not sure’. As mentioned in Chapter 5, I have used the terminology proposed by Kinsui (2020).

	世代 *	役割 *
ジェンダー *	☐ 少年・子供 ☐ 青年・壮年 ☐ 中年・大人 ☐ 高年・老人 ☐ わからない	☐ 味方・ヘルパー ☐ 悪役・敵役 ☐ いたずら者・トリックスター ☐ ニュートラル ☐ わからない
☐ 男性 ☐ 女性 ☐ わからない		

Figure 9: Questions regarding gender, age, and role.

Subsequently, five parameters relating to the impression generated by the utterance were asked to be evaluated, to examine how respondents evaluated the language use of NPCs. The five parameters analysed were, in Japanese, *kawaii*, *kowai*, *majime*, *tanomoshii*, and *omoshiroi* (respectively, in order, ‘cute’, ‘scary’, ‘serious’, ‘trustworthy’, and ‘funny’). These choices of metapragmatic labels were influenced by similar surveys and previous studies by Tanaka Yukari (2011: 28) and Fukada (2022: 9). Namely, on the one hand, *kawaii*, *kowai*, and *omoshiroi* were among the stereotypes most referenced by the 265 native speakers from the Tōkyō area who participated in the survey by Tanaka Yukari (2011: 27-30), analysing the *imēji* ‘impressions, ‘mental images’ of native speakers regarding various dialectal registers. In particular, as shown in 1.4, *kawaii* is regarded as one of the most common attributes in the contemporary semiotic landscape of Japanese popular culture (cf. Hiramoto & Wee, 2019). On the other hand, *tanomoshii* was found to be a label frequently used in official websites to describe characters in their respective anime series (Fukada, 2022: 8-10).

このセリフを話しているキャラのイメージとして、以下のものはどの程度あ
てはまると思いますか。

1を最低点、5を最高点として、5段階のうちからひとつずつ選んでくだ
さい。

- ①あてはまらない ②あまりあてはまらない ③どちらともいえない
④ある程度あてはまる ⑤よくあてはまる

	1	2	3	4	5
可愛い (cute)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
怖い (scary)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
まじめ (serious)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
頼もしい (trustworthy)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
面白い (funny)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Figure 10: Rating scale questions on attitudes.

Finally, the participants had the possibility to leave additional optional thoughts and impressions. These comments proved very insightful, and provided more chances for an analysis of the metapragmatic commentaries regarding each linguistic register and its associated characterological figure.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

Figure 11: Optional comments.

Comments are labelled according to the demographics of each participant who left the comment: for instance, “M20S” signifies a male in his twenties who sometimes plays video games. The first letter of the label denotes gender (F for “female”, M for “male”, and O for “other”), followed by two numbers indicating age (e.g., 10 for teenager, 20 for someone in their twenties, and so on). The final letter represents the self-reported familiarity of the participant with video games: N (never plays), R (rarely plays), S (sometimes plays), and O (often plays).

6.2. Analysis and discussion

This section will feature the analysis of the responses to the 11 sets of questions. I have metapragmatically labelled the characters *a posteriori*, according to their role in the game, for ease of classification and reference within the chapter: such labels are relative to the characterological figure that is associated to the register of each NPC. As explained in 6.1, to limit the influence of possible paralinguistic elements in the responses of the participants, the speaking characters were not labelled in any way inside the questionnaire. Each subsection for each character features a metalinguistic analysis of the most salient features of their dialogues. Subsequently, results regarding the different parameters (age, gender, role, and perception) will be presented and analysed. Finally, the optional comments will be discussed. Unless noted otherwise, all translations from Japanese to English are mine: when available, I have instead referenced the official English-language localised version of the games.

6.2.1. The company president

いいか [...]
1 日だけやる
今日中 5000 エナジーを稼いでこい
もし出来なければ...
お前はクビだ
せいぜい**頑張**れよ

Ii ka [Abi]
Ichinichi dake yaru
Kyōjūni 5000 enajī o kaseide koi
Moshi dekinakereba...
Omae wa kubi da!
Seizei ganbare yo

Okay [Abi]?
I'll give it just one day.
Earn 5000 energy by the end of today.
If you can't...
You're fired!
Do your best.

The character is called *Shachō* ‘company director’, from the game *Sakyubasu no Abi wa yūwaku dekinai*, and is depicted as a succubus, an anthropomorphic demon with horns, who is the manager of a company of succubus (*sakyubasu-sha*) in the demon world (*makai*). In the

extract, various tokens can be regarded as indexes of a condescending attitude. The second-person *omae* is considered as index of highly informal or derogatory male speakers (Shibatani, 1990). The verb *yaru* is also considered as index of male language, and especially of rough characters (Ma, 2019: 112). Requests in the imperative form (*meireikei*) are also regarded as index of male speakers (Kinsui, 2017: 82), such as *koi* and *ganbare* in the extract above, respectively the imperative forms of the verb *kuru* ‘to come’ and *ganbaru* ‘to insist’.

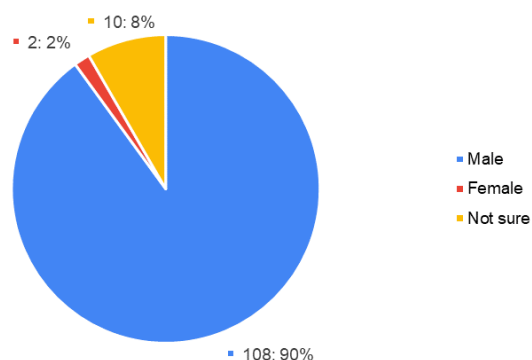


Figure 12: Gender of the company president.

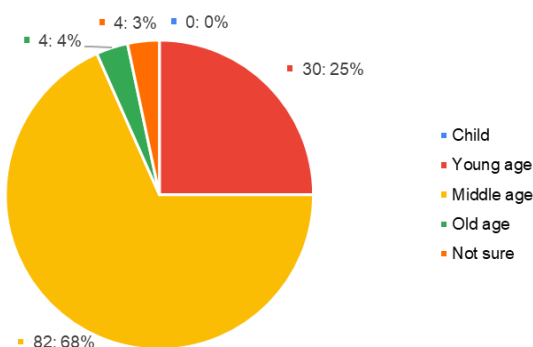


Figure 13: Age of the company president.

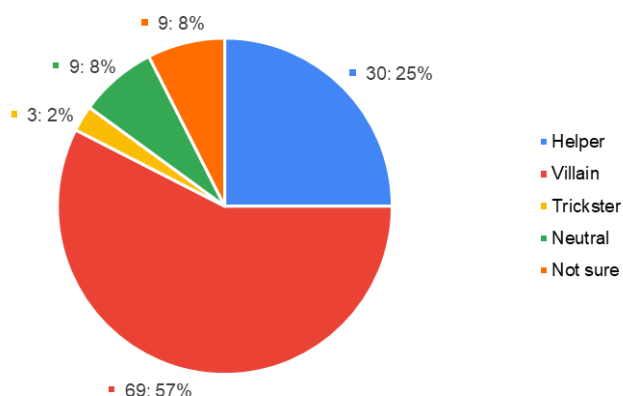


Figure 14: Role of the company president.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (108 answers, 90%) perceive the character as male, aligning with the linguistic features indicative of male speech. This reinforces the perception of the character as aggressive and authoritative. Most respondents (82 answers, 68%) identify the character as middle-aged, suggesting that the authoritative tone may align with a mature speaker, potentially enhancing the characterisation of the speaker as an intimidating figure of authority. The character is also predominantly viewed as a villain, with 69 respondents (57%) associating the utterance with a villainous figure, reflecting the condescending and aggressive language used in the dialogue.

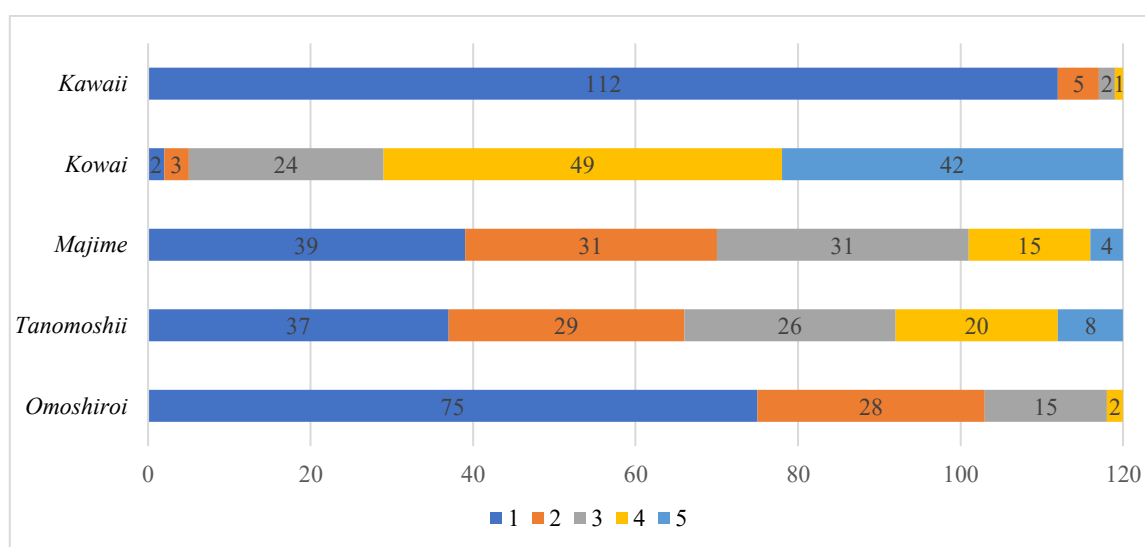


Figure 15: Perceptions on the company president.

The character is overwhelmingly perceived as not cute, with 112 respondents (93%) assigning the lowest score of 1, which aligns with the aggressive portrayal of the speaker. The character is also seen as very scary, with 49 respondents (41%) rating it at 4, and 42 respondents (35%) assigning it the highest score of 5. This linguistic attitude is likely reinforced by the presence of imperatives and by the condescending and forceful tone of the utterance, which appears to enhance the perception of the speaker as a villainous figure. The character is seen as not serious, with 39 respondents (33%) rating it at 1 and 31 respondents (26%) rating it at 2, and also as not trustworthy, with 37 respondents (31%) rating it at 1 and 29 respondents (24%) rating it at 2. This negative association can be seen as reinforcing the image of a manipulative or deceitful figure, rather than a reliable leader. Finally, a significant majority perceive the character as not funny, with 75 respondents (63%) rating it at 1 (the lowest), which complements the portrayal of the speaker as an aggressive and intimidating figure.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

20: 稼いでこいの「こい」やせいぜい頑張れよの「せいぜい」などは、男性キャラが話すイメージがある。また、上から目線で自分より下のものに言うイメージ。

28: 回答には「男」と記載しましたが、「女」にしても問題ないかと思いました。悪役のイメージです。

37: 話している人は、上司とかボスという感じのイメージ

46: ある組織の長官が言ってそうなイメージ

47: 根はいい人なのかもしれない。

53: 男性でも女性でもありうる。女性なら男性より若く感じる。盗賊の親玉のような印象を受ける

56: 高圧的だと思った。相手に対して高圧的。語尾などから粗暴なイメージを受けた。

66: ちょっとおもしろい先輩みたいなキャラクターですね。

71: 最後に頑張れよって言っているが応援している印象は無い

84: 何か大事なゲーム大会でリーダーかくの人が見込みのあるプレイヤーに檄を入れている感じ

106: 悪役と言っても小悪党感がする。

120: このキャラクターは男性で高圧的な上司という印象を受けます。しかし歳をとりすぎてはおらず、30代から40代後半程度のまだ若さを残している人物のようです。漫画ドラゴンボールの登場人物ベジータのようにプライドが高く、他人を見下してはいるものの、精神的な不安定さを感じさせ、どこか憎みきれない人物のように感じます。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 12

20: “Expressions like *koi* in *kaseide koi* and *seizei* in *seizei ganbare yo* are associated to a male character. Also, [it gives] an impression of somebody talking with a condescending attitude to an inferior.” (F20N)

28: “I replied with ‘male’, but it could also be a female. It gives the impression of a villain.” (M40S)

37: “Impression of a superior or a boss.” (F20R)

46: “Something that could be said by the chief of some organisation.” (M20O)

47: “Probably a good person deep down.” (M20R)

53:” It could be a male as well as a female. If female, younger than male. Like a boss of a gang of thieves.” (M19S)

56: “I think [the speaker] is oppressive. Oppressive towards companions. I got a rough impression from word endings.” (F20R)

66: “It is a bit like a funny *senpai*” (F40S)

71: “At the end it says, “do your best”, but there is no impression that he is actually supporting [the addressee].” (F40N)

84: “It is like a leader at an important gaming competition who is giving encouragement to a promising player.” (F40S)

106: “It could be a villain, but it gives the impression of a small-time crook.” (M30S)

120: “This character gives the impression of an oppressive male boss, but it looks like he is not too old, from 30 to at most around 45 years old. Like Vegeta from *Dragon Ball*, he is a prideful character and looks down on others, but he gives the impression of emotional instability and hatred.” (N20O)

The comments show both strong agreement with the survey data regarding the aggressive and villainous traits of the speaker, while also introducing nuances that reflect potential ambiguity in gender and character depth. Interestingly, many comments feature synonymous terms such as *jōshi* ‘superior’ and *bosu* ‘boss’ in Comment 37, *chōkan* ‘chief’ in Comment 46, *oyadama* ‘head’ in Comment 53, *senpai* ‘senior’ in Comment 66, *rīdā* ‘leader’ in Comment 84, and again *jōshi* in Comment 120, all belonging to the same semantic field: this can be regarded as reflecting the established indexical association of the register with such kinds of hierarchical characterological figures. The association of the utterance with a workplace-like situation may also be due to the presence of the expression *kubi da* ‘you’re fired’. The use of oppressive language is deemed in line with the characterological figure of the “boss”, as it appears that most participants were able to associate such register with the figure of the *shachō*. Overall, the comments appear to support the view of the character as an authoritative figure, while also revealing that some participants perceive the character in a more flexible or humorous light than suggested by the quantitative survey data, such as Comment 47 (*ne wa ii hito na no ka mo shirenai* ‘maybe a good person at heart’) and Comment 66 (*chotto omoshiroi senpai* ‘a slightly funny *senpai*’).

6.2.2. The fighting robot

バトルモードであります！

殲滅行動、開始であります！

今は我慢であります！
 慎重に行くであります！
 勝てない相手ではないであります
 戦うなら、玉砕の覚悟が必要であります！
 スライム状のシャドウが出たであります

Batoru mōdo de arimasu!
Senmetsu kōdō, kaishi de arimasu!
Ima wa gaman de arimasu!
Shinchō ni iku de arima~su!
Katenai aite de wa nai de arimasu
Tatakau nara, gyokusai no kakugo ga hitsuyō de arimasu!
Suraimu-jō no shadō ga deta de arimasu

It's battle mode!
 The annihilation action has begun!
 I have to be patient for now!
 I will proceed with caution!
 There is no opponent I can't beat.
 If you want to fight, you need to be prepared to be defeated honourably!
 A slime-like shadow has appeared.

As introduced in 5.3.4, the character is named Aigisu (Aigis), from the game *Perusona Q*, and is a female android and a self-proclaimed war machine (*watashi wa tai shadō tokubetsu seiatsu heisō nana-shiki Aigisu de arimasu* ‘I am the special anti-shadow suppression weapon type 7 Aigis’). Aigis appears as an android with short, blond hair and light blue eyes. The most recurrent feature in the dialogue is the expression *de arimasu*, which is used both as copular expression and as idiolectal sentence-final expression and is used in the medialect as index of military register (Yoda, 2014e). Parts of this analysis have been accepted for publication and are currently in press (Moretti, 2025b): in this section I expand on previous findings, and I propose a more in-depth analysis of metapragmatic commentary by the respondents.

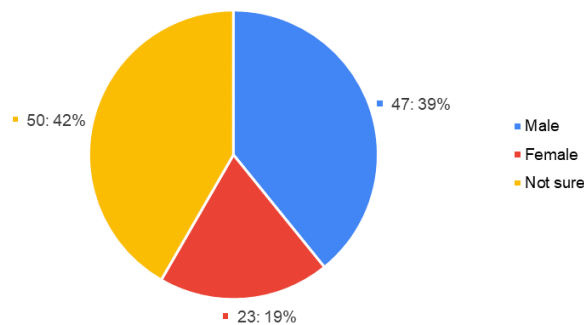


Figure 16: Gender of the fighting robot.

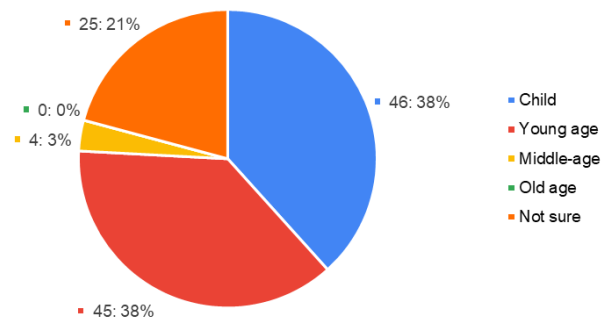


Figure 17: Age of the fighting robot.

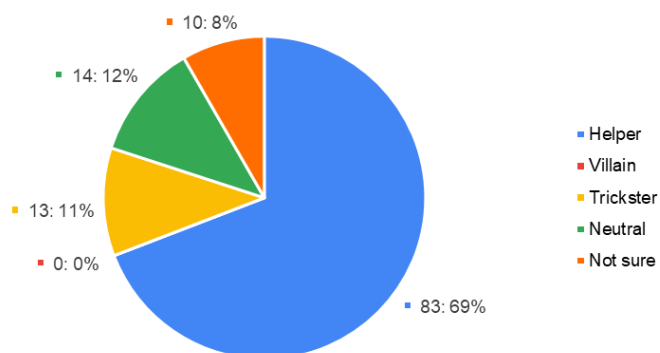


Figure 18: Role of the fighting robot.

As expressed also by Moretti (2025b), the respondents were not able to clearly identify the gender of the speaker, as 50 participants (42%) chose the option *wakaranai* ‘do not know’, and 42 associated the utterance with a male speaker. While the NPC is graphically depicted as a female-like android with short, blond hair and light blue eyes, her dialogues do not feature explicit elements of *joseigo*. Instead, it appears that the overall tone of the utterance, related to battle scenes, influenced the participants in their association of the utterance with a male figure, despite the simultaneous lack of any overt feature of male language, too. This appear to be consistent with previous descriptive analysis of *guntaigo* (see 5.4.4), which argue that such register is not tied to a specific characterisation of the speaker in terms of gender (cf. Yoda, 2014e: 130-131). The age of the character was not recognised as old by the majority of respondents. For 46 respondents (38%) the dialogue could be attributed to a ‘child’ (*shōnen* - *kodomo*), while for 45 respondents (38%) the speaker was a ‘teenager’ (*seinen* - *sōnen*), together totalling 76% of the total participants. Such association appears to be influenced by the content of the dialogue itself, relating to battle scenes, rather than the presence of specific tokens associated to youth language (*wakamonogo*). Finally, regarding the role of the speaker, the majority of the

respondents has associated the utterance with a helping figure, with 83 answers (69%) considering the speaker as an ally.

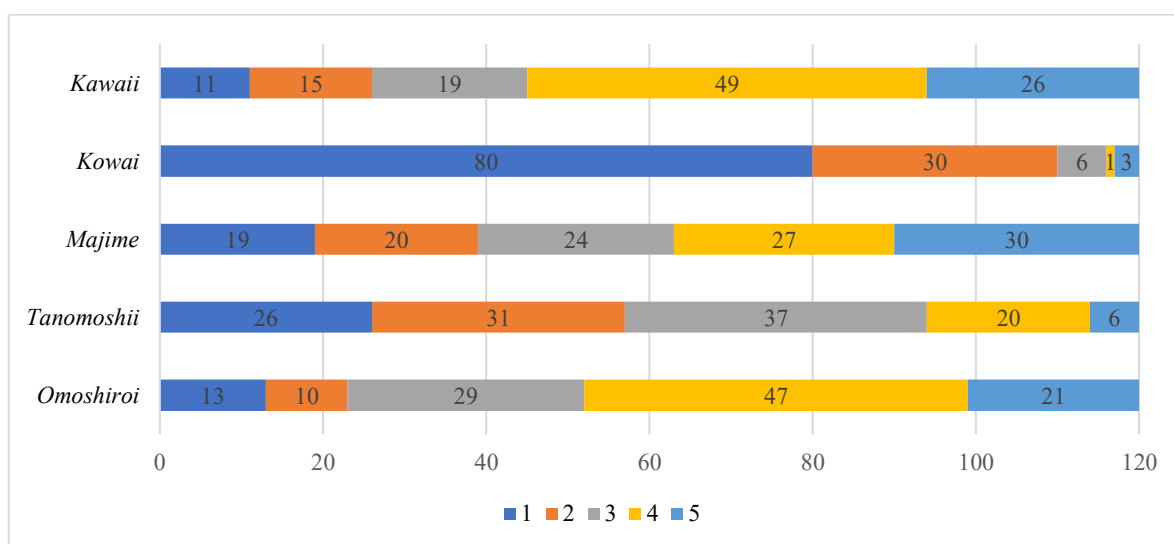


Figure 19: Perceptions on the fighting robot.

As previously analysed (cf. Moretti, 2025b), at an attitudinal level, despite the content of the utterance relating to scenes of combat, the respondents found the character moderately cute, with 49 respondents (41%) rating it at 4, and not at all scary, with 80 respondents (67%) assigning it the lowest score at 1. Conversely, the character was perceived as averagely trustworthy, with 37 respondents (31%) rating it 3, and as funny, with 47 respondents (40%) rating it at 4. Finally, it was not possible to find significant trends regarding the parameter of seriousness, despite an overall tendency to associate the dialogue to a somewhat serious character, with 27 respondents (23%) rating the utterance at 4, and 30 respondents (25%) rating it at the highest score of 5.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

13: ジェンダーというより、軍人のような所属が強調された語尾だと思う

20: 人ではない、キャラクターのイメージ

37: とってもかわいい！

51: ケロロ軍曹

56: ~であります、は軍隊などで使用される言葉であると思うが、なんども繰り返されると"キャラクター"感が出るように思う。漫画の『ケロロ軍曹』の主人公はケロロは軍人

なのでこの語尾を多用するが、多用しすぎるが上にコミカルな印象を持たせる口癖のよう
に聞こえる。

71: です、ますを語尾に付けているが丁寧な印象は無い

76: 言葉遣いは丁寧なのにやってることはなかなか過激な感じ。

83: 語尾を全部同じにすると、怖さが和らぐと感じました。

84: ナビゲーターっぽい。

106: 男女どちらでもイメージ出来るが、昨今の流れ的に女性型の真面目系戦闘機械がイ
メージし易い。

115: ゲームに出てくる案内役のロボット感があります。アニメで言うとケロロ軍曹のよ
うなイメージが1番近いです。

120: 10代中盤から後半の女性で、90年代のアニメのように、大きな装飾物などを身につ
け、シルエットが特徴的な女性、あるいは中性的なキャラクターの印象を受けます。役
割は、「いたずら者・トリックスター」も当てはまります。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 12

13: “I think that, rather than gender, the word ending puts emphasis on the affiliation of the
character to the military or something like that.” (M20S)

20: “Impression of a non-human character” (F20R)

37: “Very cute!” (F20R)

50: “Sergeant Keroro” (M20S)

56: “I think that *de arimasu* is a word used by the military, but if it is repeated over and
over it gives the impression of a [fictional] “character”. In the manga Sgt. Frog [*Keroro
gunsō*], the protagonist Keroro is a sergeant and very often uses this ending, but if it is
overused it comes across as a catchphrase that gives a comical impression.” (F20R)

71: “*Desu* and *-masu* are used, but it gives no impression of politeness.” (F40N)

76: “Its way of speaking is polite, but the thing it is doing looks pretty extreme.” (F40S)

83: “If sentence endings are always the same, its scariness is softened.” (F40S)

84: “Like a navigator.” (F40S)

106: “It could be either male or female, but in the current trends it is easy to picture a
serious fighting machine with the appearance of a female.” (M30S)

115: “Feels like a robot guide from a game. In anime, the closest impression is that of
something like *Sergeant Keroro*.” (M20S)

120: “I get the impression of a female in her mid-to-late 10s, or an androgynous character, wearing big ornaments like in a 90’s anime, with a distinctive silhouette. Its role could also be that of a trickster.” (N200)

Comments suggest that the expression *de arimasu* is mainly perceived as an indicator of the affiliation of the speaker to the armed forces, rather than being widely seen as a characterisation based on gender, as reported by Comment 13 and Comment 106. One comment also noted elements reminiscent of the language used by a ‘robot guide’ (*annai yaku no robotto*, Comment 115). Another comment noted that this style has been used ‘recently’ (*sakkon no nagare teki ni*, Comment 106) by ‘serious female-like war machines’ (*josei-gata no majime-kei sentō kikai*, Comment 106). However, Comment 56 suggests that the repeated use of the same suffix, despite its association with a military and thus serious register, ultimately gives the character a caricatured and ‘comic impression’ (*komikaru na inshō*). In addition, Comment 50, Comment 56, and Comment 115 make explicit reference to the zoomorphic character of Keroro from the *Keroro gunsō* series (Yoshizaki, 1999-). In this sci-fi comedy manga and anime, Keroro serves as a sergeant in an army of anthropomorphic frog-like aliens who have come to conquer Earth. As also expressed by Moretti (2025b), this connection between the character of Aigis and Keroro suggests that the linguistic sign of *de aru* is recognised as an index, belonging to a particular linguistic register with an associated characterological figure (in this case a stereotyped militaristic figure), which appears to be widely recognised in the intertextual environment of pop culture.

6.2.3. The speaker of Kansai dialect

ほな いくで

実はな... 自分 知らんやろうけどな
世界は自分のいるこの世界だけではないん
世界には パラレルワールドちゅうでな
いくつもの並行世界があるんやな
そのうちのひとつが 俺らの世界

Hona iku de

Jitsu wa na... Jibun shiran yarō kedo na
Sekai wa jibun no iru kono sekai dake de wa nai n
Sekai ni wa parareru wārudo chū de na
Ikutsu mo no heikō sekai ga aru n ya na
Sono uchi no hitotsu ga orera no sekai

On with the show!
 See, it's like this, see...
 What it is is, there's more worlds out there than this one by here.
 There's what you might call "parallel worlds", see?
 They're like worlds along by the side of yourer [*sic!*] one.
 And one of those worlds is my world.
 (*Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch*, Namco Bandai Games, 2013)

Shizuku is a fairy who serves as companion and guide of the protagonist in the game *Ni no kuni*, helping in battles and during the story. The character is depicted with a drop-shaped body, a light-yellow skin, and an aquamarine fairy suit, with a red lantern hanging on his nose. In the dialogues of the character, and also in the extract above, various features associated to Kansai dialect are present: in this case, the conjunction *hona*, the final particle *de* (Kinsui, 2014l), the negative auxiliary *-n* (Kinsui, 2014r), and the copular expression *ya*.

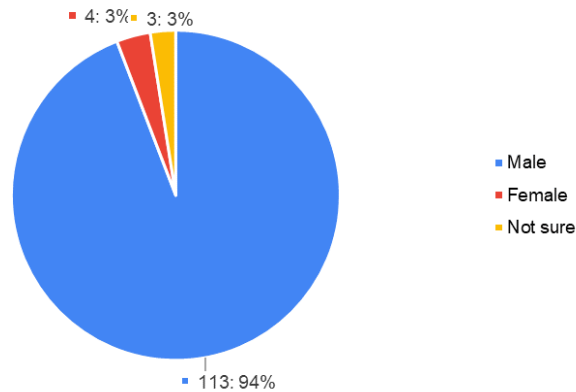


Figure 20: Gender of the speaker of Kansai dialect.

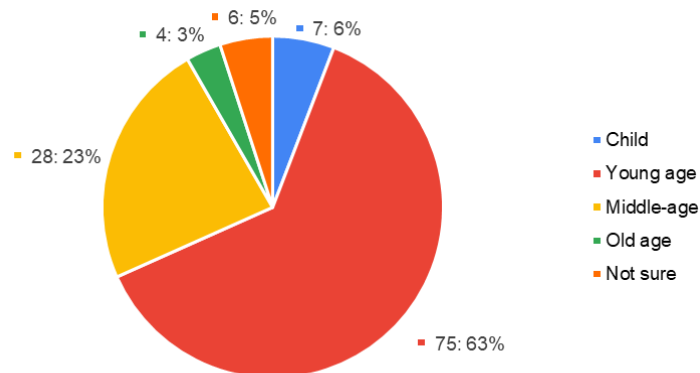


Figure 21: Age of the speaker of Kansai dialect.

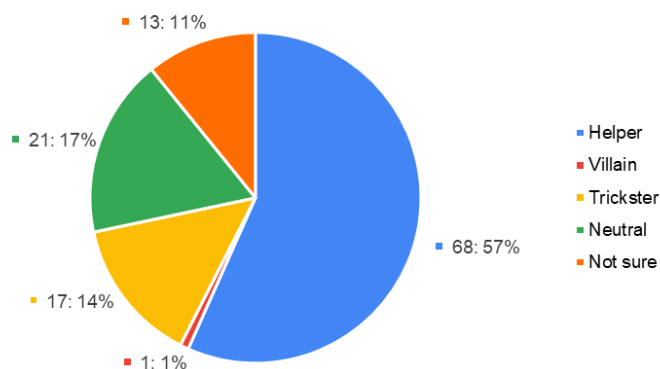


Figure 22: Role of the speaker of Kansai dialect.

113 respondents (94%) perceived Shizuku as male, while only 4 participants (3%) thought the character was female. This strong male attribution is likely due to the presence of *ore* as first-person pronoun. However, Kansai dialect can often carry a stereotypically masculine tone, and it is often used in such way in the medialect to characterise male figures with a friendly or comedic edge (cf. SturtzSreetharan, 2017). Regarding the age of the NPC, 75 respondents (63%) categorised the speaker as young, with 28 participants (23%) selecting middle-aged. Despite features of Western Japanese, like the negative form *-n*, being used as indexes of old age, the register was not considered as *rōjingo*, likely due to the concurrent absence of other prominent indexes, such as the pronoun *washi* and the copular expression *ja*. As such, ‘old age’ was the least popular option, with only 4 choices (3%). Finally, 68 participants (57%) found the speaker to be a helping figure, which appears to be influenced by the character offering explanations and assistance, and by Kansai dialect being perceived as friendly and affectionate (Sturtz Sreetharan, 2004: 278).

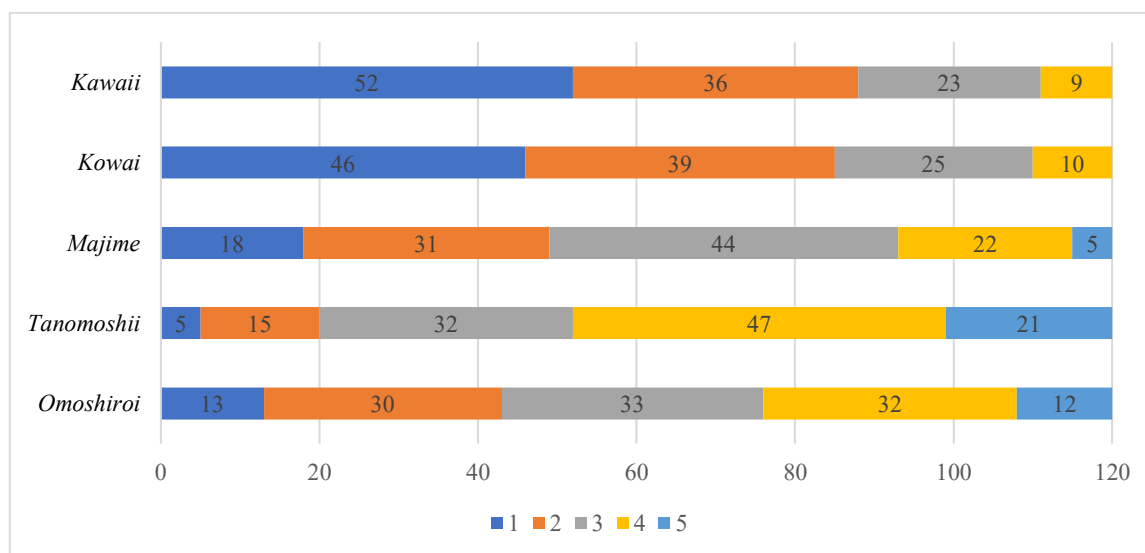


Figure 23: Perceptions on the speaker of Kansai dialect.

At the attitudinal level, the character was perceived as not cute, with 52 respondents (43%) choosing the lowest score of 1, and also as not scary, with 46 respondents (38%) rating it at 1. Conversely, the speaker was regarded as moderately serious, with 44 respondents (37%) rating it with at 3, and as trustworthy, with 47 respondents (39%) rating it at 4. Despite Kansai dialect being often associated with humorous or comedic personae, the speaker was not considered as overtly funny by the majority of the speakers, with 30 respondents (25%) rating it at 2 (not funny), 33 respondents (28%) rating it at 3 (neutral), and 32 respondents (27%) rating it at 4 (somewhat funny). This may be explained by the fact that the survey was conducted in the Kyōto area, where dialect is often spoken and heard (see also 4.5), and as such does not necessarily function as index of a “funny” type of speaker.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

13: 関西弁から面白さ、重大な事実をシンプルに説明する様子から頼もしさを感じられる

37: 鶴瓶(関西弁で話すコメディアン) みたい。

46: ゲームのチュートリアルにいるキャラが喋ってそう

56: 関西弁なのでフランクな印象付けを狙っているように思われる。

66: ちょっと変な日本語ですね。

76: 関西弁だと面白さが加わる感じ

83: 方言が入ると、印象が変わると感じました。

84: 関西弁でユーモラスな言葉遣い。意味深発言だけど、芯をついてる感じな事を言うタイプ

106: 堀川りょうさんしかイメージ出来ませんでした。

120: 役割は選択肢にない「ライバル」キャラ(悪役ではない) と感じました。主人公と対立しながら、時には助けの手を差し伸べてくれる、一部で人気のありそうなキャラです。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 11

13: “Funniness can be expressed from the Kansai dialect, trustworthiness can be expressed from explaining serious things in a simple way.” (M20S)

37: “Like Tsurube (a comedian who talks in Kansai dialect).” (F20R)

46: “Something that could be said by a character in a game tutorial.” (M20O)

56: “Because it is Kansai dialect, it can be thought that they are aiming for a frank impression.” (F20R)

66: “This Japanese is a little strange, isn’t it?” (F40S)

76: “If it is Kansai dialect, a sense of fun is added.” (F40S)

83: “If you insert a dialect, I feel like the impression [it gives to the audience] changes.” (F40S)

84: “It is Kansai dialect, and it is a humorous way of speaking. It is a type of person that goes straight to the point even if it is a meaningful statement.” (F40S)

106: “I could only think of Horikawa Ryō [actor and voice actor from Ōsaka].” (M30S)

120: “I feel that its role is that of a rival (not a villain), which was something not included in the choices. It is a character that, while confronting the protagonist, occasionally offers assistance: it can be popular with some.” (N20O)

6 out of 11 comments explicitly or implicitly recognised the register of the speaker as belonging to Kansai dialect. On the other hand, Comment 66 described the language as *chotto henna nihongo* ‘slightly strange Japanese’, with a negative evaluation. While the label of *henna nihongo* is associated in terms of racial strangeness (Takamori, 2015), in this case it can instead suggest the ongoing vitality of an «idealized monolingual Standard Japanese ideology» (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith, 2016: 10) in metapragmatic discourse, where diatopic varieties are instead marginalised and negatively evaluated. On the other hand, some comments explicitly mention the association between the dialect and an overall sense of humour. In particular, Comment 37 mentions Tsurube (likely Shōfukutei Tsurube II, 1951-), a comedian and actor from Ōsaka, while Comment 106 mentions Horikawa Ryō (1958-), an actor and voice actor also hailing from Ōsaka. These references implicitly suggest the intertextuality of the medialect. This also suggests that, although participants were aware of the widespread language ideology regarding Kansai-*ben* as the “language of comedy”, they were not influenced by them when actually evaluating the dialogue extract in terms of *omoshirosa*.

6.2.4. The feline *obake*

そ、それはオバケ違いというもの
我輩は通りすがりのオバケである
ファントムのやつらなら遺跡の奥へ去っていったよ
なかなかいいドリルを持っているね
大事にするがいい
さらばである

ニャ〜ゴ

お嬢さん、わが輩は怪しいものではないのである

So, sore wa obake chigai to iu mono

Wagahai *wa tōrisugari no obake* ***de aru***

Fantomu no yatsura nara iseki no oku e satte itta yo

Naka naka ii doriru o motte iru ne

Daiji ni ***suru ga ii***

Saraba ***de aru***

Nya~go

Ojōsan, wagahai wa ayashii mono de wa nai no ***de aru***

I am afraid you are mistaken.

I am merely an innocent monster passing by.

The Phantoms went deep inside the ruins.

Nice drill you have there.

Take good care of it.

I'm off.

Meow!

Nothing to see here, move along please.

(*Gurumin: A Monstrous Adventure*, Nihon Falcom, 2004)

The character is named Mоторо and is present in the game *Gurumin 3D*. The NPC is a blue cat *obake* (a type of *yōkai*, translated into English as ‘monster’), with diamond-shaped yellow eyes, a wide mouth, a zigzag tail, and a bell on his chest. In the extract, the pronoun *wagahai* and the copular expression *de aru* can be considered as indexes of learned male speakers and figures of authority (Kinsui, 2014p; Fujimoto, 2014c), and the archaic imperative expression *ga ii* is also used by such characters. The interjection *nyāgo* is instead derived from the feline onomatopoeia *nya*, which characterises the speaker as a cat-like figure.

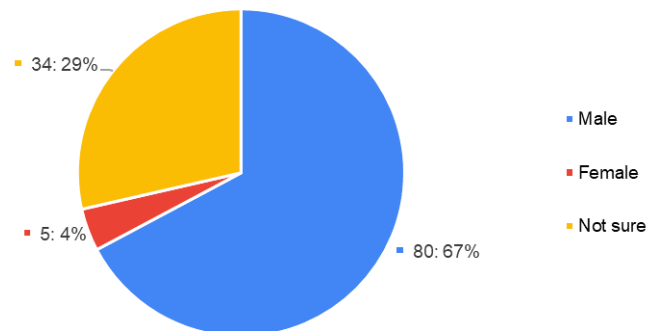


Figure 24: Gender of feline obake.

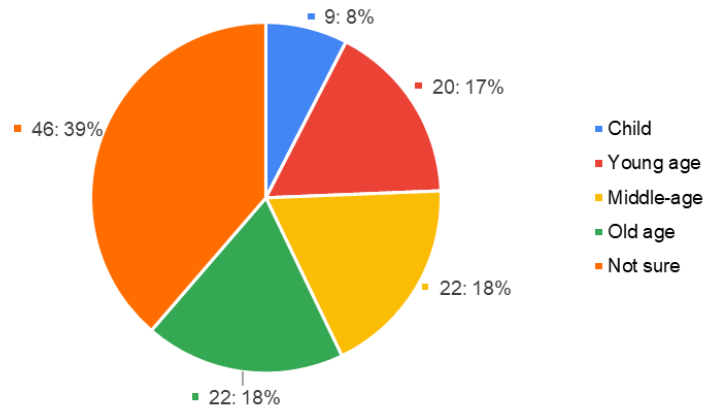


Figure 25: Age of the feline obake.

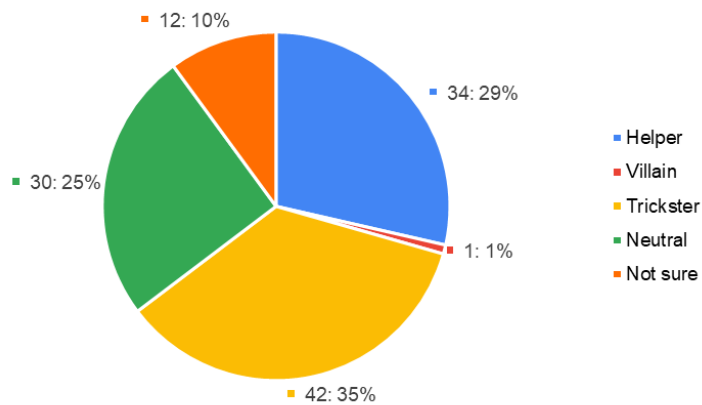


Figure 26: Role of the feline obake.

80 respondents (67%) identified the character as male, while 34 participants (29%) were unsure, and only 5 respondents (4%) perceived the character as female. The use of *wagahai* and *de aru* conveys an authoritative, traditionally male-associated formality, as exemplified by the register of male students in the Meiji era (*shoseigo*), which likely led respondents to identify the character as male. These linguistic choices, often linked with a scholarly or dignified male tone, likely reinforced the strong male attribution, even though the character also displays feline characteristics, such as the interjection *nyāgo*. As expressed in 5.2.12, the use of *wagahai* and *de aru* by a feline character can also be considered as a parodic reference to the novel *Wagahai wa neko de aru* by Natsume Sōseki, in which the feline protagonist uses such a high register under the influence of his owner, himself a former *shosei*. Perceptions around age were more varied, with 46 respondents (39%) being unsure, 22 respondents (18%) viewing the character as elderly, and smaller numbers perceiving a middle-aged (22 answers, 18%) or younger persona (20 answers, 17%). The uncertainty around age could stem from the mixture of

authoritative language, which might suggest age or maturity, and the interjection *nya*, which frames the speaker as a cat-like figure and adds a comedic undertone to the utterance. Regarding the role, 42 respondents (35%) viewed the character as a trickster, while 34 participants (29%) saw them as an ally, 30 participants (25%) as neutral, 12 respondents (10%) were unsure, and only 1 respondent (1%) regarded the speakers as a villain. The playful language, combined with a blend of formal speech and feline interjections, likely creates a quirky tone that can suggest mischievousness, contributing to the perception of the character as a trickster. Meanwhile, expressions such as *daiji ni suru ga ii* ‘take care’ may have conveyed a supportive nature, which aligns with perceptions of the character as an ally.

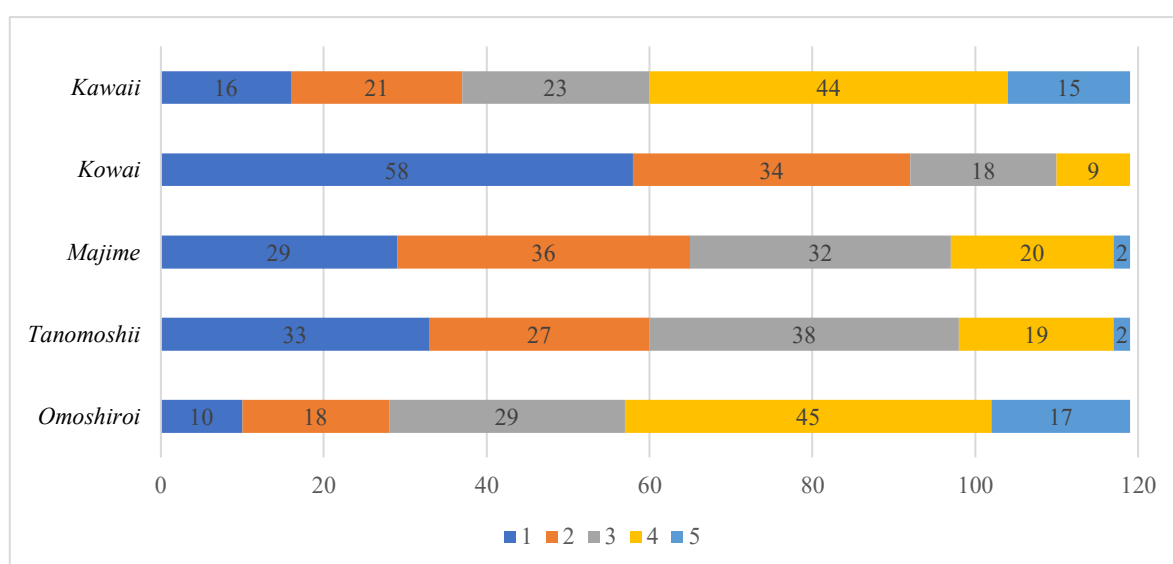


Figure 27: Perceptions on the feline obake.

The character received moderate ratings for cuteness, with most scores around 3 (24 answers, 20%) and 4 (44 answers, 37%). This reflects a perception of endearing qualities, likely due to the feline interjection. Most respondents did not perceive the character as scary, with 58 participants (48%) selecting the lowest score of 1. The character was perceived as not so serious: despite the high register adding gravity, the playful tone and the cat-like *nya* likely temper perceptions of strict seriousness. The character received mixed ratings on trustworthiness, with the majority (38 answers, 32%) selecting 3, while 33 participants (28%) chose the lowest rating of 1, and only 2 respondents (2%) selected the highest rating of 5. The impression of the speaker being a trickster may have caused respondents to feel uncertainty about the reliability of the character. Finally, perceptions of the speech being funny were relatively high, with 46 respondents (38%) assigning a score of 4. The comedic cat-like interjection *nyāgo*, and the mix of high

register and plain expressions, such as the informal third-person plural pronoun *yatsura* ‘those guys’, may have contributed to the impression of humour.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

19: 猫？オバケ？なので男性女性の判断が難しいと感じたが、「お嬢さん」の台詞で男性かなと推測した。

56: 我輩、なのである、という言葉が、生きてきた年月の長さを思わせる。ニャーゴやオバケ違いという言葉から、猫の姿をしたオバケだと推測した。コミカルな印象。

71: ねこ？

83: ニャーゴなので、猫なのかと連想しました。

84: ネコかなあ。憎めないタイプの味方ゆるキャラ

106: 子供に見える壮年の人外キャラクターのイメージ

120: 性別と年齢が無いマスコットキャラクター。体長は大きくても成人男性の膝丈程度で、声は女性声優(ワンピースのチョッパーやポケモンのニャースのようなやや特徴的な声)の印象です。口調の割に可愛いキャラクターのように感じます。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 7

19: “Because it is probably a cat or a monster it is difficult to decide whether it is male or female, but because it uses *ojōsan* I guess he is a male.” (F20R)

56: “Words like *wagahai* and *na no de aru* give the impression of an old character who has lived a long life. From words like *nyāgo* and *obake* I guess it is a monster in the shape of a cat. Comical impression.” (F20R)

71: “A cat?” (F40N)

83: “Because of *nyāgo*, it reminded me of a cat.” (F40S)

84: “I wonder if it is a cat... A friendly costumed mascot character that is impossible to dislike.” (F40S)

106: “Impression of an adult non-human character that looks like a child.” (M30S)

120: “A mascot character that has no gender and age. Its body length is about knee-length of an adult male at most, and its voice is that of a voice actress (a somewhat distinctive voice, like Chopper from *ONE PIECE* or Meowth from *Pokémon*). It feels like a cute character despite its manner of talking.” (N20O)

Expressions like *wagahai* and *de aru* were linked to age, with some respondents feeling they conveyed wisdom (Comment 56) or maturity (Comment 106). However, the feline-like interjection *nyāgo* led to varied interpretations, with Comment 106 imagining a character who is childlike in appearance, but actually adult in age. Multiple respondents identified feline characteristics based on *nyāgo*, associating it with a cat or cat-like mascot: comments such as ‘a cat or a monster’ (*neko? obake?*) in Comment 19, and references to a “cat” or “cat-like” figure in Comment 56, Comment 71, and Comment 83 indicate that the feline register is widely known and recognised. Comment 120 also explicitly mentions other non-human animal-like characters from contemporary popular manga and anime, suggesting how the intertextuality of the medialect shapes and informs language perceptions, even when the audience is not necessarily accustomed to the source material.

6.2.5. The young girl

でもさ...
 アンタの店じゃなくて親の店じゃん
 へいへい...
 ...お嬢やっぱり潜入に失敗したな
 なんだよ
 別に驚くこっちゃないだろ？
 アンタんとコにもいるし
 アタシは[...]!
 お嬢の保護者ってトコだな

Demo sa...
Anta no mise ja nakute oya no mise jan
Heihei...
...Ojō yappari sennyū ni shippai shita na
Nan da yo
Betsu ni odoroku koccha nai daro?
Anta n toko ni mo iru shi
Atashi wa [Purimu]!
Ojō no hogosha tte toko da na

Uh, y’know y’don’t own that store yet, right? It belongs to your parents.

Shyeah, yeah, what’s up?

... Oh, uh “mistress”, I see your attempt at infiltration failed.

Daaang, this one sure is sharp. You got a problem with that, kid?

I mean, you hang out with one, too, so what’s the big deal?

Call me Prime. You could say I’m Alou- er, the mistress’s guardian.

(*Recettear: An Item Shop’s Tale*, Carpe Fulgur, 2010)

This character is named Purimu (Prime) from the game *Rusettia*, and she is a fairy that can be seen sometimes accompanying another female character, claiming to be her guardian and addressing her as *ojō* ‘mistress’. In the extract above, the first-person pronoun *atashi* is used as index of female speakers, especially vigorous and tomboyish characters (Yoda, 2014a). Furthermore, the second-person pronoun *anta* is associated with young female speakers as index of impertinency and strong will (Fujimoto, 2014a). The final particle *sa* is also regarded as index of strong-mindedness and mannishness in female speakers (Yoda, 2014b). The absence of final particles in zero copula construction, which is regarded as index of female speaker (Shibatani, 1990: 373), and the presence of sentence-final expression like *da yo* and *da na* can be also interpreted as indexes of the strong will and the masculinity of the character.

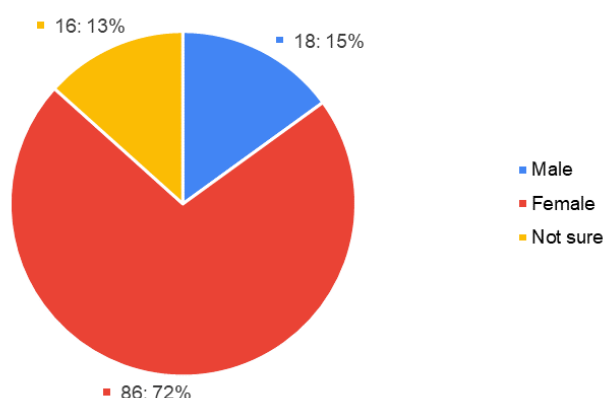


Figure 28: Gender of the young girl.

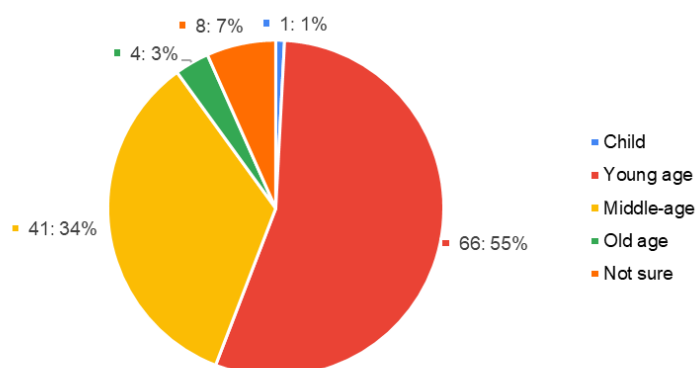


Figure 29: Age of the young girl.

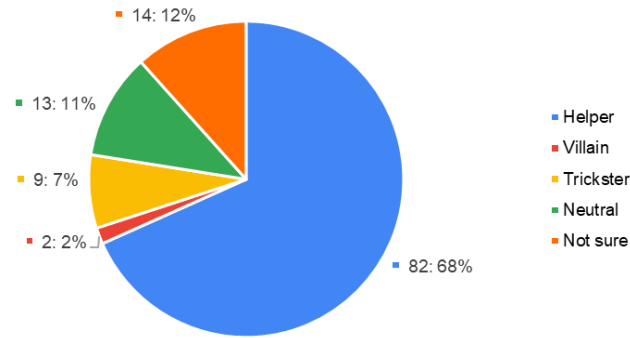


Figure 30: Role of the young girl.

A strong majority of 86 respondents (72%) identified the character as female, with only 18 participants (15%) selecting male, and 16 respondents (13%) being unsure. Elements such as *atashi* and *anta* likely led many participants to identify the character as female, albeit a somewhat unconventional or strong-willed one, as expressed also Comment 83 below. The use of language features that are regarded as divergent from traditional feminine speech, such as the aforementioned absence of zero copula construction, may have introduced some ambiguity. The character was primarily perceived as young (66 respondents, 55%) or middle-aged (41 respondents, 34%), with only 4 participants (3%) identifying an older age and 8 participants (7%) being unsure, likely suggested by the directness and lack of formality in the excerpt. Most respondents identified the character as an ally (82 respondents, 68%), while a smaller number viewed her as neutral (13 answers, 11%), trickster (9 answers, 7%), or villain (2 answers, 2%): as expressed by comments reported below, this association of the utterance to a positive figure is likely due to the impression of frankness and trustworthiness in the dialogue, together with the use of *hogosha* ‘guardian’ as term of self-description.

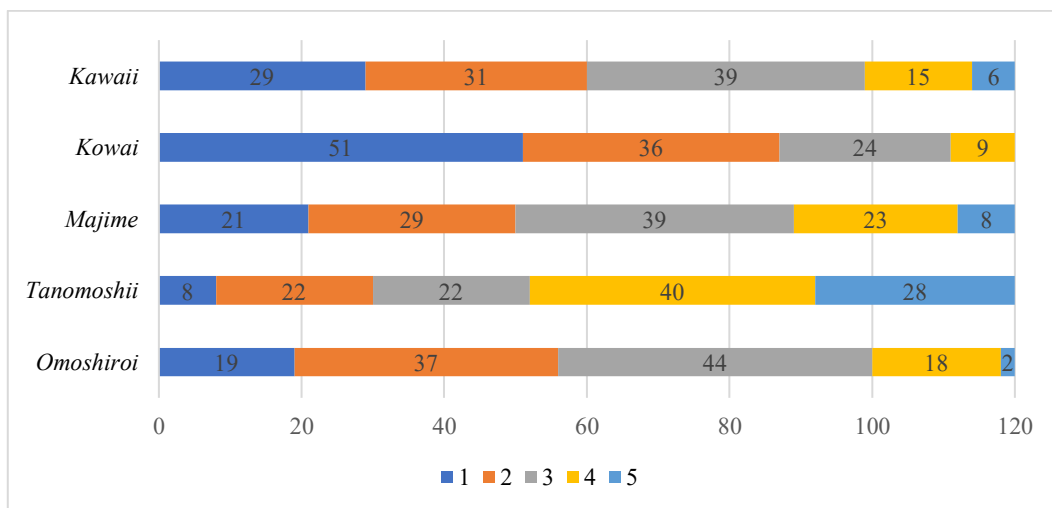


Figure 31: Perceptions on the young girl.

Ratings for the parameter of *kawaii* were moderate, with most respondents selecting scores of 2 (31 choices, 26%) or 3 (39 choices, 33%), and only 6 participants (5%) giving the highest rating of 5. This would align with the rougher language, which would not convey traditional attributes commonly associated to the label of *kawaii*, such as cuteness and delicateness (cf. Hiramoto & Wee, 2019: 16), but it would instead suggest a more direct personality of the speaker. Most respondents did not perceive the speaker as particularly scary, with 51 participants (43%) giving the lowest score of 1. The informal and direct tone may have softened perceptions of threat, making the character appear more approachable, despite the rough tone. For the parameter of seriousness, most respondents chose middle-range values, with 39 respondents (33%) rating it at 3 (neutral). On the other hand, the character was more consistently regarded as trustworthy, with 40 respondents (33%) selecting 4 and 28 respondents (23%) selecting the highest rating of 5. The role of the speaker as a self-proclaimed guardian, paired with informal but assertive speech, seems to evoke reliability and a sense of responsibility, as exemplified also by some of the comments reported below. Finally, the speaker was regarded as not particularly funny, with 37 respondents (31%) assigning it a score of 2 (not funny), and 44 respondents (37%) assigning a score of 3 (neutral).

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

56: アンタやアタシがカタカナ表記なのでフランクな印象。

83: 言葉遣いは男性っぽいけど、アタシと言ってるので、女性なのか、どちらか分からないと思った。

84: むかしからの馴染みやゆかりある人。親世代から、付き合いがあり家庭状況もわかってる人

106: 頼りになる姉御肌と感じた

120: 幼い或いは 10 代前半程度の女性主人公あるいはヒロイン(以下 A とする)に付き従っている女性(B とする)で、年齢は 10 代後半から 20 代前半程度でしょうか。B はやや男らしい性格か、あるいは、A のボディーガードなどの武力的な役割を担っている。A は B のことを慕っているが B はそのことに気づいていない。作品のファンの間で百合系の 2 次創作が流行る。(A 攻め B 受け)

(Optional) opinions and comments: 5

56: “An impression of frankness, because *anta* and *atashi* are written in katakana.” (F20R)

83: “Wording is masculine, but because it says *atashi* I am not sure if it is a female or not.” (F40S)

84: “A person that has an intimacy or a connection [with the addressee] since the past. Somebody who has a relationship since the generation of their parents and also knows that household well.” (F40S)

106: “I felt a big-sisterly disposition to be reliable.” (M30S)

120: “A woman (hereafter referred to as B), in her late teens or early 20s, who follows a young or early teenage female protagonist or heroine (hereafter referred to as A). B has a somewhat masculine personality or plays a military role, such as A’s bodyguard. A is in love with B, but B is unaware of it. Derivative *yuri* works are popular among fans of this work.” (A *seme*, b *uke*)” (N20O)

Comment 83 mentions how ‘wording is masculine’ (*kotobazukai wa otokoppoi*), but because the speaker uses *atashi* the participant is not sure if it is a female or not: this points to the contrast between assertive language, often viewed as masculine, and the pronoun *atashi*, typically associated with femininity. Comment 120 also references on the masculine personality of the speaker. Comment 120 also explicitly mentions ‘derivative works’ (*niji sōsaku*), denoting a competence of the participant in the media-mix of contemporary cultural industries in Japan, and especially so-called “*otaku* market”. In particular, borrowing again from the work of Japanese cultural critic Azuma Hiroki, the notion of derivative work is tied to his theory of database consumption (Azuma, 2007) as I have introduced in 1.4, referring to how consumers interact with fictional worlds as a collection of fragmented elements, such as character traits, visual motifs, and story tropes, that can also be rearranged or consumed independently of the source material.

二次創作とは、オリジナルのマンガやアニメのキャラクターが、読者や視聴者によって異なった設定や人間関係を与えられて作られる創作物を意味し、現在のオタクたちの市場ではきわめて大きな役割を果たしている。「二次」という表現からは、パロディやオマージュのような派生的な作品が想像されるが、実際にはそれに止まらず、実に多様な質の作品が生みだされている。二次創作の作品はおもに「同人誌」としてコミックマーケットや専門業者を介して流通しているが、近年では同人作家出身のクリエイターが増え

ているため、その発想は商業作品の市場にも深く浸透している。たとえば最近のアニメやゲームでは、オリジナルの作品とほぼ同時に、そこからキャラクターだけ引き抜き、異なる設定のなかに投げこんで作られた関連作品が制作されることがあるが、それらはいわば（矛盾する表現だが）オリジナルの二次創作とでも言える作品である。プロのマンガ家が自作の二次創作を発表することもめずらしくない。(Azuma, 2007)

Derivative works [*niji sōsaku*] refer to original manga and anime characters that are created with different settings and relationships depending on the reader or viewer, and they play an extremely important role in the current *otaku* market [*otakutachi no shijō*]. The expression “secondary” [*niji*] suggests derivative works such as parodies and homages, but in reality, it goes beyond that and produces works of a wide variety of qualities. Derivative works are mainly distributed as *dōjinshi* through the comic market and specialised businesses, but in recent years, as the number of creators who are former *dōjinshi* writers has increased, the idea has penetrated deeply into the market for commercial works. For example, in recent anime and games, related works, in which characters are taken out of them and thrown into a different setting, are sometimes produced almost simultaneously with the original work. However, albeit contradictory, such works can be said to be derivative of the original. It is also not uncommon for professional manga artists to publish their own derivative works. (Translation mine)

In these cases, derivative works highlight the intertextual repertoire of fictional works of pop culture, where elements from different sources are reinterpreted, recombined, and recontextualised. As such, it is also possible to argue that knowledge of registers of fictionalised orality, as a kind of intertextual repertoire, is circulated (cf. Squires 2014: 43) through exposure to other forms of pop culture. Thus, participants in the questionnaire appear to be able to recognise characterological figures on the basis of linguistic cues, even without any additional external information about the speaking NPCs or knowledge of the source material.

Finally, comment 56 references a metapragmatic commentary on the use of katakana as an index of ‘frankness’ (*furanku na inshō*). This reflects comments by developers reported in Chapter 4, and particularly by Laineus in 4.1, who believes that katakana creates an impression of ‘innocence’ (*mujakisa*), rather than a sense of foreignness: this confirms that the indexical field of potential meanings of katakana is pragmatically shaped by the context in which the index is found, rather than being fixed.

6.2.6. The stereotypical rough male

こら！待てー！
おー そこの赤いの！
そのままじっとしてろよ
いててて 耳耳！そりゃオレだ！
耳が伸びるだろ！ いいから放せ！
んん！？
言葉が通じてるのか？
どうやらオレの言葉がわかるのはおまえだけみたいだな
オレとしちゃそっちのお嬢さんとしゃべれた方が嬉しかったんだがな
何だと！？ 追うぞ！

Kora! Matē!
Ō soko no akai no!
Sono mama jitto shitero yo
Itetetete mimi mimi! Sorya ore da!
Mimi ga nobiru daro! Ii kara hanase!
N n!?
Kotoba ga tsūjiteru no ka?
Dō yara ore no kotoba ga wakaru no wa omae dake mitai da na
Ore to shicha socchi no ojōsan to shabereta hō ga ureshikatta n da ga na
Nan da to!/? Ou zo!

Wait! Hold it!
You there in red!
Hold on to it!
Ow, ow, ow, ow! My ears! That's me!
You're stretching out my ears! Would ya let me go?
Huh?!
Are you able to understand what I'm saying?
So it seems that you're the only one who can understand what I'm saying.
I don't really know what's going on... But you can understand me, so all right!
Let's follow 'em! Are ya ready?
(*Detective Pikachu*, Nintendo, 2018)

The character is Pikachu, from the game *Detective Pikachu*. This peculiar talking Pikachu claims to be a great detective, and it is depicted as holding a magnifying glass and wearing a brown coat and deerstalker hat. In particular, in this graphical representation of the NPC, the deerstalker can be regarded as a reference to Sherlock Holmes, and indirectly as an index for the construction of the characterological figure of the detective, as «[t]he deerstalker alone can serve synecdochically to signify the Great Detective» (cf. Pearson, 2018: 144). In the excerpt

above, the first-person pronoun *ore* can be interpreted as index of unrefined, masculine, and direct male speakers (Kinsui, 2014d). The final particle *zo* can also be considered as index of forceful male speakers (Yoda, 2014d), as the repeated use of imperative forms. It is interesting to note here that the human protagonist of the game, when he first hears these words, apologises to the speaker calling him ‘old-timer’ (*ojisan*), and is then puzzled when he discovers that the speaker is actually a Pikachu. This in-game label would suggest that the register can be associated to a middle-aged male figure.

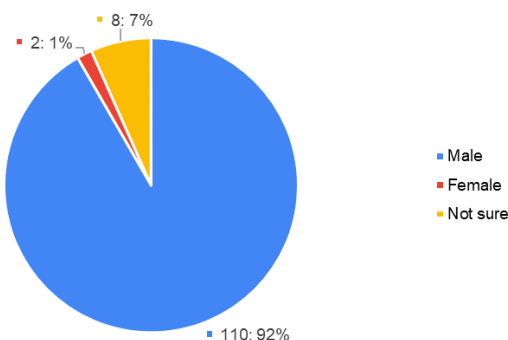


Figure 32: Gender of the rough male.

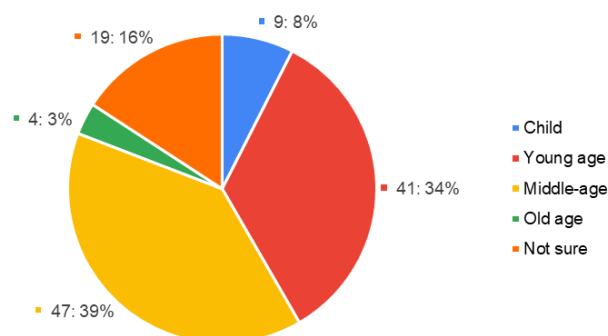


Figure 33: Age of the rough male.

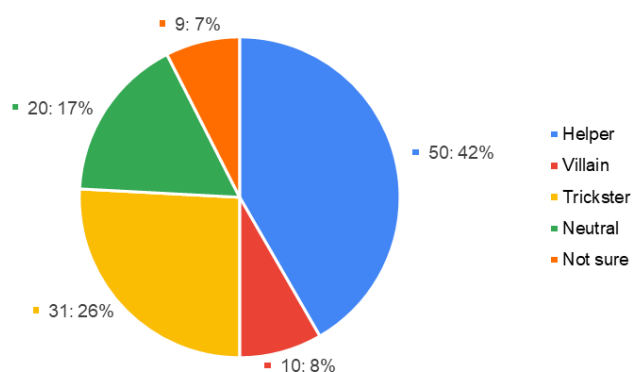


Figure 34: Role of the rough male.

The overwhelming majority of participants found the character to be male, with 110 respondents (92%) identifying him as such. This strong identification aligns with the linguistic markers in the dialogue, specifically the use of *ore* and *zo*, which are traditionally associated with a direct and masculine tone (cf. Sturtz Sreetharan, 2004). Respondents were split between perceptions of the character as middle-aged (47 respondents, 39%) or young (41 respondents, 34%), while a smaller group (9 respondents, 8%) saw the character as childlike: these results appear to follow the in-game label of *ojisan* only in part. Such mixed perception is also referenced in a comment, reported below, where one participant thought that the speaker is an elderly male but with the appearance of a young girl (Comment 120). The role most attributed to the character was that of an ally (50 respondents, 42%), though there was a significant number who saw the character as a trickster (31 respondents, 26%). As noted in the comments, despite the arrogant and condescending tone associated with overtly male-associated language, the overall humorous tone of the utterance did not evoke impressions of a villainous character (see 6.8 for a comparison).

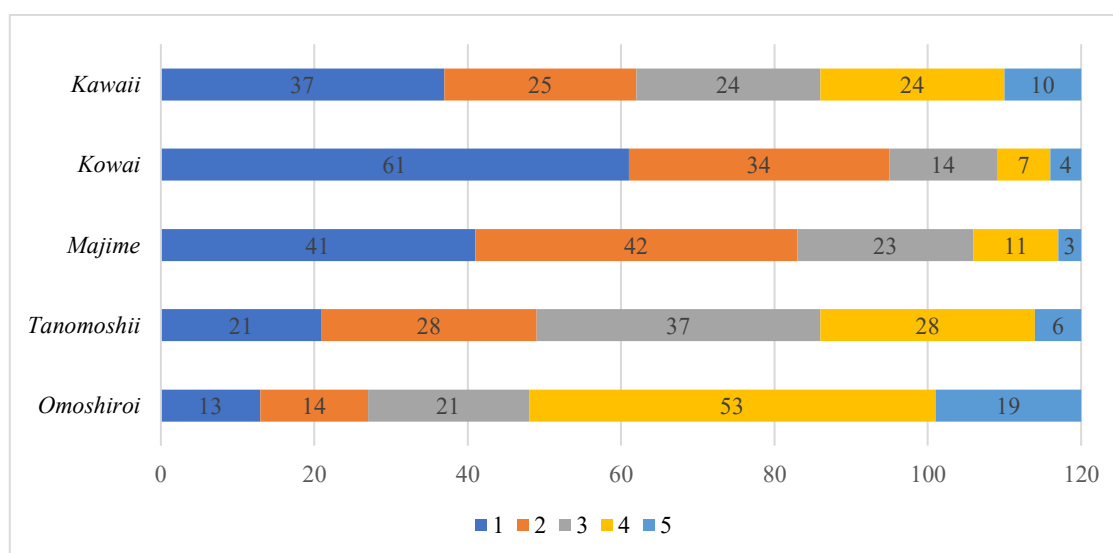


Figure 35: Perceptions on the rough male.

The character was not perceived as cute, with 37 respondents (31%) rating it at 1: the assertive tone and direct language are likely to have influenced such perceptions of cuteness. Most respondents (61 answers, 51%) gave the character the lowest rating for scariness at 1, as the language does not appear to come across as actually threatening, despite being recognised as arrogant or rough. The speaker is also perceived as not serious, with 41 respondents (34%) rating it at 1, and 42 respondents (35%) rating it at 2. No significant tendencies can be found regarding the parameter of trustworthiness, but a relative majority of respondents found the speaker neither particularly trustworthy nor untrustworthy (37 responses, 31%). Finally, most

participants found the character funny, with 53 respondents (44%) rating it at 4 and 19 respondents (16%) rating it at the highest score at 5.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

49: 上から目線だと思う

56: 言葉遣いが大人の男性キャラクターに採用されやすいものだと感じた。おまえ呼びだが、ひらがな表記だし、コミカルなところがあるのでそこまで高圧的に感じない。

83: オレなので男性だと思いました。

84: ウサギか、耳の長いキャラ。開けっ広げな性格

106: 軽口を叩いてるけど少々粗暴に感じる。

120: キャラクター設定は中年から老人くらいの男性であるが、見た目は動物か可愛らしい少女などであるような印象。ピンチの時に秘密の技とかで助けてくれそう。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 6

49: “An arrogant or condescending attitude.” (M19R)

56: “I think that this way of speaking is easily employed by adult male characters. It uses *omae*, but because it is written in hiragana and there are comical passages, I do not think that it is that much oppressive.”

83: “Because of *ore* I think he is male.” (F40S)

84: “A rabbit or a character with long ears. A frank and open personality.” (F40S)

106: “It cracks jokes, but I feel it is a little rough.” (M30S)

120: “The impression is that of a character whose profile is that of a middle-aged to elderly man, but whose appearance is that of an animal or a cute young girl. It could be of help in a pinch with a secret technique or something.” (N20O)

Two comments explicitly mention the association between personal pronouns and language ideologies: on the one hand, *omae* is regarded as an oppressive address term, but the script choice is found to influence such perception, with hiragana being regarded as a “softer” script and therefore making *omae* less oppressive (Comment 56). On the other hand, *ore* is explicitly recognised as a male-associated first-person pronoun (Comment 83), resonating with the quantitative results of the survey, showing that the majority of the respondents are aware of such ideological association. Finally, despite the in-game label of *oyaji*, only two comments have metapragmatically described the speaker using terms belonging to the relative semantic field,

otona no dansei ‘adult male’ in Comment 56, and *chūnen kara rōjin kurai no dansei* ‘middle-aged to elderly man’ in Comment 120.

6.2.7. The polite speaker of standard Japanese

拾ったら**私**のところへ戻って来て下さい。

拾えたよう**です**ね。

基本的な操作はこんな**ところ**です。

ところで、今日の**あなた**は、恋人へリンゴを持って帰るためにこの森へ**来**ましたね。

あなたの部屋は森を抜けて北へ進んだ先に**あり**ます。

さあ、彼女が**待**っていますよ。

私はこれで失礼**し**ます。

*Hirottara **watashi** no tokoro e modotte kite **kudasai**.*

*Hiroeta yō **desu ne**.*

*Kihonteki na sōsa wa konna tokoro **desu**.*

*Tokoro de, kyō no **anata** wa, koibito e ringo o motte kaeru tame ni kono mori e **kimashita ne**.*

***Anata** no heya wa mori o nukete kita e susunda saki ni **arimasu**.*

*Sā, kanojo ga matte **imasu yo**.*

***Watashi** wa kore de **shitsurei shimasu**.*

Please come back to me after picking it up.

You have picked it up.

These are the basic controls.

By the way,

Today, you came to this forest to bring an apple back to your girlfriend.

Your home is located at the north of this forest.

She’s waiting for you.

Then, I will take my leave now.

(*The Dream Libra Had*, Laineus, 2021)

The character is named Kajitsu and appears in the game *The dream Libra had*. The character is dressed as a butler, with a black suit and a tie, but whose head is an apple. The tone of the dialogues, and of the extract above, is polite and adheres to Standard Japanese, with consistent use of the neutral first-person pronoun *watashi*, the polite copular expression *desu*, the polite auxiliary form *-masu* and its past tense *-mashita*, and the form of request *-te kudasai*. Kinsui (2003: 68-69) argues that ‘standard language’ (*hyōjungo*) has a low degree of role language. This argument would suggest that, as argued in 5.11, Standard Japanese possess a low degree of iconicity and would not be used to index specific characterological figures. However, Duc-Harada (2021) instead argues that *hyōjungo* is used in fiction to emphasise contrast between

two figures employing different linguistic registers, such as protagonist and antagonist, or to characterise the speaker as formal, responsible, mature, or serious.

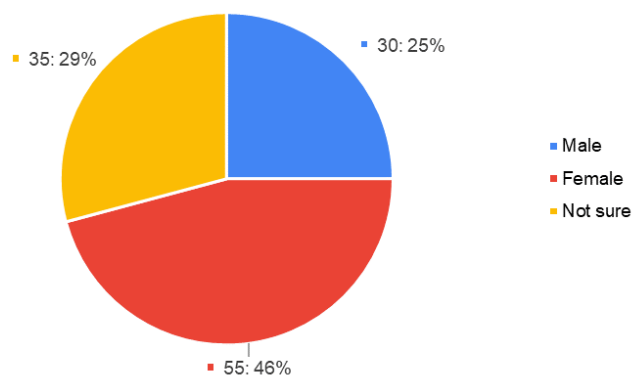


Figure 36: Gender of the speaker of standard Japanese.

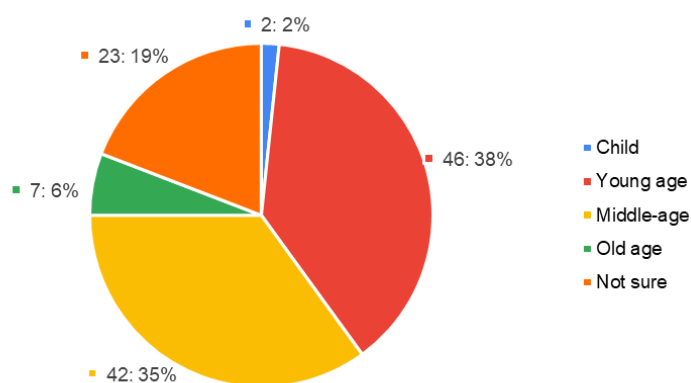


Figure 37: Age of the speaker of standard Japanese.

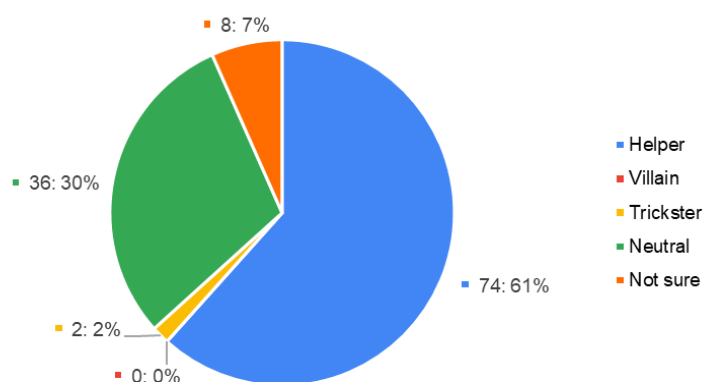


Figure 38: Role of the speaker of standard Japanese.

The responses leaned significantly towards perceiving the character as female (55 respondents, 46%), while 30 participants (25%) saw them as male, and 35 participants (29%) were

unsure. Such association is likely due to the use of the first-person pronoun *watashi* and the formal used by the character, which, despite not being gendered expressions *per se*, are considered more likely to be used by female speaker, due to the gender ideology of female speech seen as more refined than male speech (cf. Cameron, 2005). Most participants associated the character to a young (46 answers, 38%) or middle-aged persona (42 answers, 35%), despite the lack of any recognisable index of age in the textual extract. Finally, a majority of respondents identified the character as an ally (74 answers, 61%), indicating that the language conveys a sense of guidance and support. The instructive and polite phrasing would align with a helping or supporting role, rather than a neutral or villainous figure, with two participants also commenting that such a character would likely be featured in a tutorial, as expressed below.

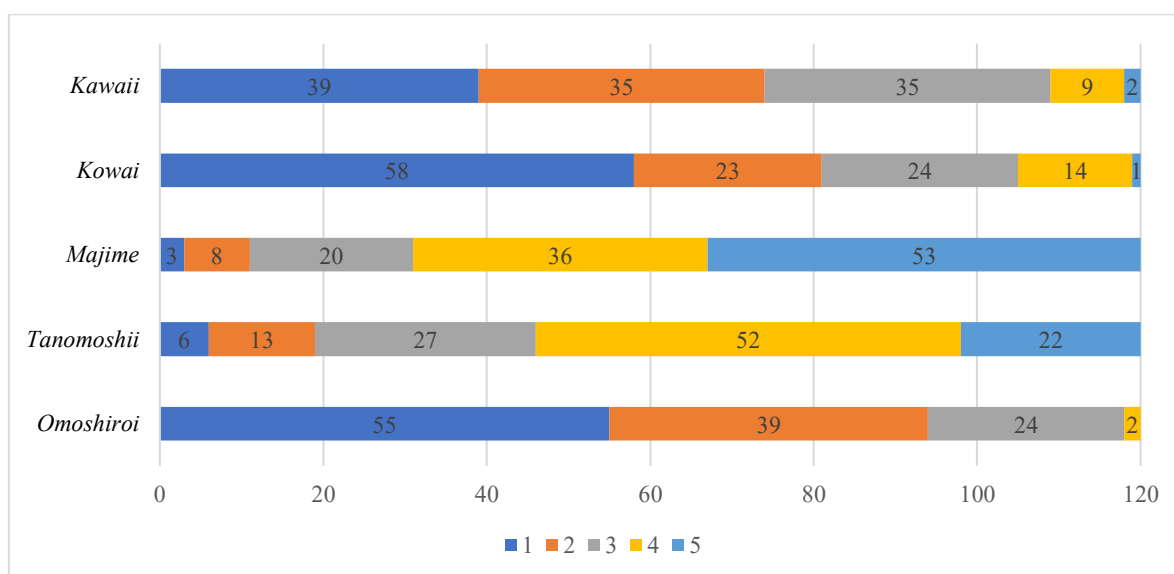


Figure 39: Perceptions on the speaker of standard Japanese.

The character was perceived as not cute, with the majority of scores falling between 1 (39 respondents, 33%), 2 (35 respondents, 29%), and 3 (35 respondents, 29%). The character was also perceived as not scary, with 58 respondents choosing the lowest score at 1. Conversely, the speaker was regarded as very serious, with most ratings at 4 (36 answers, 30%) and 5 (53 answers, 44%). Similarly, it was also regarded as trustworthy, with a majority of scores in the range of 4 (52 answers, 43%) and 5 (22 answers, 18%). Finally, the character was perceived as not funny, with the majority of respondents rating it at the lowest scores of 1 (55 answers, 46%) and 2 (39 answers, 33%). Such attitudes largely reflect common perceptions of Standard Japanese (*hyōjungo*) as «boring» (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith, 2016: 90), while also being

recognised as the language of reliable and serious characters (Duc-Harada, 2021: 55) in the medialect of fictional works.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

13: 精霊のような、年齢やジェンダーの概念がない存在に感じる。最後のボスになってもおかしくない

53: そもそも人間ではなく神様のような印象を受ける

56: 主人公のサポート役で、チュートリアルなどで操作方法を教えてくれるキャラクターのように思う。私という一人称はどのジェンダーにも用いられる丁寧なものだし、語尾にも現実では聞かないような過剰な「女言葉(だわ、なのね、など)」が使用されていない。なのでジェンダーを強調する言葉遣いは見えにくいと判断した。

83: 丁寧な言葉遣いだと、女性っぽく感じます。

84: 礼儀正しい執事的な人。誰にでも、丁寧な感じの人

106: 丁寧なのでチュートリアル説明の女性だと思うが、丁寧な口調でえげつない事をしてくるサイコキャラもいるので言葉だけでは怖い

120: 中性あるいは無性で全体的に白く(白い長髪など) 見た目からは年齢感生物感を感じさせない。神秘的な存在。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 7

13: “It feels like a spirit-like being that has no concept of age or gender. It would not be strange for this character to become the final boss.” (M20S)

53: “In the first place I get the impression of a god, not of a human.” (M19S)

56: “I think it is like a character who supports the protagonist and that during the tutorial teaches how to move in the game. *Watashi* is a polite pronoun that can be used by any gender, and there is no excessive use of “women’s language” (like *da wa* or *na no ne*), which would not be heard in real life, at the end of words. So, I judged that expressions that emphasise gender are hard to detect.” (F20R)

83: “Because of the polite way of speaking, I feel like it is feminine.” (F40S)

84: “A courteous butler-like person. Somebody who is polite towards anyone.” (F40S)

106: “Because of the politeness I think it is a female in a tutorial, but because there are also psychotic characters with a polite way of talking who do nasty things, words alone are scary.” (M30S)

120: “Androgynous or asexual, overall white (e.g. long white hair), no sense of age or biology from appearance. Mystical being.” (N20O)

Respondents did not mention on *anata* coming being perceived as arrogant, despite it being one of the most common impressions associated with its use (Yonezawa, 2021: 78). However, the dominant use of *anata* as a non-gendered term of self-address (Yonezawa, 2021: 10) is recognised by participants, as they do not feel that the speaker is characterised in terms of gender through its language use. In these regards, the perceived genderless nature of the speaker is mentioned by several participants (Comment 13, Comment 56, Comment 120). However, the overall politeness of the utterance is explicitly mentioned as an indirect index of female speech (Comment 83, Comment 106), which appears to reproduce the dominant ideology of Japanese female language as more refined (cf. Nakamura, 2005).

6.2.8. The villain

とまれコゾウ！

この[...]さまのかわいいペットをいじめたやつはキサマだな！

そのうえでノイズをはねかえせるらしいがこいつもおなじようにできるかな？

ガブリ！！とやられてしまうがいい！

そうはさせんぞ！

ジャマものどもがおいかけてきおったか！

Tomare kozō!

Kono [Gāgan]-sama no kawaii petto o ijimeta yatsu wa kisama da na!

Sono ue de noizu o hanekaeseru rashii ga koitsu mo onaji yō ni dekiru ka na?

Gaburi!! To yararete shimau ga ii!

Sō wa sasen zo!

Jama mono-domo ga oi kakete kiotta ka

Stop right there! You’d better listen when the great Gargan’s talking.

So... YOU’RE the one who’s been mistreating my adorable pets.

I hear you’re quite a sound striker with that stuff, but I wonder...

Can you handle a REAL challenge?

For your sake, you’d better hope you’re beaten in a single chomp!

Hold it right there!

So, some annoying scum has been chasing me around, eh?

(*HarmoKnight*, Nintendo, 2013)

This character is named Gāgan (Gargan) and is the main villain of the game *Rizumu hantā Hāmonaito*. He is the leader of the Noizoids (*Noizoido*), a race of cybernetic aliens who create

extremely loud noises. The character addresses himself using his own first name with the honorific suffix *-sama* (*Gāgan-sama*), which can be compared to the address term *oresama* and is considered as index of arrogant and vulgar male characters (Kinsui, 2014d). *Kisama* is regarded as a highly derogatory second-person pronoun, mainly used by male speakers when addressing subordinates or verbally abusing the addressee. Regarding the auxiliary verb *oru* in *kiotta*, Takagi (2025: 381-382) states that it is used in Western Japanese as anti-honorific aspect marker, and it is used to express disdain towards the addressee or when talking to somebody that is deemed as inferior in status to the speaker, as seen in 5.7.3 with the auxiliary verb *yoru*. In this sense, *oru* can be considered as synonymous to the auxiliary verb *yagaru* used in Eastern varieties of Japanese for the same pejorative pragmatic function. The final particle *zo* is considered as index of male speakers, usually forceful authority figures (Yoda, 2014d). The expression *gaii* as an imperative form of request is also often associated with authority figures, and especially villains. On the other hand, the negative auxiliary *-n* is associated to elderly male speakers (Kinsui, 2014o).

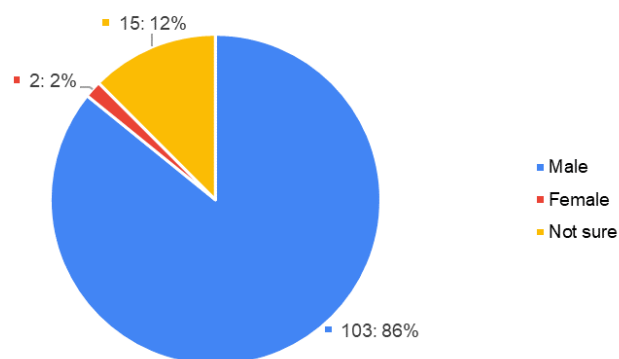


Figure 40: Gender of the villain.

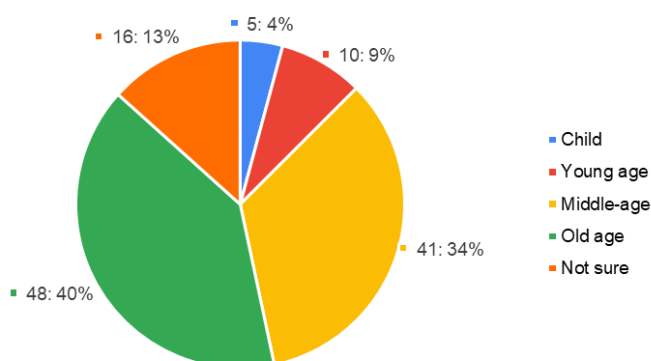


Figure 41: Age of the villain.

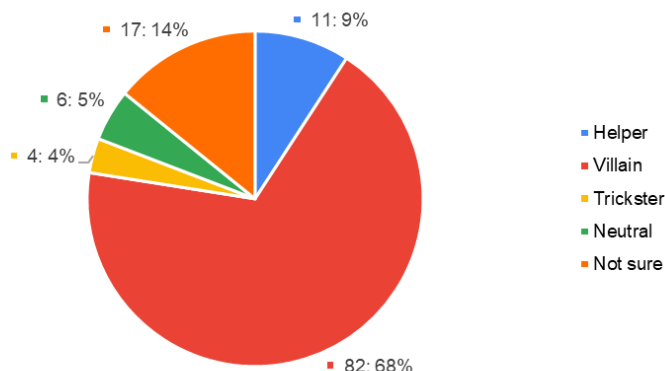


Figure 42: Role of the villain.

The speaker was recognised as a male by the great majority of participants, with 103 choices (86%), likely due to the coarse language and to specific linguistic items commonly associated to male speech like *da na* and *zo*. The majority of respondents associated the extract with a villainous character. The character was regarded as mature, with 48 participants (40%) associating the utterance with an impression of old age, and 41 participants (34%) with an impression of middle age. This is reflected in two comments, presented below, who explicitly associate the utterance with a middle-aged man or an *ossan* (colloquial and slight derogatory expression to denote a middle-aged man). Finally, the character was recognised as a villain, with 82 respondents (68%) choosing such option, likely due to the derogatory tone of the utterance, with the use of imperative forms or request, self-aggrandising forms of address like *-sama* attached to its own name, and vulgar personal pronouns like *kisama*.

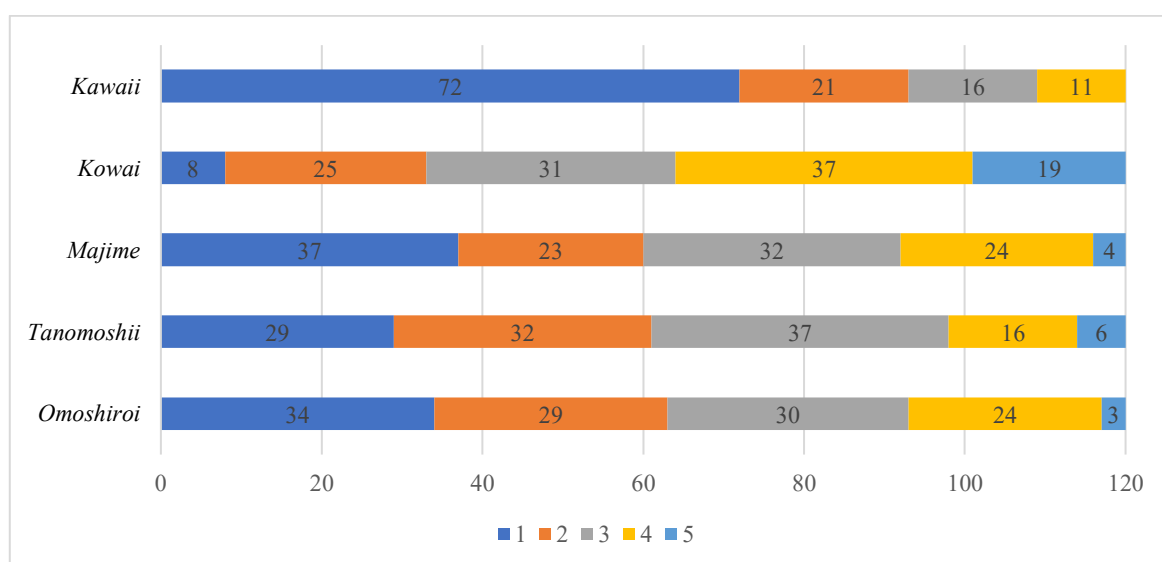


Figure 43: Perceptions on the villain.

The character was perceived as not cute, with 72 respondents (60%) assigning the lowest score of 1. The character was also perceived as scary, with 37 respondents (31%) assigning a score of 4. No significant tendencies could be seen for the parameter of seriousness, apart from 37 participants (31%) considering the speaker “not at all serious” with a score of 1: such evaluation is also found in some of the comments. The character was also not considered particularly trustworthy, with 98 respondents (82%) giving a rating of 3 or lower (neutral or negative), and not especially funny, as 93 respondents (78%) gave a rating of 3 or lower. These predominant negative evaluations align with the NPC being framed as a villain, which would not be typically expected to elicit a positive response from the audience in terms of likability.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

13: あんまり強くなさそう

52: このキャラクターは知らないが、おそらく、Pokémon のキャラクターだと私は思った。

56: セリフに漢字が一切ないことから、知能レベルがあまり高くないキャラクターとして設定されている、または人外のキャラクターなのかと感じた。仰々しい言葉遣いとひらがなカタカナのみの文章のギャップが可愛いと思う。

84: 悪役のおっさん。ちょっと、押され気味な雰囲気かな、ちょっと焦ってる感じ。

106: 主人公の強さを示すためのやられ役として模範的。身体がデカくパツと見強そうな中年のおじさんがイメージ出来る。

120: 出オチの敵キャラだが、ファンからの人気によっては味方キャラになりギャグ要因になる。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 6

13: “It does not seem very strong.” (M20S)

52: “I do not know this character, but I think that it is probably a character from *Pokémon*.” (M20S)

56: “The absence of any kanji in the dialogue made me feel that the character was set up as a character with a not very high level of intelligence, or a non-human character. I think the discrepancy between the exaggerated language and the hiragana-katakana-only text is cute.” (F20R)

84: “Villain *ossan*. A bit of a pushy atmosphere, a bit impatient.” (F40S)

106: “Exemplary as a beaten role to show the strength of the protagonist. I can imagine a middle-aged mister with a big body and a strong appearance.” (M30S)

120: “Enemy characters who are laughing stocks, but depending on their popularity with fans, they can become allies and become a gag factor.” (N200)

Interestingly, Comment 56 explicitly addresses script ideologies. The in-game text is presented only in hiragana and katakana, likely due to children being the expected audience for the game, as «texts written by/for children are often kanji-absent» (Robertson, 2019: 2), and the game is rated as suitable for all ages by CERO (see 5.1). However, Comment 56 related the lack of kanji in the dialogue with a perceived sense of non-intelligence in the speaking character, addressing the normative language ideology of kanji being the “proper” way to express Japanese. The participant also appears to project a common view of script choice indexing identities (cf. Robertson, 2017), and in this case the lack of kanji where one would expect them is associated with an “uneducated” characterological figure. The pervasiveness of language ideologies about correct language use can also be seen here, and it appears to resonate with the views of D. in 4.2, where the game developer implies that *kokugo* is the ideologically correct usage, compared to the medialect, which is seen as a “less prestigious” repertoire.

6.2.9. The young-looking female *kami*

んむ？並列処理がどうかしたさ？

こらえているのさ。

しかし貴様の姿を見かけるだけで身体の制止ができぬのよ。

夫の胸に飛びこむ妻の心境を思い描くがいい

時間の問題さね

少なすぎはしないかや

桁を増やせこの不信心者

ワシのさね

N mu? Heiretsu shori ga dō ka shita sa?

Koraete iru no sa.

Shikashi kisama no sugata o mikakeru dake de karada no seishi ga dekinu no yo.

Otto no mune ni tobikomu tsuma no shinkyō o omoiegaku ga ii

Jikan no mondai sa ne

Sukunasugi wa shinai ka ya

Keta o fuyase kono fushinjinsha

Washi no sa ne

What? What do you mean multi-task No.1? Why are you looking at me like that, girl?

I try. But I can't help myself when I see you. Imagine a sailor's wife jumping into her
 husband's arms after his long voyage at sea.
 But you will be, soon.
 Isn't that too little?
 Well then, put in several!
 That's my ice-cream money.

(*Petit Novel Series Vol. 2: Boundaries in January*, Flyhigh Works, 2014)

This dialogue belongs to Shiro from the game *Kyōiki no ichigatsu*. The character is a female *kami*, a local Shintō deity, and is graphically depicted as a young female with white hair. However, many linguistic features in her dialogues are more often associated to the characterisation of male speakers in the medialect. In particular, the first-person pronoun *washi* is associated to the register of elderly male speakers (Fujimoto, 2014g). The second-person pronoun *kisama* is also considered as index of male language, and in the medialect it is used to characterise cool-headed male speakers who constantly look down on others (Kinsui, 2014g: 73). The auxiliary *-nu* when used together with the pronoun *washi* is also considered as index of elderly male register (Iwata, 2014e). Request are presented twice, once with the construction “*rentaikei + ga ii*”, and one with the imperative form (*meireikei*) of the verb. The expression *ga ii* in particular is recognised as old-fashioned and is used to frame authority figures. In the medialect, the final particle *sa* is found both in the speech of male characters as index of coolness and independence, and in the speech of female characters as index of strong-mindedness and mannishness (Yoda, 2014b). On the other hand, the final particle *no* in affirmative sentences is associated to both elderly male register and female speech (Yoda, 2014g), but the presence of the additional final particle *yo* in the expression *no yo* is used in the medialect as index of female characters (Yoda, 2014i). The particle *ne* in the medialect appears more often in the register of female characters (Yoda, 2014f). However, the expression *sa ne* in the extract appears to have archaic or dialectal nuances (Hasunuma, 2015: 21) and is regarded by some native speakers as belonging to middle-aged female characters in the medialect (Takigawa, n.d.; @rurya_niji, 2023). Finally, as a *dōjin* game, the source material likely allowed the development team greater freedom in shaping the visual and linguistic characterisation of the NPC, particularly in the contrast between the young-looking female character and the register of the dialogue. Such gaps between graphical depiction and linguistic characterisation are also referenced by Noguchi in 4.4 and by Ryūkishi07 in 4.6 as techniques used by developers to subvert the expectations of players, and they can be interpreted as one of the (arguably few) ways where developers creatively engage with language use inside their games.

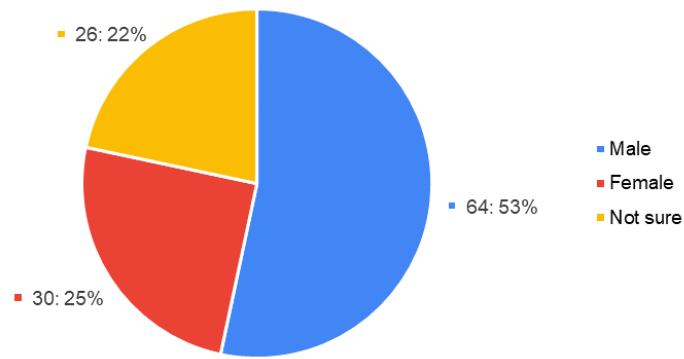


Figure 44: Gender of the young-looking kami.

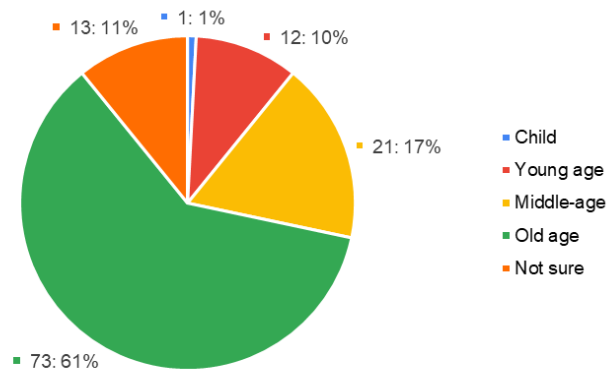


Figure 45: Age of the young-looking kami.

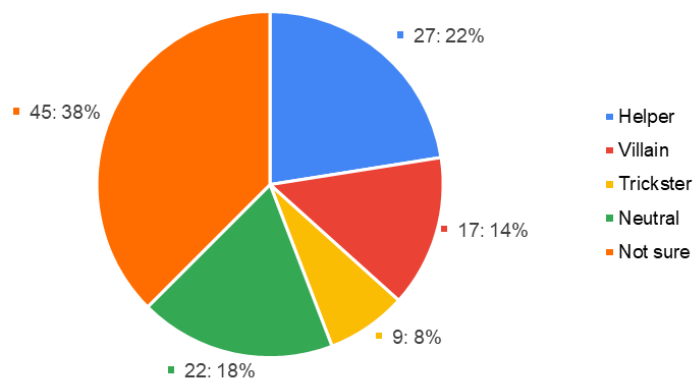


Figure 46: Role of the young-looking kami.

Although the character is female, the majority of the respondent felt that the character was male, with 64 responses (53%). Differently from another character framed as an old female (see 6.10), Shiro's dialogues do not feature indexes of female speech. *Rōjingo* appears to be understood as a normative register for old males, reflecting the ideology that male-associated forms

are unmarked and are seen as the norm, while female-associated forms are recognised as deviations. In the case of this extract, since the linguistic forms do not deviate from the norm, they are normatively associated to a male speaker, as it would be considered unnatural for a female persona to express herself with such tone. Accordingly, the character was perceived as mature by the majority of participants, with 73 participants (61%) describing it as old, and 21 participants (17%) as middle-aged. Finally, it appears that the NPC was not heavily characterised in terms of role, as 45 respondents (38%) were unsure. Apart from this, 27 respondents (22%) associated the dialogue extract with an ally, and 22 participants (18%) with a neutral character.

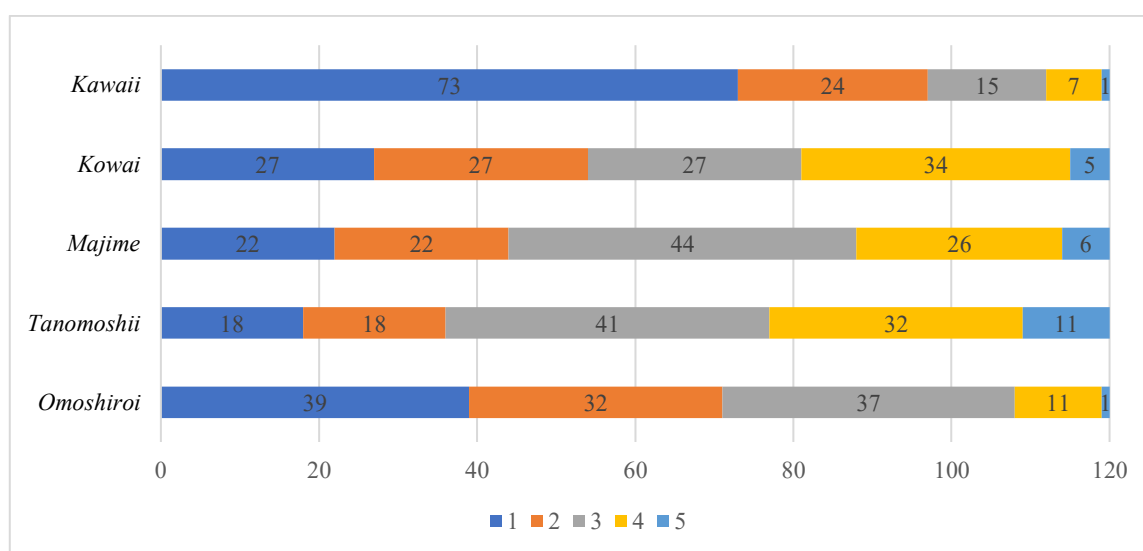


Figure 47: Perceptions on the young-looking kami.

The character was regarded as overwhelmingly not funny, with 73 respondents (61%) rating it at the lowest score at 1. Conversely, no significant tendencies could be seen regarding the perceived scariness of the character. The speaker was regarded as averagely serious, with 44 respondents (37%) rating it at 3 (neutral), and as somewhat trustworthy, with 41 respondents (34%) rating it at 3, and 32 respondents (27%) assigning it a score of 4. On the other hand, the speaker was regarded as overwhelmingly not funny, with 39 participants (33%) assigning it the lowest score of 1.

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

13: AKIRA のミヤコ様みたいなポジション？

20: どこかの方言で話している印象。

56: 話し言葉が古いので、年齢としてはかなり上だと思うが、見た目はその年齢に比例していないのではないかと感じた。夫の胸に飛び込む妻、という例え話は長年連れ添った夫婦の関係というより、結婚したばかりで愛情が溢れ出ている関係のように思う。そのため、見た目はそれくらい若いのではないかと思った。

83: ワシなので、老人っぽく感じました

84: しんいをつく言葉を伝える人

106: 少々面倒くさいインテリキャラを連想する。子供以外であれば幅広い年齢層でイメージ出来る

120: ほとんど人物像が浮かばないが最後の「ワシ」という一人称からは老人や老婆という印象を受ける。しかし前の文との一貫性は感じられない。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 7

13: “A position like Lady Miyako from *Akira*?” (M20S)

20: “An impression of somebody speaking in a dialect from somewhere.” (F20R)

56: “Because the spoken language is archaic, I think that it is quite old in terms of age, but I felt that its appearance may not be proportionate to its age. I think that the analogy of a wife jumping into her husband’s chest is like a relationship where the couple has just married and there is an outpouring of love, rather than the relationship of a couple who have been together for many years. Therefore, I thought that the character’s appearance must be somewhat young.” (F20R)

83: “Because of *washi* it felt like an old man.” (F40S)

84: “A person who delivers words of truth.” (F40S)

106: “I associate it with slightly bothersome intellectual characters. It can be associated with a wide range of age groups, except children.” (M30S)

120: “I can hardly picture the person, but the first-person *washi* at the end gives the impression of an old man or an old woman. But there is no sense of coherence with the previous sentences.” (N20O)

Comment 13 supports the view of intertextuality as a preferred way for the transmission and the recognition of iconised registers, namely drawing from the character of Lady Miyako (*Miyako-sama*) from the manga *AKIRA* (Ōtomo, 1982-1990). In the manga, Lady Miyako is a former government test subject, who possesses psychic abilities. She is depicted as an older woman who serves as a spiritual leader, guiding her followers, and offering wisdom. Her

dialogues also feature elements of “elderly male language”, such as the first-person pronoun *washi* and the copular expression *ja*. This metapragmatic comment reflects an expectation that linguistic indexes correlate with specific character types, helping the audience to categorise characters based on the shared repertoire of the medialect. Language appears to index specific attributes, such as power, age, or knowledge, based on an iconised role. Intertextuality happens across media, as in this case a character from a manga is used as a basis for the recognition of an unknown NPC from a video game.

6.2.10. The old female *kami*

遺跡の周囲にある勾玉石が壇から落とされておるようじゃな…。

モノノケ達をまた封じるには勾玉石を壇上に戻さねばならぬ。

[...]よ、勾玉石を壇上に戻したら、近くの地藏の影に隠れておれ。

そうしたらわらわが、封印の石陣を発動しよう。

Iseki no shūi ni aru nioi tamaishi ga dan kara otosarete oru yō ja na...

Mononoketachi o mata fūjiru ni wa nioi tamaishi o danjō ni modosaneba naranu.

[Usagimaru] yo, nioi tamaishi o danjō ni modoshitara, chikaku no Jizō no kage ni kakurete ore.

Sō shitara warawa ga, fūin no ishijin o hatsudō shiyō.

It looks like the coffin stones around the ruins have been dropped from the platform...

To seal the Mononoke again, the stones must be returned to the platform.

[Usagimaru], return the stones to the platform and hide behind the nearby Jizō statue.

Then I will activate the sealing stone formation.

The character, from the game *Shippū no Usagimaru*, is a female *kami*, and it is called Toyoukebime, like the goddess of agriculture, industry, food, clothing, and houses in Shintō, and she is graphically depicted as a rabbit. The first-person pronoun *warawa* is used in the medialect to characterise female authority figures. In the utterance above, it is found to be used together with indexes of elderly male speakers (such as the verb *oru*, the copular expression *ja*, and the auxiliary *-nu*) to address the high social status, the old-fashionedness, or the arrogance of the speaker in fictional works (Yoda, 2014k). The use of *yo* as a vocative marker together with the proper name of the addressee, such as in the construction *Usagimaru yo* that is present in the dialogue, is found to be associated to a «dramatic and theatrical effect» (Maynard, 2001: 689). However, the expression can also be interpreted as an archaism, as *yo* was used as vocative particle in Old Japanese (cf. Russell & Sells, 2015): such association can thus potentially contribute to the characterisation of the speaker as elderly or old-fashioned.

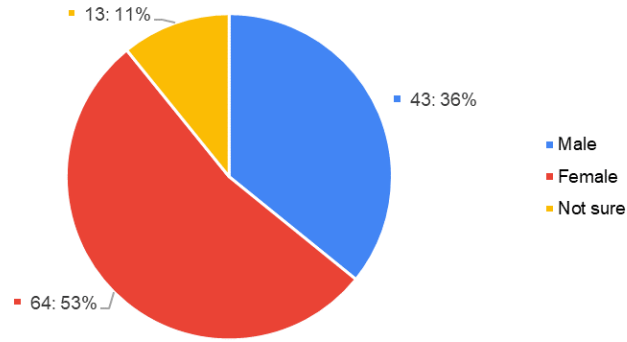


Figure 48: Gender of the old kami.

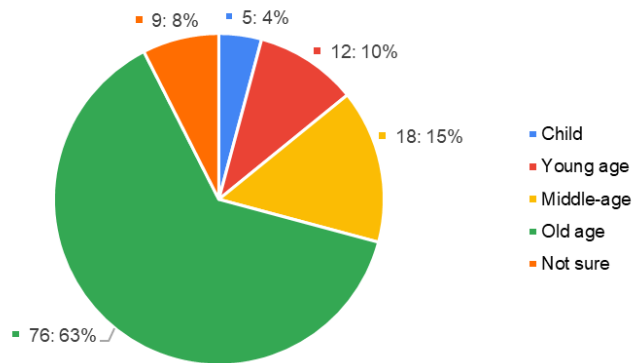


Figure 49: Age of the old kami.

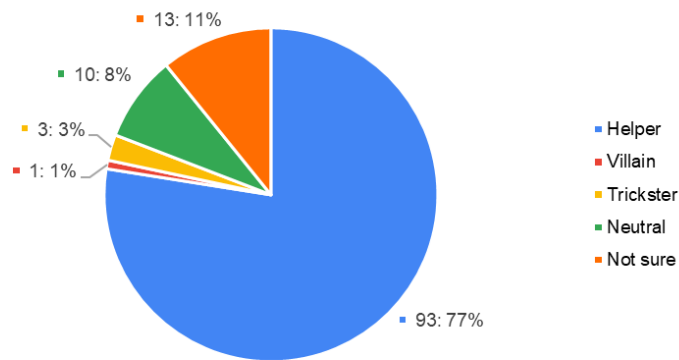


Figure 50: Role of the old kami.

The majority of participants recognised the character as female, with 64 responses (53%). However, a sizeable minority perceived the speaker as male, with 43 responses (36%). This is probably due to the fact that the gender of the speaker was indexed only through the presence of the first-person pronoun *warawa*, and the greater number of indexes of stereotypical elderly male speech (*ja na*, *oru*, *naranu*) may have influenced some of the participants. Accordingly,

the character was also recognised as an elderly figure, with 76 respondents (63%) choosing this answer, due to the presence of such widely established index of *rōjingo*. Finally, the character was also recognised as an ally, with 93 respondents (77%) choosing this option, likely due to the content of the utterance, where the character gives instructions and offers assistance to the addressee.

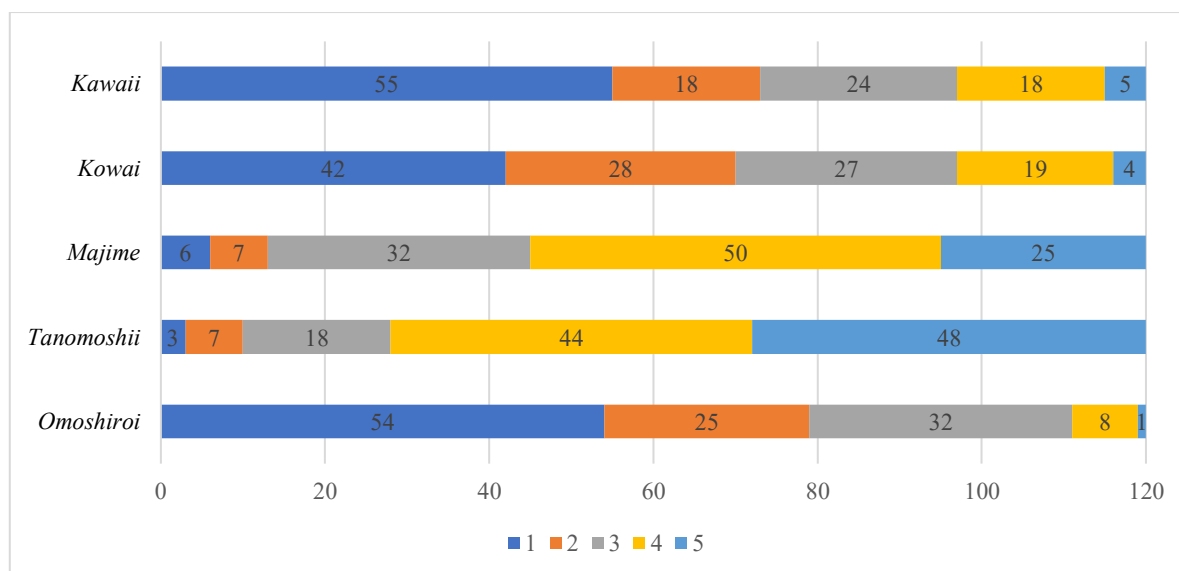


Figure 51: Perceptions on the old kami.

The character was not perceived as cute, with 55 respondents (46%) giving it the lowest score at 1, likely due to the perception of the speaker as an elderly figure. The character was also perceived as not scary, with 42 respondents (35%) also rating it at 1, in line with the speaker being seen as a positive character. Conversely, the NPC was regarded as serious, with 50 respondents (42%) giving it a score of 4, and also as very trustworthy, with 44 respondents (37%) giving it a score of 4, and 48 respondents (40%) rating it at 5 (the highest). Such evaluation is likely due to the established association between elderly characters and mentor-like figures in narrative works of fiction, as well as to the content of the utterance, as expressed by some of the comments reported below. On the other hand, the character was not perceived as funny, with 54 respondents (45%) rating it at 1 (the lowest).

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

13: 神社にいるケモミミ美少女だけど実はすごい年取ってるヤツだ (知らないけど)

53: おそらく人間ではない

56: 語尾から年齢の高さがうかがえる。一人称の「わらわ」は昔高貴な女性が使用していた言葉だという印象を持っている。

83: 目上の人と感じました

84: 味方。クリア方法を教えてくれている

106: 色々知ってて頼りになる長老ポジション。男女どちらでも通用する

115: 「わらわ」という表現に女性のジェンダーを感じます。単語の古さというのも影響しているかと思います。高齢の方が使う言葉には、当時のジェンダー意識の低さから、単語自体に使うジェンダーが決められていることを無意識に判断しているためではないかと思います。

120: 卑弥呼や天照のような神職系の女性のイメージ。強く師匠的なポジションだろう。二次創作では天然のキャラ付けがされることが多そう。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 8

13: “A beautiful *kemomimi* [girl with animal ears] young girl in a shrine, but actually a very old guy (but I don’t know).” (M20S)

53: “It is probably not human.” (M19S)

56: “From word endings we can infer an old age. The first-person pronoun *warawa* gives the impression of a word used by noble women in the past.” (F20R)

83: “I got the feeling of a superior.” (F40S)

84: “Ally. It gives instructions on how to clear the stage.” (F40S)

106: “Position of an elder who knows a lot and is reliable. Either male or female could work.” (M30S)

115: “In the expression *warawa* I get the feeling of a female. I think probably old-fashioned vocabulary also has an influence on this. This may be due to the unconscious judgment that the words used by older people are determined by the gender used in the words themselves, due to the lack of gender awareness at the time.” (M20S)

120: “Impression of a Shintō priestess like Himiko or Amaterasu. Probably a strong mentor-like position. In derivative works, a spontaneous characterisation is likely to be common.” (N20O)

Two comments explicitly mention the association between *warawa* and women’s speech. Comment 56 considers it as ‘a word used by noble women in the past’ (*mukashi kōki na josei ga shiyō shite ita kotoba*). Conversely, according to Comment 115, the participant suggests that

such pronoun makes them ‘feel the female gender’ (*josei no jendā o kanjimasu*). Several respondents also note how the utterance gives the impressions that the speaker is a mentor or an ally, employing labels that belong to the same semantic field (*meue no hito* ‘senior’ in Comment 83, *mikata* ‘ally’ in Comment 84, *tayori ni naru chōrō* ‘reliable elder’ in Comment 106, *shishō* ‘master’ in Comment 120). Finally, Comment 120 makes one more reference ‘derivative works’ (*niji sōsaku*), as previously mentioned in 6.5, which again suggests the competence of the participant in the media mix and the “*otaku* culture” of contemporary Japan.

6.2.11. The country bumpkin

まったく キミにはいくら カンシャしてもしきれない**ダス**！
 近いうちに 手紙でお礼の品を 送るから、楽しみに待ってる**ダス**よ！
 いつもはクールな**オラ**も、今は キミへの熱い感謝であふれている**ダス**！
 ぜひ お礼をさせてほしい**ズラ**！
 手紙にして送る**ダス**よ
 届くの待っててほしい**ダス**

*Mattaku kimi ni wa ikura kansha shite mo shi kirenai **dasu**!*
*Chikai uchi ni tegami de orei no shina o okuru kara, tanoshimi ni matteru **dasu** yo!*
*Itsumo wa kūru na **ora** mo, ima wa kimi e no atsui kansha de afurete iru **dasu**!*
*Zehi orei o sasete hoshii **zura**!*
*Tegami ni shite okuru **dasu** yo*
*Todoku no mattete hoshii **dasu***

I can’t thank you enough for your top-notch snowman making skills!
 I’ll be sending you a letter with something to show my appreciation!
 Keep an eye out for it!
 Even I can’t play it cool here. I’m practically melting with appreciation for you and your snow skills.
 (*Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, Nintendo, 2013)

The character is a snowman from the *Dōbutsu no mori* series, and the extract above is taken specifically from *Tobidase Dōbutsu no mori*. In the game, snowmen can be built by the player character using snowballs that appear randomly in the game during the winter season. The first-person pronoun *ora* is used in fictional works to characterise rural speakers (Iwata, 2014c). The *Nihon hōgen daijiten* states that the expression *zura* is used in various dialects (particularly in Kanagawa, Yamanashi, Nagano, Gifu, and Aichi prefectures) for the dubitative mood, while Onishi (2018: 564) in the Tōkai-Tōsan dialect of Chūbu region for the. However, it appears to be used in the dialogue of the NPC as a generic Eastern Japanese token, without pointing to a

specific geographical region, which can contribute to the characterisation of the rural identity of the speaker. On the other hand, the copular expression *dasu* is often used in fictional works as index of Kansai Japanese, and particularly of Ōsaka dialect (Kinsui, 2014k: 119), which appears to be based on actual usage (cf. Takagi, 2025: 389). However, the *Nihon hōgen daijiten* states that *dasu* is also widely found in other dialects, such as those of the prefectures of Akita, Yamagata, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Toyama, Nagano, Mie, Kyōto, Ōsaka, Hyōgo, Nara, Tokushima, Ehime, Kōchi, and Fukuoka. Therefore, rather than a precise geographical provenance, *dasu* can be also interpreted as index of stereotypical rural identity, similarly to *zura*.

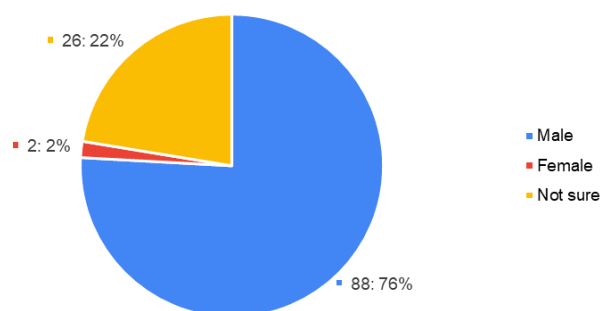


Figure 52: Gender of the country bumpkin.

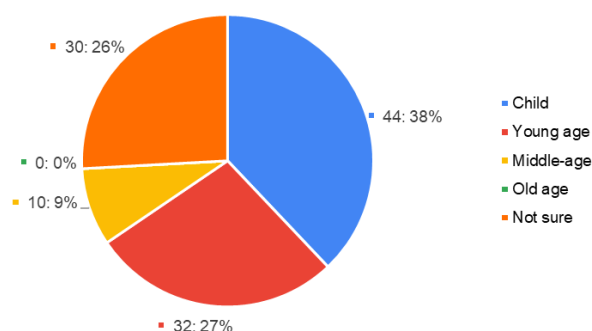


Figure 53: Age of the country bumpkin.

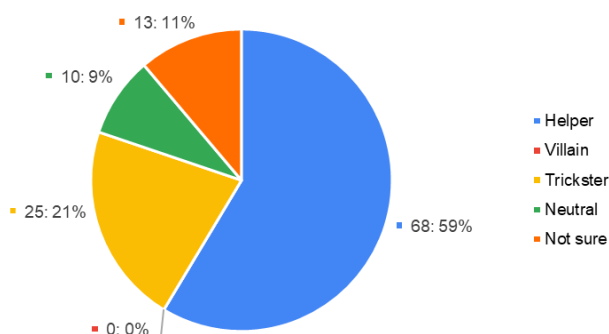


Figure 54: Role of the country bumpkin.

The character was recognised as male, with 88 responses (76%), likely due to the presence of first-person pronoun *ora*. As expressed by comments reported below, such register is often associated to male characters in fictional works. However, a sizeable minority (26 participants, 22%) were not sure. The character was also perceived as young, with 44 participants (38%) describing it as a child, and 32 participants (27%) associating it to a young adult. Nonetheless, 30 participants (26%) again were unsure about how to label the speaker in terms of age. Finally, the speaker was perceived as an overall positive figure, with 68 participants (59%) labelling it as an ally, while no respondent described it as a villain.

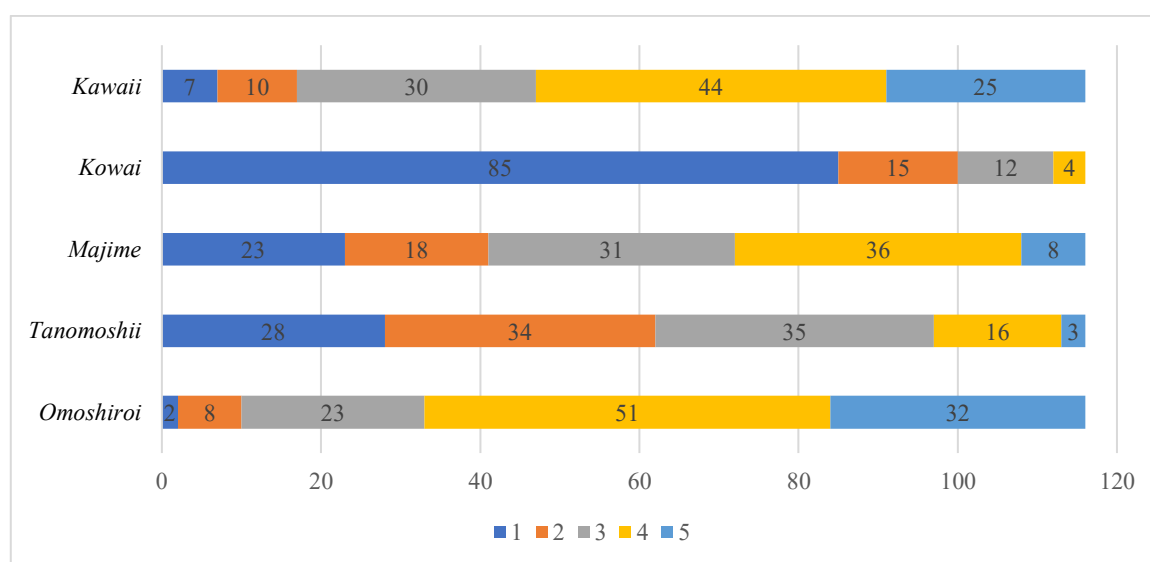


Figure 55: Perceptions on the country bumpkin.

The character was perceived as cute, with 44 respondents (37%) rating it at 4, and not at all scary, with an overwhelming majority of 85 participants (71%) rating it at the lowest at 1. No significant tendencies could be acknowledged regarding the parameters of seriousness and trustworthiness. Finally, the character was perceived as funny, with 51 respondents (43%) rating it at 4 and 32 respondents (27%) rating it at 5 (the highest).

(任意) キャラクターや言葉遣いなどに関する意見や感想

20: ロボット?のようなキャラクターのイメージ

56: 方言×カタカナの相乗効果で可愛く感じる。東北方言のステレオタイプの話し方をしているキャラクターは田舎出身というアイデンティティと結び付けられやすいと思う

ので、このキャラクターもそうかもしれないと思った。または森からきた人外キャラクターなどもそうしたステレオタイプを当てはめがれやすいと思う

83: 語尾が面白い

84: 親しみのわくタイプ。自分を慕ってくれていて、感謝してくれている。素直な言葉がスツと言える感じ。

106: 昔アニメで語尾にダスをつけるキャラクターを見ていたため、鷹羽次郎丸しかイメージが出来ない

115: DRAGON BALL の悟空みたいなイメージです。悟空に、日本語が覚束ない外国人を足したイメージでしょうか。

120: 人外で顔や口が大きい(唇が太い)、あまり賢くの無いキャラクター。義理深いが行動に結果が伴わない場合が多い印象。愛想が良く憎めない。ゼルダの伝説 BoW に登場するゴロン族がイメージとして近しい。

(Optional) opinions and comments: 7

20: “An impression of a character like a robot?” (F20R)

56: “Due to the synergy between dialect and katakana, I feel cuteness [in the dialogue]. Characters with stereotypical Tōhoku dialect tend to be associated with a rural identity, and this may be the case with this character as well. Or non-human characters from the forest, for example, are more likely to be subjected to such stereotypes.” (F20R)

83: “These word endings are funny.” (F40S)

84: “A very friendly type. It adores itself and is thanking the player for it. Feeling of someone who can say honest things directly.” (F40S)

106: “Because in the past I have seen characters in anime that use *dasu* at the end of words, I can only imagine Takaba Jirōmaru [from *Bakusō kyōdai Let's & Go!!*].” (M30S)

115: “An impression like Gokū from *Dragon Ball*. Together with Goku, could it be that there is also an impression of a foreigner whose Japanese is not very clear?” (M20S)

120: “Non-human character with large face and mouth (thick lips) and not very clever. Impression of a character who is righteous but whose actions are often not accompanied by results. Friendly and hard to hate. The impression is close to that of the Gorons from *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*.” (N20O)

Comment 56 explicitly mentions linguistic elements such script choices, in this case katakana and dialect. As noted in the metalinguistic explanation at the beginning of this section, the dialogue does not feature any linguistic element that can be associated univocally to diatopic variations actually used in the Tōhoku region. Instead, as also pointed out by Hiramoto (2009), elements such as the first-person pronoun *ora* are indexically regimented as belonging to “pseudo-Tōhoku dialects”. However, in this case, rather than evoking images of roughness, rudeness, and a lack of education by the speaking character (Hiramoto, 2009: 259-261), according to Comment 56, the use of dialect merely evokes a rural identity, without its associated supposed negative characteristics. Intertextuality is suggested by many comments which reference previous exposition to this register, or only to single linguistic feature that appear to be indexically regimented, in other media of pop culture. For example, Comment 106 associated the copular expression *dasu* not with a particular diatopic variation or as associated stereotypical persona, but rather with a specific character from a specific series of manga and anime, in this case Takaba Jirōmaru from *Bakusō kyōdai Rettsu endo gō!!* (Koshita, 1994-1999). The character is depicted as a young and energetic male, and his dialogues also feature the use of *ora* as first-person pronoun and *dasu* as copular expression. Comment 115 makes references to Son Gokū, the protagonist of the series *Dragon Ball* (*Doragon Bōru*, Toriyama, 1984-1995), a cheerful monkey-tailed boy who practices martial arts and possesses superhuman strength: the character does not use *dasu*, but he exclusively uses *ora* as first-person pronoun. Finally, Comment 120 makes references to the Gorons (*Goron-zoku* ‘Goron Tribe’), a race of rock people typically living in mountain ranges, from the video games series *The Legend of Zelda* (*Zeruda no densetsu*, Nintendo, 1986-). However, specifically in the instalment *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (*Zeruda no densetsu: Buresu obu za wairudo*, Nintendo, 2017), despite occasional use of the copular expression *dasu*, the Gorons are usually characterised by the use of the idiolectal character-associated final particle (*kyara gobi*) *goro* and *koro*, while their characterisation as open and friendly creatures is in line with the other user of the register. As such, as mentioned in 5.1.8, linguistic features such as the pronoun *ora* can function on a higher order of indexicality to address the innocence and genuineness of the speaker, and this appears to be case for the three characters referenced by the comments. However, Gokū and the Gorons are also characterised as rural speakers, and such twofold indexical association is also present for the character of the Snowman, who is both perceived as a cute, funny, and positive character, but whose characteristics of rural speaker make him also not particularly trustworthy, as evidenced by the survey and the metapragmatic commentaries.

6.3. Conclusions

As argued in 1.3, role language can be regarded as an example of iconization, whereby «[l]inguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them» (Irvine & Gal, 2000: 37), and of indexical regimentation, as «a previously broad indexical field of potential semiotic meanings (Eckert, 2008) is narrowed to a much smaller set of strongly ideologized and semiotically inflexible meanings» (Bucholtz, 2011: 257). From the questionnaires, it appears that participants were able to imagine character types based on a dialogic extract featuring various registers of role language, without any information on the physical characteristics or in-game graphic depiction of the speaker. As such, consumers appear to reference an intertextual repertoire of characterological figures and their enregistered linguistic styles. These semiotic and metapragmatic processes exemplify the intertwining of narrative comprehension within the context of Japanese popular culture, with a culturally specific literacy. Such literacy enables audiences to derive information from textual elements that may be fragmented or minimalistic, reflecting a broader and recursive ecosystem of creation, interpretation, and diffusion. Linguistic attitudes are also a product of the circulation of shared knowledge related to the medialect, as is the knowledge of related characterological figures and character types, the so-called “database”.

キャラクター小説はデータベースを参照して作られ、そうして作られたキャラクター小説がふたたびデータベースを豊かにしていく。私たちの目の前には、そのような循環的な物語生成の光景が広がりつつある。(Azuma, 2007)

Character novels [*kyarakutā shōsetsu*] are created by referring to the database, and the character novels created in this way enrich the database once again. The scene of such cyclical generation of narratives is unfolding before our eyes. (Translation mine)

Many comments also referenced other forms of popular culture, such as anime, manga, other games, and even comedians. As pointed out in 4.7, consumers of the media mix are exposed to characterological figures in the form of stock characters or recurring character tropes. Such shared knowledge, or “literacy”, is then used to decode the linguistic cues in a given dialogue, and to pragmatically interpret them and associate them to specific characterological figures.

ライトノベルの作家と読者は、戦後日本のマンガやアニメが育てあげてきた想像力の環境を前提としているために、特定のキャラクターの外見的な特徴（さきほどの引用箇所

では「眼鏡」「小柄」といった表現)がどのような性格や行動様式(「神秘的な無表情系」「魔女っ娘」)に結び合わされるのか、かなり具体的な知識を共有している。したがって、彼らは、作品のなかに(たとえば)小柄でドジな女の子が現れれば、半ば自動的に、彼女がこの状況ではこうする、あの状況ならそうする、と複数の場面を思い描くことができる。作もまた、読者にそのような能力、いわば萌えのリテラシーを期待して、キャラクターを造形することができる。(Azuma, 2007)

Since light novel authors and readers rely on the imaginative environment cultivated by postwar Japanese manga and anime, they possess a fairly concrete shared knowledge about how specific physical characteristics of characters (such as “glasses” or “being petite”) are linked to particular personalities or behavioural patterns (like “mysterious and expressionless” or “magical girl”). Therefore, when a petite, clumsy girl appears in a story, they can almost automatically imagine how she would act in various situations. Similarly, authors can design characters with the expectation that readers possess this ability, or what might be called *moe* literacy. (Translation mine)

From the comments, it also emerges that many respondents were able to guess that the speaker was a non-human character, despite the lack of any explicit cue that would have pointed to such identification. This appears to be the case in particular for the characters of the fighting robot in 6.2.2, the feline *obake* in 6.2.4, the rough male in 6.2.6, the speaker of Standard Japanese in 6.2.7, the old female kami in 6.2.10, and the country bumpkin in 6.2.11. These NPCs appear to be characterised by an established and widely recognised register of fictionalised orality, with a number of highly iconised linguistic features, particularly first-person pronouns, copular expressions and final particles. As suggested by previous scholarship on indexicality and discourse, «these elements of a variable’s “indexical field” are assembled from summaries of recurring patterns of usage, rather than from “close readings” of their indexical functioning in any actual context(s) of situated (and interested) use» (Moore, 2020: 22). Due to the premise that the textual excerpts featured in the survey would be taken from video game characters, such reference to the source material seems to have activated the indexical field of “non-humanness” of several dialogue extracts for a number of participants. As argued in 4.7, it appears that media ideologies shape beliefs of consumers about what is possible or expected in the world of popular culture, also from a linguistic standpoint. Considering first-hand accounts collected through interviews and the corpus-assisted linguistic analysis, results of the questionnaire survey also reinforce the idea that language use in video games is a fossilised reiteration of

established ideologies about language and its users. As argued by Ensslin (2010), «a significant part of the popularity particularly of mainstream game series [...] derives from the strategic reiteration of stereotypes relating to gender and race, and also language attitudes» (Ensslin, 2010: 205). On the other hand, despite independent video games exhibiting greater autonomy in their production processes (Hichibe & Tanaka, 2016: 44), which would suggest a greater degree of freedom in their linguistic characterisation, *dōjin* games still exhibit the same normativeness found in commercial games, as suggested by Fiadotau (2019). Such “unchangedness”, and the conservative and fossilised nature of the medialect, appears to also be recognised by the native speakers, who are able to recollect and comment on previous intertextual encounters with widely established registers and character types.

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate how ideologies shape the linguistic representation of virtual speakers in contemporary Japanese video games. I have argued that video games, despite their potential for challenging expectations, instead appear to be a conservative medium by all accounts, in their (un)conscious reproduction of established ideologies about language use, gender, and societal norms. The objective of this research has been achieved through a triangulated approach, which considered both quantitative and qualitative analyses, employing a corpus-based approach to the investigation of language use inside a corpus of written video game dialogues, and by directly asking both users and developers for their opinions and perceptions on language and characters inside video games, with a critical analysis of the metapragmatic discourses in their responses. Besides empirical, data-driven conclusions on language and ideologies in video games, methodologically, the thesis has shown how employing categories from the Anglo-American tradition of linguistic anthropology can prove effective in enhancing the reliability and depth of sociolinguistic analysis on fictionalised orality in Japanese. This would be especially useful in broadening the scope of ongoing scholarship on *yakuwarigo*, not merely providing a description of language use inside media but also focusing on the discursive practice of language in fictional works of pop culture, by taking into consideration metapragmatic commentaries and linguistic attitudes and perceptions around language.

In Chapter 1, I have introduced categories that have been employed in previous scholarship on the use of language for the purpose of characterisation. After introducing the concept of role language, I have also referenced the criticisms that have been levelled at its perceived theoretical and methodological shortcomings. Subsequently, I have argued for the use of categories borrowed from linguistic anthropology, namely indexicality, enregisterment, and iconization. I have argued that employing such concepts together with *yakuwarigo* would be useful in overcoming its shortcomings. Finally, I have emphasised how fictional characters can be framed as object for research on fictionalised orality. As such, I have introduced the concept of characterological figure to link the study of the linguistic representation of fictional identities with scholarship on language ideologies.

Chapter 2 has dealt with video games, with a focus on their textual and linguistic nature. I also introduced non-player characters (NPCs) as a defining feature of the medium. Accordingly, I drew on categories introduced in the previous chapter to justify how NPCs can be regarded as examples of characterological figure, to consider them as suitable objects of analysis in the vein

of linguistic anthropology. The theme of agency in video games and the role of game developers was also introduced and discussed. I argued that video games can be regarded primarily as a text by a specific author, and that such authorship can be analysed in terms of propagation of language ideologies. On the theme of Japanese independent video games, two schools of thought can be observed: one argues for *dōjin* games to be considered as creative and potentially norm-breaking, while the other views them as more conservative in nature. As the triangulated analysis would suggest, I argue that video games appear to instead be a conservative medium. Finally, I explained the construction of the target corpus.

In Chapter 3 I have offered an overview of past research on language use in works of popular culture, with a focus on English and Japanese. I have shown that so-called “pop cultural linguistics”, broadly constructed as the study of language in contemporary pop culture under a variety of approaches, is a growing field of enquiry in the English-language academia. In this vein, I have argued that similar discursive approaches, grounded in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, may also be fruitfully applied for research on Japanese inside video games, whose study thus far has mainly followed a descriptive approach.

In Chapter 4 I have investigated language ideologies in the linguistic characterisation of non-human NPCs, with a focus on *dōjin* game developers through semi-structured interviews. This highlighted how developers rely on established linguistic styles and tropes, rather than creating entirely new registers. Through interviews, it became evident that developers, consciously or unconsciously, draw from the intertextual repertoire of popular media and culture, shaping their writing through processes of iconization and indexical regimentation. Despite claims that amateur developers operate outside commercial pressures, their work often aligns with audience expectations and established character tropes. The study also identified how linguistic choices, such as pronouns, speech patterns, and script variations like katakana, contribute to character identity, from the perspective of creators of said characters. Ultimately, I argue that game developers engage with a distinct and parallel repertoire, shaped by pop culture, which informs fictional speech styles, without necessarily influencing real-world communication.

Chapter 5 has discussed the use of linguistic features in the characterisation of fictional characters in video games. I highlighted the consistent use of certain linguistic markers, such as first-person pronouns and verb forms, to index specific characterological figures and their social identities. The analysis suggests that the medialect of video game dialogues reflects a fossilised array of registers and associated characterological figures, which are routinely reiterated in popular culture. The use of these linguistic features is not only used to characterise human NPCs, but also extends to non-human characters, reinforcing established tropes and gender ideologies.

For example, mole characters across different games are characterised by the use of dialectal features, overwhelmingly by the presence of pseudo-Eastern Japanese varieties, but also by diatopic variation associated to Kansai dialect. However, linguistic varieties in fictionalised orality are regimented, as the degree of linguistic variation is much lower than in natural-occurring utterances and mostly concerns easily recognisable items, such as pronouns and lexicon. Moreover, linguistic variation is subject to processes of adequation, which refers to «the fact that in order for groups or individuals to be positioned as alike, they need not – and in any case cannot – be identical but must merely be understood as sufficiently similar for current interactional purposes» (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005: 600). As such, despite the potential for non-normative representations, the medialect appears to be conservative, as it adheres to shared norms and expectations. By routinely associating a linguistic style to specific character tropes, linguistic variation becomes enregistered, and language ideologies, which «can be understood as sources of linguistic representations» (Jaffe, 2020: 73), are reproduced and normalised through fictionalised orality.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I have presented the results of a questionnaire survey on linguistic attitudes and perceptions. Findings suggest that the use of language in video game dialogues reflects processes of iconization and indexical regimentation. Linguistic features become associated with character types and social identities, creating a shared “database”, or repertoire of characterological figures, that both creators and consumers of media can reference. Participants in the questionnaire survey were often able to imagine character types based solely on the linguistic registers used, without any visual cues, especially in the case of highly stylised registers, such as *guntaigo* in 6.2.2. Together with knowledge of what can be called “registers of role language”, speakers also rely on metapragmatic awareness of language use in context to associate language to characterological figures, such as the use of abusive and non-honorific speech style for the register of villains in 6.2.8. This suggests that consumers have developed a culturally specific literacy that allows them to decode textual elements and derive information about fictional characters from them. In this, consumers appear to also be influenced by processes of adequation: linguistic characterisation only needs to be similar enough to previous iteration of fictionalised orality (one specific pronoun such as *ora*, one particularly connotated copula expression like *ja*), to be understood as belonging to a given characterological figure. By analysing the metapragmatic commentary by participants in the survey, the medialect of pop cultural products appears to be conservative, as it reiterates established linguistic stereotypes and tropes rather than innovating new norms. This stability is recognised by native speakers, who can recall encountering the same registers and character types across different media.

Overall, the findings of this research indicate that linguistic characterisation in contemporary Japanese video games, including independent and fan-created titles, generally follows the same normative patterns observed in commercial games. This further suggests that the medialect of fictional works of contemporary Japanese popular culture can be regarded as a fossilised and conservative repertoire of linguistic registers, reflecting broader media ideologies about language and identity. At the same time, as expressed by game developers, such repertoire is ‘useful’ (*benri*), as noted by D. in 4.2, and sometimes even expected by players. For example, Laineus in 4.1 states that he is aware of his reuse of highly stereotyped registers of language for purposes of characterisation in his own games, as it is also a device to intensify the immersion into a fictional world, where natural everyday-like use of language would actually come off as unnatural. Thus, it appears that linguistic representations in fictional dialogues «reflect, embody and are windows on dominant discourses, models, schemas and stereotypes related to languages, language practices and speakers [and] are subject to iconization» (Jaffe, 2020: 71).

Moreover, all the developers that have been interviewed for this thesis are, first and foremost, also consumers of pop culture: as suggested by Niizato in 4.4, they have ‘absorbed’ (*kyūshū shita*) widely established linguistic representations, and they output such elements in their own games. As such, the use of highly stylised registers of language is reiterated, as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy (cf. Heinrich, 2012: 122), and it is encountered through exposure to media of pop culture but not used in natural-occurring conversations, unless when referencing a specific characterological figure (cf. Sadanobu, 2015). Overall, the analysis on the target corpus and on metapragmatic discourses indicates that language use in video games is shaped more by adherence to a shared medialect than by innovation, reinforcing familiar characterological figures and narrative roles through the strategic use of linguistic registers. The findings of this study demonstrate that linguistic characterisation remains highly conventionalised, reinforcing established tropes rather than innovating.

The empirical findings add to a growing body of literature on language ideologies in contemporary pop culture and provide important insights into the role of fictionalised orality in Japanese-language written video game dialogues. At the same time, however, it must also be recognised that the quantitative analysis was based on a smaller sample size than those available in larger corpora such as the BCCWJ, the CEJC, and the COJADS, due to limitations on both the technical and the budget level. With a relatively small sample size, caution must be applied. Nonetheless, with further studies, and once the Japanese Game Corpus (JGC) will be completed, the results obtained qualitatively by the textual analysis could be confirmed also with a more

quantitative analysis. At the same time, a greater number of interviews with developers, and a greater number of participants in a survey would certainly be beneficial for further research.

Nonetheless, the triangulated approach that has been employed in this thesis, with its parallel focus on the experiences of game developers and on the attitudes of consumers, has shed light on the intertextual nature of language in the contemporary medialect. Developers are active consumers of the contemporary media mix, and while they do not create new styles of fictionalised orality, they contribute to the circulation of already established and fossilised registers of language, which in turn are picked up by other consumers, in a loop of self-reinforcement of underlying language ideologies in contemporary Japanese popular culture.

The results obtained in this thesis have contributed to highlighting the limits of the theory of *yakuwarigo*, which were observed also by Maynard (2016). While *yakuwarigo* had been extensively studied as a tool for character depiction inside Japanese-language media, its role as a reflection and reinforcement of underlying language ideologies had not been sufficiently explored. The use of the categories of linguistic anthropology was crucial to overcome such limits. As noted in 1.2, Maynard (2016: 63-67) has been the first to suggest the application of the concept of indexicality to the study of Japanese fictionalised orality for the characterisation of the virtual speaker. In this thesis I have expanded on these suggestions, engaging with key concepts of linguistic anthropology (enregisterment, iconization, regimentation). On the one hand, the *yakuwarigo* paradigm appears to be more descriptive, with a focus on language “in a vacuum”, isolated from its context. Conversely, in this thesis I have shown how employing such linguistic anthropological framework is helpful to frame language use in pop media as a discursive practice, where language and ideologies are mediated through communication.

With further research, these insights and this methodology can be used to shed light on the broader societal implications of linguistic choices in the media, particularly in relation to identity and cultural norms. In addition to its theoretical contributions, further research on language in video games would have practical implications for creators and for everyone involved in game industries. By identifying how linguistic representation influences the perceptions of players, the findings could guide developers in making informed and culturally sensitive decisions in their work. This would be especially relevant in a globalised world, where Japanese video games reach diverse international audiences, often serving as a key point of engagement with Japanese culture.

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Estratto per riassunto della tesi di dottorato

L'estratto (max. 1000 battute) deve essere redatto sia in lingua italiana che in lingua inglese e nella lingua straniera eventualmente indicata dal Collegio dei docenti.

L'estratto va firmato e rilegato come ultimo foglio della tesi.

Studente: Lorenzo Moretti _____ matricola: 856159

Dottorato: Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa

Ciclo: 37°

Titolo della tesi³: *Language Ideologies in Japanese Pop Culture: Characterisation and Perceptions in Written Video Game Dialogues*

Abstract: Questa tesi analizza le ideologie linguistiche nella cultura pop giapponese, concentrandosi sulla caratterizzazione linguistica dei personaggi non umani nei dialoghi dei videogiochi. Lo studio esamina il ruolo degli sviluppatori, i dialoghi testuali e le percezioni degli utenti attraverso un approccio triangolato (*author-oriented*, *text-oriented* e *player-oriented*), indagando la costruzione implicita ed esplicita delle identità virtuali attraverso l'uso della lingua. La sezione teorica offre una panoramica delle ricerche esistenti sulla relazione tra lingua e caratterizzazione, con particolare attenzione agli aspetti linguistici dei videogiochi e alle fonti secondarie sul legame tra linguaggio e ideologia nella cultura popolare. Nell'indagine empirica, le interviste agli sviluppatori forniscono approfondimenti sul processo di scrittura e sulla rappresentazione linguistica dei personaggi non umani, mentre l'analisi basata su corpora esplora come le scelte linguistiche contribuiscano alla costruzione delle identità dei personaggi. A completare questa analisi metalinguistica, un'indagine metapragmatica indaga le percezioni degli utenti sul linguaggio nei videogiochi. Questo studio offre un contributo alla comprensione della rappresentazione mediata dei personaggi e delle ideologie linguistiche nel contesto videoludico, fornendo una prospettiva sociolinguistica più ampia sulla costruzione delle identità fittizie.

This thesis analyses linguistic ideologies in Japanese pop culture, focusing on the linguistic characterization of non-human characters in video game dialogues. The study examines the role of developers, textual dialogues, and user perceptions through a triangulated approach (*author-oriented*, *text-oriented*, and *player-oriented*), investigating the implicit and explicit construction of virtual identities through language. The theoretical section provides an overview of existing research on the relationship between language and characterization, with particular attention to the linguistic aspects of video games and secondary sources on the connection between language and ideology in popular culture. In the empirical investigation, interviews with developers offer insights into the writing process and the linguistic representation of non-human characters, while corpus-based analysis explores how linguistic choices contribute to shaping character identities. Complementing this metalinguistic analysis, a metapragmatic investigation examines user perceptions of language in video games. This study contributes to the understanding of the mediated representation of characters and linguistic ideologies in the video game context, offering a broader sociolinguistic perspective on the construction of fictional identities.

Firma dello studente



³ Il titolo deve essere quello definitivo, uguale a quello che risulta stampato sulla copertina dell'elaborato consegnato.