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Contemporary Japan
Challenges for a World Economic Power in Transition

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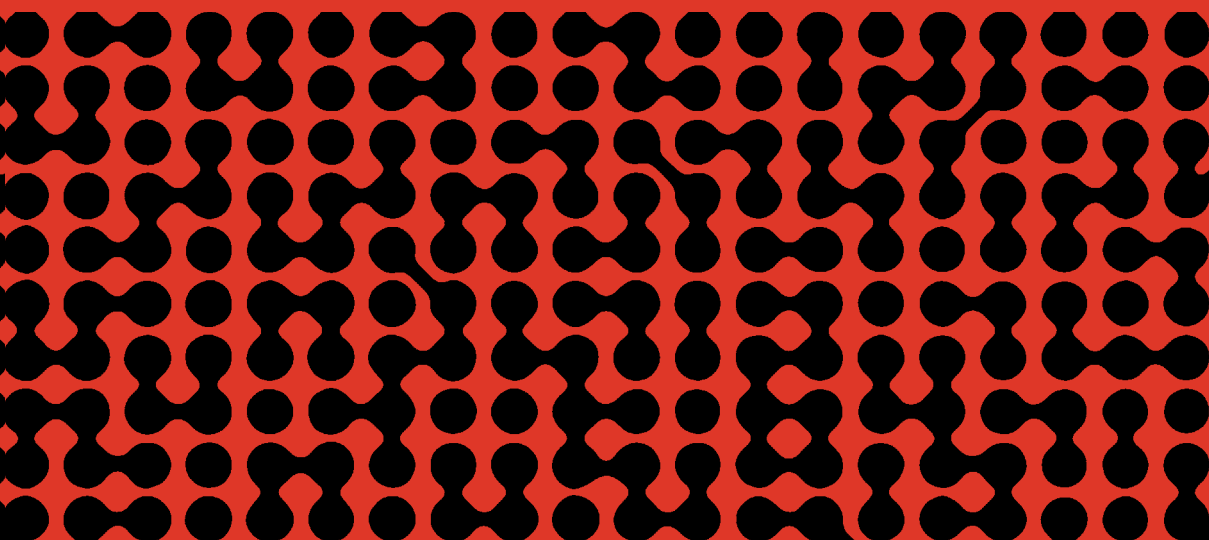
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Summary

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION
NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND HUMAN RELATIONS IN GLOBAL
COMMUNICATION JAPAN

Keitai shōsetsu: Mobile Phone Novels
Is It True that New Technologies Are Changing the Japanese Language?

Paolo Calvetti (Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia, Italia)

Abstract   *Keitai shōsetsu*, or 'mobile phone novels', is a recent social and 'literary' phenomenon that started at the beginning of this century and has subsequently become widely diffused in Japan. Novels, often written by amateur authors, are distributed via mobile phones and on the Web, and read by a huge number of people. The subjects and topics of these novels, the young age of the characters depicted, as well as of the vast majority of the addressees of these stories seem to influence the diaphasic factors of the language. For its use of mobile phone technology, *keitai shōsetsu* also represents a testing ground to understand the influence of tools in the transformation of language, that is hence acquiring new communication strategies. Various aspects of the Japanese language used in *keitai shōsetsu* are described by means of different examples and by showing the influence of widespread mobile phone habits, such as use of emoticons, on 'literary' production.

Summary   1. Introduction. – 2. Mobile Phone Novels. – 3. The Sampling of *Keitai Shōsetsu*. – 4. Shortened Forms. – 5. Colloquialisms. – 6. A 'Syntax' for Emoticons. – 7. Minor Features: Graphic Peculiarities, Parenthesis and Line Spacing. – 8. Conclusions.

1 Introduction

Keitai shōsetsu, or 'mobile phone novels', is a recent social and 'literary' phenomenon dating to the beginning of this century that has since become widely diffused in Japan. Novels, often written by amateur authors, are distributed via mobile phones and on the Web, and read by a huge number of people. The writing process, the tool used for editing and reading, the age and social characteristics of those involved in the phenomenon require further analysis to help our understanding of the unique features of this text genre.

In this article I will provide a brief overview of how the phenomenon of 'mobile phone novels' became diffused, and outline the results of a linguistic analysis I carried out in an attempt to analyse some shared characteristics of the language used in the works I sampled. My research was

intended to help me understand if, and eventually to what extent, the use of a new writing tool and of a new communication system had modified the language in terms of vocabulary, syntax and orthography.

2 Mobile Phone Novels

The publication in 2000 of *Deep Love: Ayu no monogatari* (Deep Love: The Story of Ayu) is considered to have marked the birth of *keitai shōsetsu* in Japan.[1] The novel appeared on *Zavn*, a private Japanese website (`http://www.zavn.net`) administrated by 'Yoshi', the *nom de plume* of the novel's author. Since the issue of this 'first' digital novel, an almost incalculable number of other works has appeared on the Internet and circulated through the mobile phone system used by a large audience of readers to follow their favourite authors. *Deep Love*, like other successful *keitai shōsetsu*, was later printed and sold as a hardcopy book, and even gave rise to a film, a TV drama and a manga series.[2] The whole series of four printed volumes describing the daily lives of Ayu – a young girl who decides to be a prostitute to round out her income – and of her friends, seems to have sold over 2.5 million copies by the end of 2004 (Yoshida 2008, p. 45 as quoted in La Marca 2011, p. 6).

Another work, *Koizora* (Sky of Love, 2006), written by someone writing under the name of Mika, seems to have received more than 20 million website visits (Onishi 2008); of course, this does not necessarily mean that 20 million people have read the novel, just that the site was viewed 20 million times to read the work. At any rate this figure gives an idea of the dimension of the phenomenon, and of public interest in this kind of new writing.

While the upsurge of *keitai shōsetsu* in Japan has undeniably had an important impact in the editorial and social spheres, the question of the 'literary' value of *keitai shōsetsu* has sparked off a controversial debate on the Japanese scene of literary criticism. Many scholars refuse to see any sort of literary merit in *keitai shōsetsu*, considering them nothing more than a sort of fast-food for uneducated young girls that provides them with some kind of ephemeral appeasement through the writing and reading of

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1 See Honda Tōru (2008) quoted in La Marca (2011) a PhD dissertation thesis that contains an accurate description of this magmatic literary phenomenon. I am much indebted to the author for his help in choosing the samples for my linguistic analyses.

2 Four paperbacks: *Deep Love – Ayu no monogatari*, Tokyo, Sutātsu Shuppan, 2002; *Deep Love – Hosuto*, Tokyo, Sutātsu Shuppan, 2003; *Deep Love – Reina no unmei*, Tokyo, Sutātsu Shuppan, 2003; *Deep Love – Pao no monogatari*, Tokyo, Sutātsu Shuppan, 2003. A movie, released as a DVD, with the same title as the first episode appeared in April 2004, and two TV drama series, based on the first and second episodes, were broadcast by TV Tokyo from October 2004 and January 2005, respectively. The TV dramas were also recently released as DVDs. Moreover, a manga version has also been published by the Kōdansha publisher.

self-referential stories narrating their own daily lives.[3] However, others consider this kind of writing a real new literary genre, tracing back similarities with traditional pre-modern forms of literature like the *naniwabushi* (Naniwa tune) of the Tokugawa period (Nakamura 2008, p. 191; La Marca 2011, p. 222).

This is not the place for an in-depth discussion of this issue nor it is the goal of this paper to give an evaluation of the meaning of *keitai shōsetsu* in the sphere of contemporary Japanese literature. In fact, the aforementioned debate has also dealt with a formal question, more than an issue of contents, centred on the applicability of the term *shōsetsu*/novel to the narrative format and subjects of the so-called *keitai shōsetsu*. The question was «Can a *keitai shōsetsu* be considered a 'novel'?» (La Marca 2011, p. 222). It is also worth remembering that this new form of narrative has also inspired traditional novelists, like the popular Setouchi Jakuchō, to tackle the new genre. In 2008, at the age of eighty-six, Setouchi published a *keitai shōsetsu* entitled *Ashita no Niji* (Tomorrow's Rainbow) under the pen name of Pāpuru (purple, recalling the meaning of the Japanese term *murasaki*, a name strongly linked to *The Tale of Genji*).[4] The voice of Setouchi backed that part of the public that appreciates the newness of the phenomenon, and gave some legitimisation to a literary phenomenon that has continued to be centred on a young readership, with popular themes like the worries and problems facing adolescents in their everyday life like love affairs, pregnancy, abortions, suicide, or the death of a beloved boyfriend.

Keitai shōsetsu have also attracted the attention of non-Japanese mass media (Onishi 2008) who have reported the remarkable dimensions of the phenomenon, and the literary debate going on in Japan.

Keitai shōsetsu are read online via mobile phones or using a personal computer, simply accessing one of the web servers specialised in this service.[5] The service itself is usually free of charge, and the providers make a profit from advertising. Every frame (a 'page' of the mobile novel) contains a limited number of characters that fit, more or less, into the device's display (see Figs. 1a-b).

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[3] For a synopsis of criticisms and debates about the value of *keitai shōsetsu* see Sugiura (2008, pp. 26-28) and La Marca (2011, pp. 214-220).

[4] The book, before readable also on the Internet, was also printed in the same year by the Mainichi Shinbunsha.

[5] In addition to personal author sites, there are also dedicated *keitai shōsetsu* websites, the most popular and oldest of which are *Mahō no Ai-rando* (`http://ip.tosp.co.jp`) and *Noichigo* (`http://no-ichigo.jp`), which gave many authors the opportunity to upload their works free of charge.
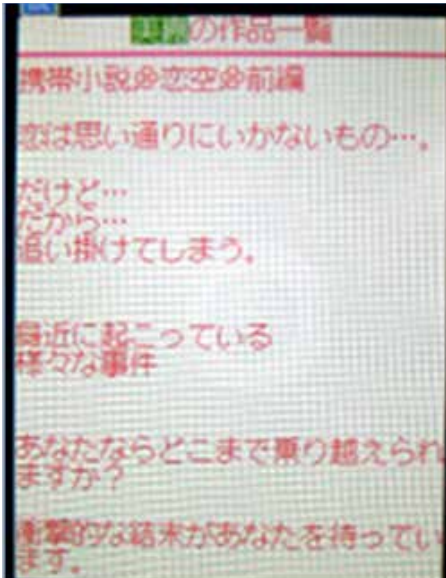
Figure 1a. First page of *Koizora*: mobile frame
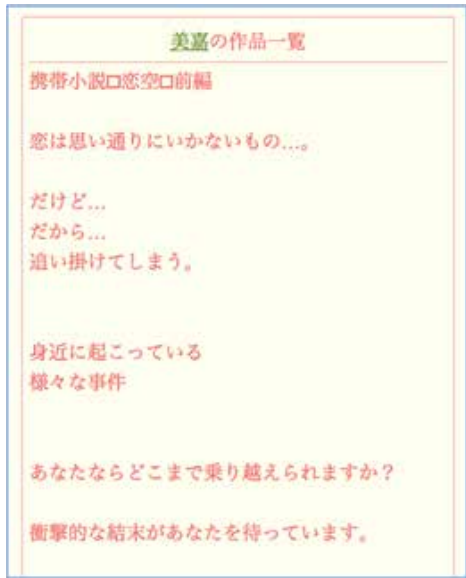
Figure 1b. First page of *Koizora*: computer frame

The visual rendering of the frame, with short lines, and frequent insertion of new lines and blank spaces, and the use of the Japanese version of emoticons give a certain rhythm, recalling that of web chats. This approach is adapted to the form of the narrative structures of most *keitai shōsetsu*. These stories, in fact, are made up of many conversations or streams of consciousness, instead of descriptions and explanations of scenes. As a result, readers are able to read the novels as if they were reading comic books or following an Internet chat.

3 The Sampling of *Keitai Shōsetsu*

For the analyses of a sampling of mobile novels, I decided to include 11 works published in print, from 2006 to 2009, for a total of about 581,000 tokens ('words'). The selection does not represent a true corpus, but rather a collection of texts chosen for their success or representativeness. The table 1 contains the significant data of the works analysed: title, name of the authors, year of publication, total number of words, number of single lexemes,[6] and number of sentences as automatically calculated by the

6 Here «word» means a single morphological unit counted by the computer application (a single «token») whereas «lexeme» is a single lexical item. A single «lexeme» could occur more than one time (and usually it does) and it is counted as a «word» any time it appears in a text.

software Chaki 2.1.[7] The transcription in Roman alphabet is not coupled with Japanese scripts when it represents the original novel's title.

Table 1. List of texts' samples

Title	Author	Date	Words	Lexemes	Sentences
Noroi asobi	Saori	2006 print	32761	4616	3326
Koizora	Mika	2006 print	135019	8661	12415
Love at night	Yūya	2006 print	20442	3017	1938
Teddy Bear	Bea Hime	2006 print	51791	4649	5272
Itoshiki kimi e	Hikari	2007 print	68334	6302	7055
Shi no kusuri	Saori	2007 print	37061	4858	3726
Higai mōsō kareshi	Aporo	2007 print	45015	4990	5636
Moshimo kimi ga	Rin	2007 print	20241	2886	1866
Kono koe ga kareru made	Yuki	2008 print	40479	3621	4732
Atashi kanojo	Kiki	2009 print	45353	4477	15830
Purinsesu	Kimi	2009 print	84755	6186	8479

As is evident from the data, the different novels are not homogeneous from a quantitative point of view, with some texts totalling more than 135,000 words, and others only about 5,000 words. It is possible to argue that the different length of the texts could affect the style of the novels in terms of conciseness and brevity of the sentences but, as far as the features we are interested in are concerned – the use of shortened verbal forms, or insertion of emoticons, for example – no direct relationship has been shown between text length and linguistic style.

4 Shortened Forms

One of the features often considered a characteristic of *keitai shōsetsu* is the use of 'colloquial' forms. The shortened verbal forms just mentioned could be seen as a sign of an informal register. In fact, even though there are differences in the novels analysed here, the majority of them are characterised by a prevalence of shortened forms like the dropping of the vowel *-i-* in the auxiliary verb *iru* (e.g.: V-*te ru* instead of V-*te iru*, V-*te te* instead of V-*te ite*, etc.).

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7 Plain file texts have been processed with the Japanese morphological analyser Mecab and then processed with Chaki 2.0 to observe quantitative data and the lexical characteristics and collocations. I wish to thank Dr. Patrizia Zotti (Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale») for her advice in data processing and for the supply of the necessary software.

Table 2 shows the statistical distribution, for each novel, of the shortened forms vs. non-shortened forms. The cases in which the former exceed the latter are indicated in grey. As one can see, in the majority of cases the shortened forms exceed the number of non-shortened forms:

Table 2. Shortened forms vs. non-shortened forms

Title	V *-te iru*	V *-te iru*	V *-te ite*	V *-te te*
Noroi asobi 呪い遊び	58	37	16	3
Koizora 恋空	507	320	37	45
Love at night	21	85	4	15
Teddy Bear	220	124	45	36
Itoshiki kimi e 愛しき君へ	82	202	8	47
Shi no kusuri 死の薬	67	95	7	9
Higai mōsō kareshi 被害妄想彼氏	93	85	2	8
Moshimo kimi ga もしもキミが	45	64	11	8
Kono koe ga kareru made この声が枯れるまで	127	76	6	10
Atashi kanojo あたし彼女	65	203	9	19
Purinsesu プリンセス	5	466	1	52

This does not depend only on the widespread presence of dialogical parts mimicking spoken (colloquial) language, but is also due to the use of shortened forms in the descriptive passages of the novels.

The followings are examples of three different uses of shortened forms, all from the novel *Itoshiki kimi e* (My Beloved): a dialogue, a stream of consciousness, and a descriptive passage. I have transcribed the original text, with the unique use of parentheses and emoticons:

綾香【なんの話してるの〜？(＾o＾)】
Ayaka: «*Nan no hanashi **shite ru** no – ?* (joyful emoticon)»
Ayaka: «What are speeeaking about? (joyful emoticon)»

後数分後には逢ってるんだ
やばい……
なんか急に緊張してきた…
*Ato sūfungo ni wa **atte ru** n da*

Yabai......
Nanka kyū ni kinchō shite kita
In a few minutes I will meet him!
I'm worried......
Suddenly I feel kind of nervous...

高校を卒業してから、有線付きのワンルームマンションで一人暮らしを始めてこっそりと猫を飼ってる
*Kōkō o sotsugyō shite kara, yūsentsuki no wanrūmu manshon de hito-rigurashi o hajimete kossori to neko o **katte ru***
After I finished high school, I began to live by myself in one-room apart-ment with an Internet connection, and I secretly keep a cat

It seems that there is a tendency to 'write as one speaks'. Also, in descrip-tive parts, authors follow the oral usage of shortened forms, which are very common in the everyday spoken language. In this case we could speak of a new sort of *genbun itchi* (unification of spoken and written language, as during the Meiji period) where the colloquial forms are reproduced in every textual area. Here there is an even closer correspondence be-tween written and oral texts than in the experimental texts produced by the followers of the 'movement for the unification of spoken and written language' during the Meiji period. The use of the same media utilised to exchange messages in chats probably induces the authors of *keitai shōsetsu* to reproduce the language they would use if messaging on a mobile phone in all kind of texts, including the descriptive parts of the novels. This is a case of a diamesic variation (Mioni 1983, p. 508; Berruto 1987, pp. 19-20) based on a 'diatechnic factor' (Fiormonte 2003, p. 112), or the complex interaction of multiple technical elements with language. Like other variation factors (diastratic, diaphasic, etc.), the diatechnic fac-tor should also be kept in mind when analysing CMC (Computer Mediated Communication). In fact looking at the texts in our selection, it is clear that the tool used to write *keitai shōsetsu* (the mobile phone) stimulates and supports a writing style characterised by a particular organisation of the space (the phone's screen), already mentioned above, that contributes to generating a specific reading rhythm produced by the use of short, almost musically syncopated sentences like blank verses. More importantly, the language register is not only the product of a specific register peculiar to the generation of these authors, but also of a transgenerational regis-ter sharing common features among mobile phone users. The absence of morphologically articulated honorifics, a more informal style (if compared with the traditional epistolary one), the use of emoticons instead of lin-guistic expressions to convey politeness, etc. are, for example, some of the characteristics of mobile or chat language (Nishimura 2007) that also characterise the style of *keitai shōsetsu*.

In brief, one could say that diatechnic factors influence both the process of production as well as the process of interpretation of text building, which is a common feature of CMC as can be observed in Internet chat or web forums.

5 Colloquialisms

The language used in *keitai shōsetsu* is generally characterised by the use of so-called colloquialisms, that is, elements usually typical of spoken language in a diamesic variation.

One of these features is the ellipsis of postpositions:

a. *Nan no hanashi Ø shite ru no–?* (Whaaat are you speaking about?)
   (*Itoshiki kimi e*)

b. *Dōshite kao Ø kakusu n da yo–?* (And why you are hiding your faaace?)
   (*Love at night*)

c. *Teka, uchi Ø agaru?* (And then, you come in?)
   Iya… gaki to kaimono Ø iku kara ii ya (No, that's fine since I'm going shopping with the kids)
   (*Itoshiki kimi e*)

Here, for example, there is a recurrent omission of object particles (in a. and b. Ø instead of *o*), and place particles in sentences with motion verbs or compounds of motion verbs (in c. Ø instead of *ni* in both cases), but other 'colloquialisms' can be found in lexical features in the following examples.

d. *Kimoi yo* (That's really sick)
   (*Higai mōsō kareshi*)

e. *Anta maji omoroi na!* (You're a really laugh, aren't you!) (*Itoshiki kimi e*)

f. *Chatto nai de no arashi hodo uzai mono wa nai* (There's no hassle more than a nuisance in a chat)
   (*Itoshiki kimi e*)

g. *Imifu nan desu kedo* (I haven't got a clue, though)   (*Atashi kanojo*)

h. *Datte, Saku, atarashii kēban oshiete kurenai jan* (Heck, Saku won't give me the number of the new mobile, that's why!!)   (*Noroi asobi*)

In these cases, we observe the use of lexical forms typical of the language of young people. First of all, there is a series of words, often derivations from 'standard' forms, in which the actual meaning is not the result of the sum of the words from which they are derived or, in other cases, where

the words are used with a different meaning. This is the case of the adjectives *kimoi* ('unpleasant', usually referred to a person, < *kimochi warui*), *omoroi* ('funny' < *omoshiroi*) and *uzai* ('unpleasant' feeling about being tailed or shadowed < *uzattai*) in d., e. and f., respectively, as well as the adverbial use of *maji* ('really' < *majime* 'serious'), which is not followed by the adverbial particle *ni* in the same example e. Also *imifu* ([what you say is] 'unclear', '[I] do not understand' < *imifumei*) belongs to the category of shortened expression used with a new meaning. Shortened forms are also used to speak about things or objects that are perceived as 'new' or belonging to the sphere of the daily lives of young people like *kēban* ('telephone number of a mobile phone' < *keitai bangō*), as in h.

At a morphosyntactic level, we also find expressions that could again be the result of shortened forms, like the phrase *tte ka* (< *to iu ka*, 'or perhaps I'd say') in i. and j. This is a morphophonological transformation of a standard expression, used together with its alternative forms *te yū ka* and *tsū ka* to express second thoughts within one's statements or to oppose an argument of the interlocutor, and is a typical pet word that occurs in conversations of young people. The example j. (in which we find again the form *teka*) also contains two other elements typical of colloquial language: the form *jan* for the copula, and the auxiliary *mitaina*. The first, popular in colloquial Japanese since the beginning of the 1980s, is a transformation of the phrase *janai ka* (isn't it?) that has become a sort of colloquial but polite substitute for the copula *desu* especially in women's language, while *mitaina* is the auxiliary *mitai* ('it seems that', 'it is like a...') with the particle *na* in principle used to link *mitai* to the following noun as in [...] *mitai-na ki ga shimasu* ('I have the impression that [...]'). But the form *mitaina* is now used at the end of a sentence to close an utterance, and as a strategy used by the speaker to avoid responsibility for the contents of the utterance. In other words, it often occurs when speakers seek to distance themselves from in the statement that they have just made:

i. *Hijiri, omae kōkōsei darō... kaere yo. Tte ka, gakkō ike yo* (Hijiri, you are an high school student, right? Go away! I'd say, go to school!) (*Noroi asobi*)

j. *Kareshi? Mā atarimae ni iru teka inai wakenai jan mitaina* (A boyfriend? Of course she has one... or it's better to say... it's not the case she hasn't got one, so to say) (*Atashi kanojo*)

Another phenomenon that was discovered concerns the use of shortened potential forms of verbs, the so-called *ranuki kotoba* (words lacking *-ra*). As known, the potential auxiliary suffix for the vowel verbs (*-eru* and *-iru* ending verbs) and the 'irregular verb' *kuru* (to come) is *-rareru* and verbs like *mi-ru* (to see), *tabe-ru* (to eat) and *ku-ru* change to *mi-rareru, tabe-*

rareru and *ko-rareru*, respectively, for their potential forms ('can see', 'can eat', 'can come'). In spoken Japanese dropping the first syllable *ra* of the suffix produces forms like *mi-reru*, *tabe-reru* and *ko-reru* that are considered 'informal' and 'colloquial'. In the samples that have been analysed, the *ranuki dōshi* are extensively used in dialogical parts, 'faithfully' representing the colloquial register of the protagonists as in the following sentences where the shortened verbal forms are underlined:

k. *Ima kara omoshiroi no <u>mireru</u> yo* (You will soon see an interesting one!)   (*Higai mōsō kareshi*)

l. *obachan no gohan <u>tabereru</u> shi* (and I can also eat the meal of my aunt)   (*Teddy Bear*)

m. *Nande anna toppyōshi mo nai koto bakka <u>kangaereru</u> no kashira ne* (But why is he able to think only about crazy things?)   (*Purinsesu*)

In some cases it is possible to observe the use of the dictionary (conclusive) form of adjectives instead of the adverbial form as in the following examples (all from *Itoshiki kimi e*): «*Sugoi sabishikatta*» (I felt terribly sad), «*Omoroi hanashita zo*» (I said quite interesting things), «*Erai ochikondoru*» (I am very depressed). If we consider these three examples as three sentences (in the sense that we do not analyse, for example, '*sugoi*' and '*sabishikatta*' as two distinct sentences) we would expect the adverbial suffix *-ku* after the stem of the three adjectives (*sugoku*, *omoroku*, *eraku*). It seems to be a phenomenon linked to adjectives occurring in exclamatory sentences like '*Sugoi!*' (Impressive!) '*Omoshiroi*!' (Funny!), and so on, often present in young people's conversations, which are acquiring a sort of invariable morphology. In some cases, adjectives are used without the suffix *-i* (conclusive form used also for adjectival predicate) like in '*ano kokoa maji uma*' (that chocolate was really good, *Atashi kanojo*) in which *uma* is the stem of the adjective *umai* (tasty) and is combined with the above-mentioned *maji* as in *maji sugo* (really impressive), *maji era* (quite admirable).

Needless to say, this kind of feature is not unique to *keitai shōsetsu* but marks the register of the slang typical of the young Japanese speakers that are represented in the stories of these novels. They are also the majority of the readers attracted by this kind of narrative. The set of different elements, lexical and morphosyntactical, recalling the jargon of the young, empathetically links writers and readers of *keitai shōsetsu*, who share same diastratic elements in a new social environment, through a telecommunication network constituted by mobile phones and personal computers.

6 A 'Syntax' for Emoticons

As mentioned before, *keitai shōsetsu* share with e-mails, and, more significantly, with computer chat, a sort of transiency; in other words, the possibility – or at least the feeling – that the writer can add pieces of sentences, amend previous statements, complete the reasoning in sentences following the one in which he or she started to affirm something.

In particular, anger, happiness, tenderness, etc. are not emotions that could be easily expressed in mobile or chat messaging, which requires short sentences and quick replies. It is probably for this reason that the use of emoticons has flourished in these kinds of texts as a tool to integrate the «lack of iconicity» (Fiormonte 2003, p. 116) of the telematic communication. The *keitai shōsetsu* share the same use of emoticons in descriptive parts of the novels as well as in the quotation of dialogues or in the fictional transcriptions of mobile messaging often present in these texts. In general, *kaomoji* (lett. face-characters), as they are usually called in Japanese, are used as a surrogate of the FTF (face-to-face) communication to enrich the CMC. In particular, *kaomoji* have a role in smoothing the strength of a statement (like the sentence-ending phrases '*keredomo...*' and '*no desu ga...*' in spoken Japanese) or in adding information about the communicative intentions and feelings of the source of the message. Like linguistic elements involved in the formation of the mood of sentences, emoticons are often placed at the end of a sentence.

The use of creative sequences of different kinds of signs (usually different forms of *kanji* and *kana*) helps the author to enrich the sense of the text, and the reader to acquire more information about the writer's message.

綾香《てか画面の向こうで雑魚もニヤニヤしとる癖に！笑いたかったら笑え！素直じゃないねんから！雑魚ちゃん♥ψ(｀▽´)ψ》

Figure 2. Frame 38 of *Itoshiki kimi e*

For example, the character string ♥ψ(｀▽´)ψ included in the last part of sentence in Fig. 2 seems to express joy, or happiness: there is a coloured heart (the heart always adds overtones of tenderness) after Zako-*chan*, the nickname of one of the characters, followed by two hands raised ψ ψ to the side of a face (round brackets stands for a 'face') with the two shut eyes in sign of happiness ｀▽´.

a. そう思ったら眠れない
(T-T)

b. まだまだ考えが甘い
(´,_ゝ`)

c. 俺はいつもポケットに安定剤を入れるのが習慣になったよ（´д`）

d. 必死だね(´,_ゝ`)ﾌﾟｯ無視無視

In a. the two 'T's in round brackets stand for shut eyes from which tears are running down. In b. the sequence of signs, again in round brackets, means a faint smile with the right angle of the mouth going up, while sequence in c. represents a sad and depressed face. It is interesting to note that the same *kaomoji* shown in b. is followed by a small script *katakana* sequence ﾌﾟｯ (*pu!*) in the last example in d. It is added to the *kaomoji* meaning a vague smile in order to mean an outburst of laughter. The last d. represents a sad and depressed face.

These kinds of signs all derive from the so-called 2nd channel emoticons, a repertory of *kaomoji* different from the basic emoticons used in the West, like **:)** or **:(** and their equivalent pictorial representations such as ☺ and ☹. Like the Chinese, Japanese and Korean characters used in word processing (CJK computing), they are based on a 2-byte character set, unlike the ASCII characters used for 'Western emoticons'. Generally speaking, they make use of Cyrillic and non-Japanese characters in order to enhance the potentiality of the system and to create complex meanings. They are somehow culturally influenced. For example in order to show 'bowing' in sense of respect or to 'beg pardon', the sequence **m(_)m** is used. It is the graphic representation of two hands (or fists, the two '**m**'s) at the sides of a head of a person squatting on a Japanese straw mat, mimicking a formal bow on a *tatami*.

Japanese *kaomoji* can be 'expanded' by adding one or more graphic elements that convey additional meanings to the core of the graphic icon. For example, the following

(｡・・)ノ◇

represents a face with two eyes (・・) while the first small circle ｡ represents a cheek and, being on the right side of the 'face', indicates that the face is turned to the left, and ノ ◇ are, respectively, an arm and a *zabuton* (a square floor cushion).[8] In fact the *kaomoji* is followed by the linguistic expression *zabuton, dōzo* (Please, [have a] cushion) providing a linguistic explanation of the meaning of the iconic utterance.

Combinations of chains of basic elements can expand the basic meaning (for example 'sadness', 'laugh', 'envy', etc.) in order to mean 'deep

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8 I wish to thank Dr. Claudia Iazzetta (Università degli Studi di Napoli «L'Orientale») for her help and suggestions in interpreting the meaning of *kaomoji*.

sadness', 'big laugh', 'strong envy'. In some cases *kaomoji* can also be combined with linguistic elements as in:

壁|_-)あそぼうーや

in which the word *kabe* (wall) is written in *kanji* and followed by the sign | (the limit of the wall) and by the emoticon **_-)** (a face half hidden by the wall, the entire face being **(-_-)**). The *kaomoji* is followed by the sentence *asobō ya* (let's have fun!) as if the speaker had popped up from behind a wall shouting «Let's have fun!» In this case, then, the *kanji* 壁 (*kabe*, wall) has an iconic function, and is not read as a word, but only looked at as if it were a conventionalised picture, a sort of hieroglyph.

As previously stated, this kind of semi-iconic system of communication, generated within the CMC, is widely shared in the writing of *keitai shōsetsu* and, leaving aside personal differences between authors, it is an integrated element of the writing style of mobile novels with a rather important role in the understanding of the nuances conveyed by the text.

7 Minor Features: Graphic Peculiarities, Parenthesis and Line Spacing

The fact that the tool used to generate (to write) and to make use of (to read) *keitai shōsetsu* is a mobile phone also influences some of the graphic characteristics of the text and the use of *kanji* (Chinese characters). In fact, a mobile phone may have more potentialities, but it also has some limitations when compared to writing on a personal computer or even handwriting.

In our analysis we noticed a diffused use of *kanji* to write formal nouns like *tame* (for, purpose), *wake* (reason) or verbal suffixes like -*nai* (not) and, more in general, words that in modern written Japanese are usually in *kana*, like *kinō* (yesterday), *kawaii* (cute). This usage stands out in particular because of the colloquial and informal register of the texts of mobile phone novels. Usually, one would not find *kinō* written 昨日 in a sentence like *ore kinō nanka shita?* (Did I do something yesterday?), an utterance characterised by the informal male pronoun *ore*, the shortened and colloquial form *nanka* for *nanika* (something), and the absence of a polite suffix for the verb ending. The same Chinese characters could be read as *sakujitsu*, a more formal word for 'yesterday', but it is clear from the rest of the sentence's style, and confirmed by native speakers, that in this context the natural reading of the word is *kinō*. The same could be said for *wake* or *tame* as found in the following two sentences:

a. なんの為に病院なんかいくんだ？
   Nan no tame ni byōin nanka iku n da? (Why the hell are you going to the hospital?)   (*Itoshiki kimi e*)

   b. ある訳ないじゃん。
      Aru wake nai jan. (It's impossible that there's one!) (*Atashi kanojo*)

   c. 安全なんて保証は無いんだ。
      Anzen nante hoshō wa nai n da. (Safety? There is no guarantee for
      that!)   (*Love at night*)

Looking at the original Japanese script, it is evident that there is a sort of unbalance between the linguistic style, the presence of 'unexpected' *kanji* and, on the contrary, the absence of staple Chinese characters normally used in written Japanese (in a. *nan* is written in *kana* but *tame* in *kanji*; in b., a very colloquial sentence, *wake* is written in *kanji*, and in c. even the negative suffix -*nai* has its form in Chinese character).

One reason for this could be the ease of transcribing *kanji* using a mobile phone keyboard (the same could be said for the Japanese input system on personal computers). The user does not need any particular mnemonic ability to convert the phonetic form into *kanji* and *kana* nor the time to write down complex characters made by a large number of strokes, as required in handwriting. Moreover, another reason for the 'over usage' of Chinese characters could be the screen mechanism prompting the *kanji* corresponding to the word that the user is typing, since the user has only to press the selection already suggested by the mobile phone without the need for any other complex operation.

Space-saving considerations could be another reason, given the limited space available in a mobile phone screen, but this does not really seem to be a factor involved in the phenomenon or something deliberately pursued by writers. In fact, while writing *wake* or *tame* in *kanji* saves one character compared with the equivalent *kana* script (訳 and 為 instead of わけ and ため), the negative suffix -*nai* in both cases (*kana* alone or *kanji* plus *kana* for the inflectional part of the suffix) requires two characters: ない or 無い.

Another characteristic feature of *keitai shōsetsu* regards the peculiar usage of parenthesis and punctuation.

There are no fixed rules, and the use of parentheses differs according to each author, but it is evident that strategies exist to make clear who is speaking, who is thinking, who is exchanging e-mails or chat messages on the small screen. Unlike in printed novels, direct speech quotes are often enclosed in brackets like 『…』 or 【…】 instead of the usual 「…」. Each author develops an internal system to differentiate parentheses for direct speech, soliloquies, etc., and we also noticed authors (Yūya, *Love at night*) using two kinds of different parenthesis to distinguish two characters taking part in the same conversation.

But as we have already mentioned, the particular line spacing and line breaks play a key role in contributing to the recognition of changes in speakers, monologues, streams of consciousness. We have also encoun-

tered unusual punctuation like that used in newspaper headlines where the end of a sentence is indicated by a line break instead of a full stop.

8 Conclusions

It is clear that, by virtue of its language and the nature of the themes tackled, *keitai shōsetsu* can be considered a new literary genre. We have also seen how it contributes to the analysis of the evolution of the Japanese language in terms of interaction between the language and the tool used for the communication, as well as to the examination of the hybridisation of language styles and registers through the combination of different diamesic elements.

Generally speaking, the language of *keitai shōsetsu* combines the style typical of 'serious' literary prose with the style of a CMC where deliberate informality contributes to the vitality of the text as well as being familiar to young readers making extensive use of mobile phones for chatting and net surfing in their everyday lives. As Bonomi noted for the Italian language used on the web (2010, pp. 24-25), *keitai shōsetsu* language is also marked synchronically by a large variety of linguistic registers as well as recalling everyday technological communication, giving the reader the feeling of a semi-synchronic and dialogical interaction with the author.

The technical aspect, that is, the use of mobile phones, to read and (not always) write novels represents a far from negligible element that influences the kind of relationship developed between writer and reader; although not semi-synchronically linked through an Internet chat, they share the same linguistic attitude as if connected via mobile phone or personal computer. This means that the reader is ready to accept all the communication strategies normally used for on-line CMC (colloquially-written Japanese, emoticons as an integration of psychological and emotive description, peculiar line spacing and graphical resources to enhance the communication, etc.), and participates in the decoding process in a way that is formally different from the traditional reading process. It is likely that the concise terse style of mobile phone novels does not permit precise outlines of character psychologies, and that the use of emoticons as a surrogate for feelings is probably too shallow a device to convey the emotions of the author. In fact, despite the huge number of emoticons available, they are too stereotyped to allow subtle depictions of emotions, feelings, or psychological drives.

Although it is impossible to say today whether the phenomenon of mobile phone novels *per se* will be a lasting one, it has undoubtedly revealed new potentialities in written Japanese communication, and in literary (whatever we intend by 'literary') works. We can be certain that this text genre will continue to characterise a portion of the Japanese written production, and represents a worthwhile field of investigation for linguistic research.

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In recent years Japan has faced the rapid changes
characterizing the post-global world, vis-à-vis
the economic crisis, as well as the new geopolitical
equilibrium amongst the Asian countries after
the economic and military rise of China.
Moreover, the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster
of March 2011 poses a series of questions about
energy management, social solidarity, and emergency
management along with the problems of confidence
in the national safety system that Japan has had to cope
with. This volume is a collection of contributions on a
project examining various aspects of such contemporary
Japanese society in a period of changes in economic,
political, and cultural fields. It comprises three sections:
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