



Wakamono Kotoba in “Tokyo Revengers” by Ken Wakui
Study of Morphology and Semantics

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ABSTRACT

Japanese slang or *wakamono kotoba* grows rapidly in Japanese and frequently found in Japanese media, such as in *manga* and *anime*. The difference between *wakamono kotoba* and standardized Japanese language forms and meanings becomes a problem in understanding the meanings of *wakamono kotoba*, especially for Japanese language learners. As an attempt to solve this problem, this study aims to analyze the forms and meaning of Japanese slang words or *wakamono kotoba*. The data were collected from Japanese comic titled *Tokyo Revengers* by Ken Wakui, and analyzed using the identity method and distribution techniques. The data of *wakamono kotoba* found then analyzed based on word formation theory by Tsujimura (1996), and to analyze the meaning of *wakamono kotoba*, contextual meaning theory by Pateda (2001) was used. The results showed that *wakamono kotoba* can be divided into five morphological forms including affixation, compound, reduplication, clipping, and borrowing. In terms of meaning, there are *wakamono kotoba* which still express the original meaning, while a certain number of *wakamono kotoba* have changed its' meanings from their original meanings.

KEYWORDS

Japanese language; Morphology; Semantics; Slang.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important thing in human life as a tool to communicate with others. Through language as a system, society can work together, interact, and identify themselves (Gee, Allen, & Clinton, 2001; Kridalaksana, 2009). Chaer (2003) reveals that language is productive, varied, and dynamic. In addition, language is also used to show the identity of the speakers. The diversity of languages created by social interaction activities

carried out by diverse societies or groups is known as linguistic variation (Chaer, 2010).

Along with the times, language has developed quite rapidly, giving rise to a variety of language variations. Language variations are used not only individually, but also in groups. One variation of language is slang. Slang is a type of informal language that is adopted by young people or certain social groups for internal communication which people outside the groups do not quite understand; in the form of an all-new and changing vocabulary (Liu & Seki 2021; Kridalaksana, 2009).

In Japanese, slang has similarities to *wakamono kotoba*. According to Masakazu (2003), *wakamono kotoba* is the language of young people, which is always developing and unique in each group. The use of *wakamono kotoba* is often found in media like comics, movies, or social media (Matsumoto, Ren, Matsuoka, Yoshida, & Kita, 2019). Teenagers often use vocabulary such as *boke*, *kora*, *koitsu*, *bibiru*, and so on. When viewed from the origin, these words come from dialects or variations of pre-existing words. Then there are *wakamono kotoba* such as *dase*, *kakke*, *yabee* and so on which are phonological changes from the base form.

This study analyzes the formation of *wakamono kotoba* morphologically and its meanings semantically. From the morphological aspect, a language has its uniqueness in the word-formation process. The word-formation process in morphology can create new words by systematically expanding the words in a language (Booij, 2007). In this case, *wakamono kotoba* is not included in the official Japanese language so it can cause Japanese learners to have difficulty understanding its use in sentences (Robertson, 2020). In addition, the variations formed from changes in morphologically *wakamono kotoba* are interesting to study.

In analyzing the form of *wakamono kotoba*, this study uses the word-formation theory according to Tsujimura (1996). According to Tsujimura (1996), a word can be formed through five processes, namely affixation, compounding, clipping, reduplication, and borrowing. In addition to morphological changes, this study also analyzes the meanings of *wakamono kotoba* in Japanese. The theory used is the contextual meaning theory according to Pateda (2001). Pateda (2001) reveals that contextual meaning is the meaning that arises as a result of the relationship between utterances and context.

There are several studies on slang language. Julianita (2016) analyzes the formation, function, and meaning of *wakamono kotoba* in a Japanese comic or manga with the title "Air Gear". The theory used to analyze the function of *wakamono kotoba* is the theory according to Jakobson (1960), then the theory used to analyze its meaning is the theory based by Leech (1974). Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that there were three formations of *wakamono kotoba*, namely abbreviation, mixing of phrases/words, and vowel lengthening. From its function, *wakamono kotoba* has emotive functions (feeling happy, upset, sad),

referential, and phatic. Its meaning consists of conceptual, connotative, and social meanings.

Meanwhile, Andayani (2019) analyzed the structure of the formation of *wakamono kotoba* in the Japanese animated film "Gekkan Shoujo Nozaki-kun". The theory used is the formation of *wakamono kotoba* according to Masakazu (2003). Based on the results of data analysis, Andayani found 76 data usage of *wakamono kotoba*. The data is categorized into six types of formation consisting of 1) Word shortening; 2) Mixing phrases/words; 3) Vowel elongation at the end; 4) The use of foreign languages; 5) The use of onomatopoeia, and 6) Other formation.

This study and both of Julianita (2016) and Andayani's (2019) research focused on analyzing *wakamono kotoba*. However, Julianita and Andayani's analysis used the theory of *wakamono kotoba* according to Masakazu (2003), while this study analyzed using morphological word formation theory according to Tsujimura (1999). In addition, this study also uses the theory of contextual meaning according to Pateda (2001) in analyzing the meanings of *wakamono kotoba*.

METHODS

The method in this study consisted of methods of data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the results of data analysis. In collecting data, the method used is the observation method accompanied by note-taking techniques (Sudaryanto, 2015). This method was used to record the data of *wakamono kotoba* contained in the data source. This study uses a data source in the form of a Japanese comic titled Tokyo Revengers by Ken Wakui. This comic tells the life of a junior high school teenager who lives a school life and becomes a member of a delinquent gang. This story is very suitable for showing the lives of Japanese teenagers, so there are many uses of *wakamono kotoba*. In addition, this comic has been adapted into an animated film and has won numerous awards in the shonen or teenage boy category (Pineda, 2020).

After the data is collected, the data is analyzed using the identity method and distribution techniques (Sudaryanto, 2015). In this case, the use of *wakamono kotoba* does not belong to the official Japanese language but is only used specifically in certain groups. Then the distribution technique is used to classify *wakamono kotoba* according to the

word-formation theory according to Tsujimura (1996). After being classified, the next step is to analyze the meaning using contextual meaning theory according to Pateda (2001).

The analyzed data is then presented using informal methods. This method describes the results of the analysis in words (Sudaryanto, 2015). Informal methods are used to describe the forms and meanings of *wakamono kotoba* according to the problem.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the analysis, there are 38 data on the use of *wakamono kotoba* in sentences. The formation process consists of affixation, compounding, reduplication, clipping, and borrowing. The following is the analysis of the forms and meanings of *wakamono kotoba* according to the process of their formation.

Affixation

Affixation is the process of adding prefixes or suffixes to the base form (Tsujimura, 1996). In this case, the formation of *wakamono kotoba* was found by adding the prefix *bu-* (ぶっ) to the verb and the suffix *-ra* (ら) to the noun. The following describes the analysis of *wakamono kotoba* formed by the affixation process.

- (1) ドラケン : 神泉でUSGが幅利かせてるらしーよ
マイキー : いいじゃんぶっ飛ばしにいこうよ
Doraken: Shinsen de USG ga haba kikaseteru rashii yo
Maiki: ii jan buttobashi ni ikou yo
Draken: ‘Looks like USG is in trouble in Shinsen.’
Mikey: ‘That’s good, let’s go **beat** them.’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 159)

In data (1) there is the use of the word *buttobashi*. This vocabulary comes from the verb *tobasu* ‘to beat’ which has been added prefix *bu-*. The prefix *bu-* comes from the prefix *uchi-* (うち) which changes its sound to *buchi-* (ぶち). The context of the data is Mikey told Draken that he want to beat up a gang of delinquents called USG (Udagawa Street Gang). In terms of its meaning, the prefix *bu-* adds meaning to emphasize something to the other person.

- (2) オイ！お前渋谷川中か！？テメーら何年だコラ
Oi! Omae Shibuyagawa chuu!? Temera nannen da kora
‘Hey! You’re from Shibuyagawa Middle School!? What grade are **you guys** in’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 21)
- (3) オマエらさー緊張感なさすぎっ
Omaera sa kinchoukan nasa sugi
‘**You guys** are too tense.’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 21)

In addition to prefixes, there are *wakamono kotoba* which are added with a suffix. In data (2), there is the use of *temera*. This word came from *temae*, which is a *wakamono kotoba* that means ‘you’ and added the suffix *-ra* (ら). In data (3), *omae* which is also a *wakamono kotoba* and means ‘you’ has the suffix *-ra* added. The suffix *-ra* is used to transform singular into plural. Therefore, the meaning of the words *temera* and *omae* is ‘to say two or more people.

In the previous studies, *wakamono kotoba* formed from the affixation process was not thoroughly analyzed. Julianita’s research (2016) did not find data on *wakamono kotoba* formed from the affixation process. Then Andayani’s (2019) research found only *wakamono kotoba* with additional prefixes. Therefore, in this study, there is a new finding that *wakamono kotoba* can be formed from the suffix.

Compounding

Compounding is the process of combining two or more words (Tsujimura, 1996). The *wakamono kotoba* found are the result of combining nouns, adjectives, and verbs. These findings are in line with the previous two studies, where *wakamono kotoba* can be formed from the combination of two words. However, it is not discussed in terms of meanings. The following is the result of the analysis.

- (4) 眠てーぞバカヤロー！
Nemutezo bakayaro!
‘Don’t sleep, **stupid!**’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 79)

In data (4), there is the use of the word *bakayaro*. this is a *wakamono kotoba* formed from the merging of the noun *baka* ‘stupid’ and *yaro* ‘person’. In

terms of meaning, *bakayaro* means ‘calling other people stupid’.

- (5) 気合もなんもねーダサ坊がよー不良語ってん
じゃねーぞコラ
Kiai mo nammone dasabou ga yo furyoukatatte nja ne zo kora
‘**Tacky brats** without guts like you guys don’t pretend to challenge delinquents.’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 30)

In data (5), there is the use of the word *dasabou*. This word comes from the combination of the adjective *dasai* and the noun *bou*. *Dasai* itself is *wakamono kotoba* which means ‘tacky’. While the word *bou* has the meaning of ‘brat’. Therefore, the meaning of *dasabou* is ‘tacky brats’. In the context of the sentence, this terminology is used to mock Takemichi and his friends after they lose a fight.

- (6) タケミチのイトコが渋谷川のアタマでマジよ
かったよ。
Takemichi no itoko ga Shibuya-gawa no atama de majiyokatta yo.
‘I’m **very grateful** that Takemichi’s cousin is the leader of Shibuya-gawa.’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 18)

In data (6), *majiyokatta* comes from combining the words *maji* and *yokatta*. The word *yokatta* is a past tense of the adjective *yoi*, which means ‘thankful’. Then *maji* is *wakamono kotoba* which comes from the adjective *majime* ‘serious’. In this sentence, *majiyokatta* expresses Akkun’s gratitude for Takemichi for having a connection with the school gang leader Shibuya-gawa. Therefore, the meaning of the word *maji* is ‘very’, and combined with *yokatta* becomes ‘very grateful’.

- (7) 無理矢理喧嘩させられてヤキ入れられて、毎
日...毎日...生き地獄だった
Muriyari kenka saserarete yakiirerarete mainichi mainichi ikijigoku datta
‘I’m always told to fight, tortured, every day... everyday life is like hell.’
(Wakui, 2017, page 85)

In data (7), there is the use of the word *yakiirerarete* which is a continuous form of *yakiireru*. This word is a combination of the verb *yaku* ‘burn’ and the verb *ireru* ‘to enter’. This word is derived from the phrase *yaki o ireru* which refers to the activity of forging a sharp object, such as a knife, by placing it in a fire. This phrase became popular

and its meaning changed to ‘torturing someone is like putting them in a fire’. In terms of context, Takemichi said that to describe his situation because a gang of delinquents was bullying him constantly.

Reduplication

Reduplication is the process of repeating parts or whole words (Tsujimura, 1996). In this case, the use of *wakamono kotoba* was found in the form of onomatopoeia or sound imitation. These findings are similar to the findings of previous studies. The following is the result of the analysis of the reduplication.

- (8) みたよグラビアもうシコシコしたし
Mitayo gurabia mou shikoshiko shita shi
‘I’ve seen! Even to the point of **masturbating** to see the exciting photos!’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 15)

In data (8), there is the use of *shikoshiko*. This word was said by Yamagishi when asked if he had read any adult magazines. *Shikoshiko* is an onomatopoeia or imitation of the sound like the sound of sticky feet when stepping on mud. In this case, *shikoshiko* is *wakamono kotoba* used to express the act of masturbation.

- (9) 無茶苦茶な人っスね
Muchakucha na hitossu ne
‘He really is a **reckless** person’
(Wakui, 2017b, page 110)

In data (9), the word *muchakucha* is the result of the reduplication of parts of the words. In this case, the word *muchu* ‘reckless’ is reduplicated to *kucha* to adjust the tone and become *muchakucha*. Based on its context, this word is aimed at the character named Pa’chin who suddenly attacks Takemichi without any warning.

Clipping

Clipping is the process of shortening a word (Tsujimura, 1996). There are two types of clipping types of *wakamono kotoba* found. First, shorten some parts of a word. Second, shorten two different words and combine them. Here are the results of the analysis:

- (10) タケミッチ今日から俺のダチな
Takemicchi kyou kara ore no dachi na
‘Takemicchi from today is my **friend**.’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 142)

In data (10), there is the use of the word *dachi*. This word is *wakamono kotoba* which is shortened from the word *tomodachi* ‘friend’. Based on its word-formation, it dropped the first part of the word *tomo* so that only the last part is used. In terms of meaning, Mikey said the word *dachi* to Takemicchi who is considered his friend. Mikey said this as he is a delinquent and uses the word as more colloquial and informal.

- (11) 中坊相手にこの人数で奇襲、イメージ通りのクソヤローだね
Chuubou aite ni ninsuu de kishuu, imeeji doori no kusoyaro da ne
‘Surrounding **middle schoolers** with this number of people, it turns out that you’re a bastard just like I imagined.’
(Wakui, 2017, page 9)

In data (11), there is the use of the word *chuubou*. This is based on the word *chuugaku bouzu*. This word consists of *chuugaku* means ‘middle school’ and *bouzu* means ‘monk’. Both of these words are shortened at the end and then combined. In terms of meaning, *chuubou* is referring to middle school students, as Mikey and his friends are still at middle school.

- (12) ポケットの中には 500 円玉とケータイ、しかもガラケー！
Poketto no naka ni wa 500-en dama to ketai, shikamo garake!
‘In my pocket, I have a 500 yen coin and a cell phone, a **folding phone**!’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 17)

In data (12), Takemichi called the cellphone he was carrying *garake*. According to the Nihongo Zokugo Jiten website (2021), the vocabulary of *garake* is *wakamono kotoba* which comes from a combination of the words *garapagosu* and *keitai*. *Garapagosu* adapted from the name of an island, namely the Island Galapagos. According to the Japanese, this island is a place for various animals to continuously evolve. Therefore, the term *garapagosu* has the meaning of ‘something that is constantly evolving’ like technology. *Keitai* comes from the clipping of the word *keitai denwa* which means ‘mobile phone’. Both *garapagosu* and *keitai*

are shortened at the last part and then combined into *garake*. In this case, *garake* refers to the type of folding phone that was considered sophisticated at the time.

- (13) ショボい試合見せんじゃねーよ
Shoboi shiai misenjane yo
‘Don’t put up a **boring** match.’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 81)

In data (13), the word *shoboi* is based on the phrase *me ga shoboshobo* which means ‘tired eyes’. In this case, *shoboshobo* was shortened into *shoboi*. Adding the *-i* suffix changes the word class to an adjective. In terms of context, the speaker was annoyed with Takemichi playing around in a one-on-one match. So the meaning of *shoboi* is ‘boring to the point of making you sleepy’.

Borrowing

The last type of word formation *wakamono kotoba* is borrowing from a foreign language. Words from other languages are borrowed in one language and used as complements in the language in order to keep up with the times. These words are the result of interactions between countries with different languages, which lead to the creation of loan words (Sudipa, 2021). Borrowing *wakamono kotoba* results were also found in the two previous studies. The following describes the results of the analysis of the borrowing types.

- (14) カイキンにボンタン...なんだこのダセヤンキーは！
Kaikin ni bontan nanda kono dase yankii wa!
‘Uniform with an open collar and baggy pants, who is this tacky **Yankee**!’
(Wakui, 2017a, page 16)

In data (14) there is the use of the word *yankii*. This word is the result of borrowing from the English word *yankee*. According to the website Nihongo Zokugo Jiten (2021), *yankee* is a Japanese-made vocabulary used to refer to Americans and comes from an American baseball club called “All League New York Yankees”. In Japan, this term is used to describe juvenile delinquents who have unique hairstyles, such as curly or blonde hair. In this data, the word *yankii* is referring to Takemichi who is stylized as a delinquent.

- (15) テメーワンパンでのされてんじゃねーよボケ
Teme *wanpan* de nosarete njane yo boke
'You! Don't faint because of **one hit** idiot!'
(Wakui, 2017a, page 81)

In data (15), there is the use of the word *wanpan*. This word is a borrowing from the English word one punch. The word one punch was adapted in Japanese pronunciation to become *wan panchi* and shortened to *wanpan*. This is slang for someone who can beat his opponent with just one hit (Weblio, 2021). In this context, *wanpan* is used to describe the cause of Takemichi who collapsed after taking a single hit.

Based on the analysis above, *wakamono kotoba*, or Japanese slang contained in Ken Wakui's Tokyo Revengers comic can be divided into five morphological development steps. The process of forming *wakamono kotoba* consists of 1) affixation (adding prefixes and suffixes); 2) compounding; 3) reduplication (part and whole words); 4) clipping; and 5) borrowing from a foreign language. The findings that *wakamono kotoba* can be formed from suffixes did not found in Julianita's (2016) and Andayani's (2019) researches, which implied as new findings of this study.

Moreover, when *wakamono kotoba* viewed in terms of meanings, there are a certain number of *wakamono kotoba* which meanings have changed from their original meanings. For example, adding the prefix *bu-* into *tobasu* 'beat' has the meaning of emphasizing doing something. The combination of *yaku* 'to burn' and *ireru* 'to put' into the word *yakiireru* has meaning 'torment'. The word *garake* which is a combination of the name of the Galapagos island and *keitai* 'mobile phone' refers to a folding phone. Then there is also the *wakamono kotoba* which changes its form without losing the original meaning. Like the combination of the words *dasai* 'tacky' and *bou* 'brat' into *dasabou* 'tacky brat'. Another example is shortening the part of the word likes *tomodachi* 'friend' into *dachi*.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed *wakamono kotoba* or Japanese slang contained in Ken Wakui's Tokyo Revengers comic. The findings showed that *wakamono kotoba* can be divided into five morphological development steps consists of affixation, compounding, reduplication, clipping, and borrowing from a foreign language. Research on

wakamono kotoba or Japanese slang is essential to grasp the latest change of Japanese language used by society. Given the evolution of language, it is possible to identify a new word within groups, especially among young people. The author advises that the next study looks at something other than morphology and semantics. This is due to the fact that research in this subject is frequent, whereas research in other fields such as phonology and syntax is scarce. Future research is expected to enrich knowledge about slang, both those that are still used today and those that are no longer used.

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