

ภาษาวัยรุ่นในฐานะทรัพยากรเชิงปฏิสัมพันธ์ในการ ปฏิสัมพันธ์ภาษาญี่ปุ่นในฐานะภาษาที่สอง: การศึกษาด้วย การวิเคราะห์บทสนทนาของนักศึกษาต่างชาติ

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการใช้และหน้าที่เชิงสื่อสารของรูปแบบภาษาที่มีลักษณะคล้ายภาษาวัยรุ่น (wakamono kotoba: 若者ことば) ซึ่งหมายถึงรูปแบบภาษาที่ผู้เรียน L2 ใช้ โดยมีหน้าที่คล้ายกับภาษาวัยรุ่น แต่ไม่จำเป็นต้องตรงกับการใช้ของเจ้าของภาษา ในปฏิสัมพันธ์ภาษาญี่ปุ่นของผู้เรียนภาษาที่สอง (L2) ในกลุ่มนักศึกษาต่างชาติในประเทศญี่ปุ่น งานวิจัยก่อนหน้านี้เกี่ยวกับภาษาวัยรุ่นภาษาญี่ปุ่นส่วนใหญ่มุ่งเน้นไปที่ลักษณะทางคำศัพท์และการอธิบายเชิงพรรณนา ขณะที่บทบาทของภาษาดังกล่าวในปฏิสัมพันธ์ที่เกิดขึ้นจริง โดยเฉพาะในบริบทของผู้เรียน L2 ยังได้รับความสนใจค่อนข้างจำกัด เพื่อตอบสนองต่อช่องว่างดังกล่าว งานวิจัยนี้วิเคราะห์บทสนทนาภาษาญี่ปุ่นที่ดำเนินขึ้นระหว่างนักศึกษาต่างชาติซึ่งใช้ภาษาญี่ปุ่นเป็นภาษาที่สอง โดยใช้แนวทางการวิเคราะห์การสนทนา (conversation analysis) ร่วมกับการสัมภาษณ์หลังการสนทนา เพื่อศึกษาว่ารูปแบบภาษาดังกล่าวปรากฏขึ้นในปฏิสัมพันธ์อย่างไร และทำหน้าที่เป็นทรัพยากรเชิงปฏิสัมพันธ์ (interactional resources) ในลักษณะใด ผลการวิเคราะห์พบว่าหน้าที่เชิงสื่อสารหลายประการ ได้แก่ การเอื้อต่อการดำเนินบทสนทนา การถ่ายทอดภาพหรือความรู้สึก การเสริมสร้างความเป็นอันหนึ่งอันเดียวกันระหว่างผู้สนทนา และการลดระดับความหนักแน่นของจุดยืนของผู้พูด (hedging) รูปแบบภาษาต่าง ๆ เช่น คำเน้นระดับ (เช่น chō (超), metcha (めっちゃ)) และรูปแบบท้ายประโยค (เช่น -toka (〜とか)) มีบทบาทในการสนับสนุนความสนใจของบทสนทนา การสร้างความสอดคล้องระหว่างผู้สนทนา และการเจรจาจุดยืน ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่ารูปแบบภาษาที่มีลักษณะคล้ายภาษาวัยรุ่นถูกนำมาใช้โดยผู้เรียน L2 อย่างต่อเนื่องในปฏิสัมพันธ์ระหว่างเพื่อน และไม่ได้จำกัดอยู่เฉพาะผู้พูดเจ้าของภาษาเท่านั้น แต่ยังปรากฏในบริบทการสนทนาแบบ L2 ด้วย ผลลัพธ์ดังกล่าวมีส่วนช่วยขยายองค์ความรู้เกี่ยวกับภาษาวัยรุ่นและปฏิสัมพันธ์ของผู้เรียน L2 โดยแสดงให้เห็นว่าผู้พูดสามารถใช้ทรัพยากรทางภาษาที่ไม่เป็นทางการเพื่อร่วมกันสร้างปฏิสัมพันธ์ได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำ

สำคัญ

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Youth Language as an Interactional Resource in Japanese L2 Interaction: A Conversation Analytic Study of International Students

Abstract

This study examines the use and communicative functions of youth-language-like expressions (wakamono kotoba: 若者ことば), referring to forms used by L2 speakers that share interactional functions with youth language but may differ from native-speaker usage in distribution and sociolinguistic nuance, in Japanese L2 interaction among international students in Japan. While previous studies have primarily focused on lexical and descriptive aspects of youth language, limited attention has been paid to its role in naturally occurring interaction, particularly among second language (L2) speakers. To address this gap, the present study analyzes Japanese-language conversations conducted exclusively among international students using Japanese as a second language. Adopting a conversation-analytic approach combined with post-conversation interviews, the study investigates how such expressions emerge in L2 interaction and function as interactional resources. The analysis identifies multiple communicative functions, including facilitating conversation, conveying imagery, fostering solidarity, and hedging speaker stance. Expressions such as intensifiers (e.g., chō (超), metcha (めっちゃ)) and sentence-final forms (e.g., -toka (〜とか)) contribute to conversational flow, alignment, and stance negotiation. The findings suggest that youth-language-like expressions are actively used by L2 speakers as interactional resources in peer interaction, indicating that such usage is not limited to native speakers but also emerges in L2-only conversational settings. These results contribute to research on youth language and L2 interaction by highlighting how speakers draw on informal linguistic resources to co-construct interaction.



words

youth language, Japanese L2 interaction, interactional resource, international students, conversation analysis

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1.Introduction

In recent years, the number of international students in Japan has increased, contributing to greater linguistic and cultural diversity in higher education. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the international student population reached 336,708 in 2024, the highest level recorded to date. In this context, Japanese is used not only between native speakers and international students but also as a shared lingua franca among international students, providing an important site for examining language use beyond native-speaker norms (Iwata, 2006, pp. 175–187; Tanaka, 2005).

For learners of Japanese as a second language (L2), language acquisition extends beyond formal instruction, as informal peer interaction and media exposure shape everyday language practices where learners encounter *wakamono kotoba* (Japanese youth language). Although research on youth language has accumulated since the 1990s (Yonekawa, 1996; Oyano, 1996, pp. 36–45; Ota & Makise, 2001, pp. 67–83), it has primarily focused on lexical description, with limited attention to its role in naturally occurring interaction, particularly among L2 speakers. Similarly, studies of Japanese L2 interaction have examined phenomena such as turn-taking and backchannels (Iwata, 2006; Kariya, 2005), but rarely analyze youth language as an interactional resource.

Against this background, this study examines how youth-language-like expressions are used in naturally occurring L2 interaction and what communicative functions they serve. Focusing on Japanese-language conversations among international students, the study combines conversation analysis with post-conversation interviews to investigate how such expressions emerge in interaction and contribute to the organization of talk.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What communicative functions of youth-language-like expressions appear in Japanese-language conversations among L2 speakers?
2. How do these functions compare with those reported in previous studies of native-speaker interaction?

This study contributes to sociolinguistic and Japanese L2 interaction research by extending youth language research to naturally occurring interaction, demonstrating that such expressions function as interactional resources in L2 conversation, and providing insight into how L2 speakers use pragmatic resources in informal peer interaction.

Throughout this article, Japanese examples are romanized according to the modified Hepburn system (2025 revision), with long vowels indicated by macrons and geminate consonants represented by doubling the consonant (e.g., *metcha*, *mutchcha*).

2. Background: International Students in Japan and Japanese Language Use

International students in Japan engage in Japanese-language interaction across academic,

workplace, and everyday contexts. In these contexts, learners are regularly exposed to informal language varieties, including colloquial expressions, discourse markers, and youth language. Given that many international students are of similar age and frequently interact with peers, youth language constitutes a salient component of their linguistic environment.

In such interactional environments, Japanese is not only a means of communication but also a resource for negotiating interpersonal relationships and managing stance among peers. This is particularly significant in L2 contexts, where speakers draw on available linguistic resources to achieve interactional goals. It therefore becomes important to examine how informal linguistic forms, including youth-language-like expressions, function as interactional resources in such settings.

3. Previous Studies on Youth Language

Wakamono kotoba (Japanese youth language) has attracted scholarly attention as a dynamic variety associated with younger generations, although its definition and scope vary across studies. Despite occasional negative evaluations in public discourse, it represents a site of linguistic creativity and social meaning. This chapter outlines major approaches, defines youth language as used in this study, and presents the communicative functions guiding the analysis.

3.1 Conceptualizing Youth Language

Wakamono kotoba has often been discussed in relation to slang and other informal varieties. In English-language studies, slang has been associated with marginal groups and evaluated as non-standard (Anderson & Trudgill, 1990; Allen, 1998), but also recognized as a resource for in-group communication and identity (Jay, 1992). In Japanese linguistics, youth language has been conceptualized more neutrally through its connection to group language (shūdango: 集団語). Shibata (1956, p. 92) defines group language as expressions created within specific communities. Building on this, Yonekawa (1996, p. 12) defines wakamono kotoba as expressions used by young people that serve multiple communicative functions. Despite differences in emphasis, youth language can be understood as a socially situated practice characterized by creativity, informality, and functional adaptability.

In the present study, youth language is defined as informal expressions associated with younger speakers and peer interaction, rather than strictly age-bound usage, while acknowledging its overlap with colloquial language and slang. From a functional, interaction-oriented perspective, it is treated as a resource for identifiable communicative functions in interaction, and the term “youth-language-like expressions” refers to forms produced by L2 speakers that share these functions but may not fully correspond to native-speaker usage in distribution or social meaning.

3.2 Communicative Functions of Youth Language

While Yonekawa (1996, pp. 16–27) discusses several communicative functions of youth language, including conversation facilitation, solidarity, imagery, buffering, concealment, purification, and entertainment, the present study systematically considers all of these functions as a starting

point for analysis. Previous descriptive studies (e.g., Senuma, 2005, pp. 295–323) have also documented characteristic forms of wakamono kotoba, although they have not systematically examined their interactional functions. More recent research (e.g., Leng, 2025, pp. 30–33) suggests that differences between foreign language and second language learning environments, especially in terms of opportunities for contact, play a crucial role in shaping learners' use of interactional resources.

In the present study, all functions proposed by Yonekawa (1996) were reviewed in relation to the dataset. Based on this consideration, the analysis focuses on four functions that were most consistently observable and interactionally salient in the present data: facilitating conversation, fostering solidarity, conveying imagery, and hedging speaker stance. Functions such as concealment, purification, and entertainment were considered during the analytical process but were not included in the analytical framework due to their limited occurrence and lack of clear interactional relevance in the dataset.

More specifically, the present analysis draws on Yonekawa's (1996) discussion of communicative functions such as conversation facilitation, solidarity, and imagery, while treating hedging speaker stance as a related but analytically distinct function observed in the present data. While Kuwamoto (2003a) is consulted primarily for its discussion of morphological and semantic characteristics, the functional categorization adopted here is based on interactionally observable uses in the present dataset, rather than a direct application of existing taxonomies, in order to capture interactionally relevant functions as they emerge in L2 interaction.

These functions are defined not only in terms of lexical forms but also in relation to their interactional roles, which are examined in detail in Section 5. This selection is therefore data-driven and based on a prior consideration of existing functional categories, prioritizing interactional relevance over reproducing existing taxonomies. It is not arbitrary but grounded in systematic comparison between existing functional categories and the present dataset.

3.2.1 Facilitating Conversation

Youth language contributes to conversational flow through abbreviated forms, discourse markers, and evaluative expressions that enable rapid turn progression and topic management. Such expressions support interactional rhythm and maintain conversational momentum. In Yonekawa's discussion, this function is often associated with abbreviated forms and casual conversational phrases that facilitate turn progression (e.g., intora (イントラ : instructor), an abbreviated form used to maintain conversational tempo) (Yonekawa, 1996, pp. 19–20). While the forms observed in the present dataset differ from those described by Yonekawa, they similarly contribute to conversational flow at the interactional level. In the present dataset, for example, intensifiers such as chō (超 : very) and metcha (めっちゃ : very) are observed to contribute to rapid turn progression.

3.2.2 Fostering Solidarity

Youth language functions as a resource for constructing in-group membership and

interpersonal alignment. Through shared expressions and evaluative language, speakers display affiliation and reinforce social bonds. This function corresponds to expressions that signal familiarity and shared stance, often realized through casual or informal language use. Yonekawa (1996, pp. 20–21) also notes that even widely used in-group expressions, such as *gochi* (ごち), serve to reaffirm existing social relationships among speakers. While the forms observed in the present dataset differ from those described by Yonekawa, they similarly contribute to interpersonal alignment at the interactional level. In the present dataset, for example, expressions such as *yabai* (ヤバい : awesome/terrible) and *maji* (マジ : seriously) are observed to function as resources for expressing shared evaluations and fostering interpersonal alignment.

3.2.3 Conveying Imagery

Youth language enables speakers to convey evaluations and perceptions efficiently through compact and vivid expressions. These forms facilitate shared understanding by allowing interlocutors to align their interpretations of a situation. In Yonekawa's discussion, this function is associated with expressions that evoke vivid impressions, including figurative or simile-like expressions (Yonekawa, 1996, pp. 22–23). Yonekawa also notes the use of visually and aurally evocative expressions such as *bākōdo* (バーコード : a hairstyle resembling a barcode) and *gero-gero* (ゲロゲロ : an auditory expression conveying disgust). These examples illustrate how vivid imagery is conveyed through concise expressions. In the present dataset, for example, expressions such as *sugē* (すげー : amazing) and *yabai* (ヤバい : awesome/terrible) are observed to function as resources for conveying vivid evaluations and facilitating shared understanding.

3.2.4 Hedging Speaker Stance

Youth language also functions as a resource for hedging speaker stance. Expressions such as sentence-final markers allow speakers to reduce epistemic commitment and present statements as tentative, thereby maintaining interpersonal harmony in interaction. This function is related to what Yonekawa (1996, pp. 24–25) describes as buffering, which involves avoiding expressions that may hurt the interlocutor and softening potentially face-threatening statements. While the present study focuses specifically on the interactional management of epistemic stance, this function overlaps with Yonekawa's notion of buffering in its role in maintaining interpersonal harmony. In the present dataset, for example, sentence-final expressions such as *-toka* (～とか) and *-tte kanji* (～って感じ) are observed to function as resources for managing epistemic stance and maintaining interpersonal alignment.

4. Research Method

This chapter outlines the research design and methodological framework used to investigate how youth language functions as an interactional resource in Japanese L2 interaction. The study adopts a qualitative approach combining conversation analysis and post-conversation interviews.

This design enables a close examination of linguistic forms as they emerge in interaction while also incorporating participants' reflections on their own language use.

4.1 Analytical Perspective

Conversation analysis treats language as situated social action and examines the sequential organization of talk, including turn-taking and the interactional functions of linguistic expressions. This perspective is particularly suitable for analyzing naturally occurring interaction, as it focuses on how participants collaboratively construct meaning in context.

In the present study, conversation analysis is employed to examine how youth language emerges and functions as an interactional resource in Japanese-language conversations among L2 speakers. Particular attention is paid to the sequential environment in which expressions occur, including turn-taking, prosody, pauses, and participants' responses, in order to examine their interactional functions.

4.2 Data Collection and Participants

Data were collected in July 2025. Conversations were recorded on July 26 and 27 using the online conferencing platform Zoom, which enabled participation from multiple regions of Japan and ensured audio quality suitable for transcription and interactional analysis. To promote natural peer interaction, the researcher did not observe the conversations directly; instead, participants were placed in private breakout rooms and instructed to engage in free Japanese-language conversation.

The participants were eight international students aged 18–30 enrolled at universities in Japan. All participants had completed formal Japanese language education and regularly used Japanese in academic and everyday contexts. To ensure that Japanese functioned as the shared language, participants were paired with interlocutors from different countries, reducing the likelihood of code-switching. Participants were recruited from universities located in Tokyo, Aichi, and Osaka. Their countries of origin were Indonesia, Sweden, South Korea, Thailand (two participants), China, Taiwan, and the United States.

4.3 Conversational Data, Transcription, and Interviews

Each pair engaged in approximately 30 minutes of natural Japanese-language conversation. No specific topics were assigned, allowing interactional topics to emerge organically. The conversational data were transcribed using conventions adapted from Kudo (2004), Iwata (2006), and Takagi (2005), with modifications to capture features relevant to conversation analysis, including turn-taking, pauses, overlap, and prosody.

Following the recordings, semi-structured post-conversation interviews were conducted individually with each participant. These interviews lasted approximately 25 to 40 minutes and were designed to elicit participants' reflections on their language use.

The interview protocol covered five areas: (1) awareness of youth language use, (2) experiences of Japanese language use, (3) impressions of youth language, (4) contexts in which youth language is used, and (5) comparable expressions in participants' home languages. Interview

data were consulted selectively when the interactional function of a given expression could not be sufficiently determined from the conversational data alone. This approach is consistent with a conversation-analytic framework, in which naturally occurring interaction is prioritized over retrospective accounts. Although the interview protocol covered five areas, the present study focuses primarily on aspects directly relevant to interactional analysis. Other areas are not discussed in detail due to scope limitations.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, youth language expressions were identified in the conversational data, with particular attention to forms that recurrently appeared in informal peer interaction. Second, each occurrence was analyzed within its sequential context to determine its communicative function, with particular attention to turn-taking organization, prosodic features, pauses, and participants' responses. This stage aimed to clarify how each expression contributed to the ongoing interaction. Third, when necessary, relevant post-conversation interview data were consulted to support the interpretation of interactional functions and to provide additional insight into participants' language use.

By integrating conversation analysis with post-conversation interviews, the present study prioritizes naturally occurring interaction while also incorporating participants' perspectives into the interpretation of interactional functions. This combined approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how youth-language-like expressions are used and interpreted in L2 interaction.

5. Results

This chapter presents the results of the analysis based on conversation data and post-conversation interviews. Focusing on the sequential organization of interaction, it examines how youth language expressions function as interactional resources in Japanese-language conversations among L2 speakers. Following the analytical framework outlined in Chapter 3, the findings are organized into three communicative functions: (1) facilitating conversation and conveying imagery, (2) fostering solidarity, and (3) hedging speaker stance. In the present analysis, the functions of facilitating conversation and conveying imagery are treated together due to their frequent co-occurrence in the data.

5.1 Overview of Youth Language Emergence in L2 Conversations

Across the four dyadic conversations analyzed in this study, seventeen expressions associated with youth-language-like usage were identified. In this study, interactional resources refer to linguistic and non-linguistic means used in interaction, including sentence-final forms and discourse markers (e.g., *-toka*, *-mitaina*, *-tte kanji*, *-kamo shirenai*, *-kedo*), intensifiers (e.g., *chō*, *metcha*, *sugē*), and adjectival forms such as *kimoi*. While some of these forms are not exclusive to youth language, they are included

due to their frequent use in informal peer interaction and their role in stance marking and alignment.

Phonological variants such as metcha and mutcha were treated as a single analytical category. Among the identified expressions, -toka appeared in all conversational pairs, including contexts referring to a single event. Although some expressions may appear semantically similar, they were treated separately when they exhibited different interactional functions in the data. This distinction is based on interactional function rather than semantic equivalence.

Table 1 groups these expressions according to their primary interactional functions and presents their frequency distribution across participants. The table provides an overview of patterns in the dataset, while Sections 5.2–5.4 examine selected excerpts to illustrate their interactional use.

The excerpts discussed in Sections 5.2–5.4 are not intended to correspond directly to the frequency counts for each speaker in Table 1, but are selected to illustrate representative interactional patterns. These excerpts are therefore used to highlight recurrent interactional practices rather than to provide a comprehensive account of all observed instances. While the table offers a quantitative overview of distributional tendencies, the excerpts serve to illustrate how these forms are locally organized and made interactionally relevant in specific sequential contexts.

Table 1. Youth-Language-Like Expressions Observed in Japanese L2 Conversations, Categorized by Primary Interactional Function Across Participants

Function	Youth language item	Japanese form	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Hedging / Mitigation	-mitaina (sentence-final)	～とか	11	13	23	28	21	1	14	10
	-tte kanji (sentence-final)	～みたいな	1	0	1	7	1	2	1	1
	-tte iu ka (utterance-medial)	～って感じ	0	0	1	1	2	0	3	2
	-kamo shirenai (sentence-final)	～っていうか	0	0	2	1	0	0	15	9
	-kedo (sentence-final)	～かもしれない	2	3	2	1	1	0	1	1
	Youth language item	～けど	0	3	10	6	8	1	16	2
Facilitating / Imagery	chō	超	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
	metcha / mutcha	めっちゃ/むっちゃ	0	0	38	0	0	4	3	1
	sugē	すげー	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
	gachi de	ガチで	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Solidarity / Evaluation	yabai	ヤバい	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
	maji	マジ	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Other (Low frequency)	kimoi	キモい	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
	kawachii	かわちい	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	meroi	メロい	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
	-shika katan	～しか勝たん	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	sage	サゲ	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Note. Frequencies are based on the entire dataset across all conversational pairs. Letters A–H refer to individual participants. The examples in Sections 5.2–5.4 are representative excerpts for qualitative analysis and do not reflect overall frequency distribution. Low-frequency items are grouped separately due to limited occurrences.

5.2 Facilitating Conversation and Conveying Imagery

In the present data, the functions of facilitating conversation and conveying imagery frequently co-occur within the same interactional sequences. This combined function is identified as facilitating conversation because such expressions contribute to turn progression, sustain interactional flow, and support the co-construction of shared evaluations.

Excerpt 1: Conversation between Speaker A (China) and Speaker B (United States)

191A : かわいい。超かわいい。

192B : (3秒) 顔はなんか卵みたい。

193A : ははは (笑う) でも、えっと一、戦うになるときは、(B : うん、あー) イケメン。

Note. This excerpt was selected by the author from a naturally occurring conversation recorded with the participants' consent. All personal names have been anonymized.

In this sequence, *chō* (超) appears after prior alignment has been established through repeated assessments such as *kawaii* (かわいい). The shift to *chō kawaii* (超かわいい) functions as an upgrade of evaluation, reinforcing shared stance and inviting a response. This is taken up by Speaker B in the following turn through a related evaluative comment, indicating continued alignment. In this way, *chō* (超) sustains the evaluative sequence and facilitates conversational momentum.

Such intensifiers also contribute to conveying imagery by enabling speakers to express evaluations in a vivid and economical manner, allowing interlocutors to quickly grasp the speaker's stance. In addition to *chō* (超), similar interactional patterns were observed with *metcha* (めっちゃ), as illustrated below.

Excerpt 2: Conversation between Speaker C (Sweden) and Speaker D (South Korea)

259C : でしょ? 何でもMade in Chinaでしょ? (D : そうだけど)

ここで作るのはめっちゃ高い。日本製、いいけど、俺には高い。

260D : うーん、でも一、幸い、私のカメラは日本製。ふふ。

Note. This excerpt was selected by the author from a naturally occurring conversation recorded with the participants' consent. All personal names have been anonymized.

Here, *metcha* (めっちゃ) functions as an assessment upgrade within an ongoing evaluative sequence. As with *chō* (超), it contributes to maintaining conversational flow and facilitating shared understanding. From an interactional perspective, these intensifiers function as resources for coordinating evaluation and alignment, sustaining conversational momentum while conveying imagery.

5.3 Fostering Solidarity

Another important function observed in the data is the use of youth language as a resource for fostering solidarity and interpersonal alignment. This function is identified as solidarity-oriented because such expressions enable speakers to display shared stance and maintain affiliative interaction.

Excerpt 3: Conversation between Speaker E (Indonesia) and Speaker F (Thailand)

053E : ま、筆記試験で、んー、最初は、ま、3つのことについて述べて、何とか、み、3つのこ、3つのことばを定義、定義しなさいっていうやつ。

054F : えーっ。何か難しそう。

055E : やったけど、ヤバい。そしてー、そして、ま、3つの、その、ま、エッセイ (F : うん) エッセイの問題とかあって、なんか、広くは正しく書いたけど、細かいところまで書かなくて、ヤバいって感じ。でも大丈夫かなあ。

Note. This excerpt was selected by the author from a naturally occurring conversation recorded with the participants' consent. All personal names have been anonymized.

In this sequence, *yabai* (ヤバい) is produced as a retrospective evaluation of the speaker's exam performance. Rather than conveying literal danger, it functions as an affective assessment that indexes stance. This occurs in a context where Speaker F has already described the difficulty of the exam, establishing a shared evaluative frame. The use of *yabai* (ヤバい) at this point displays alignment by showing that Speaker E shares this perception of difficulty. Rather than elaborating the evaluation, the speaker employs *yabai* (ヤバい) as a compact expression that invites affiliation. In this sense, *yabai* (ヤバい) operates as a responsive action that builds on prior talk and reinforces the ongoing evaluative sequence.

From a conversation analytic perspective, *yabai* (ヤバい) functions as a resource for stance alignment within an ongoing evaluative sequence. Its placement following prior talk allows it to operate as an affiliative response, contributing to the co-construction of a shared stance. Such usage illustrates how speakers rely on concise evaluative forms to maintain intersubjectivity while sustaining the progressivity of the interaction.

5.4 Hedging Speaker Stance

Another salient function observed in the data is the use of youth-language-like expressions as resources for hedging speaker stance. Such expressions allow speakers to reduce epistemic commitment, present statements as tentative, and maintain interpersonal harmony.

Excerpt 4: Conversation between Speaker G (Thailand) and Speaker H (Taiwan)

119H : うん。 (1 秒) で、でもGちゃんは東京？東京に行くよね？

120G : うーん、行くけどー、 (H : けどー) それが行くかどうかわかんないっていうかー、決まっていっていうかー (H : うん) 決まってるけどー (H : うん) 決めた、決めた 決めたけどー (H : うん) うーん、まだ8月に入らないとわかんないっていうかー (H : うん) うーん、そんな感じです。

121H : ふーん。

Note. This excerpt was selected by the author from a naturally occurring conversation recorded with the participants' consent. All personal names have been anonymized.

In this sequence, Speaker G employs sentence-final expressions such as *-kedo* (〜けど)

and -tte iu ka (～っていうか) to frame the utterance as provisional and negotiable. Rather than producing a single definitive statement, the speaker incrementally constructs the turn through a series of reformulations, deferring commitment and keeping the proposition open.

From a conversation analytic perspective, these forms function as resources for managing epistemic stance within an ongoing sequence. The utterance is produced as an evolving account, allowing the speaker to navigate uncertainty while maintaining interactional progressivity. The minimal response from Speaker H (“ふーん”) indicates that this mitigated format is treated as interactionally appropriate. These expressions are included not because they are exclusive to youth language, but because of their frequent use in informal peer interaction and their role in managing stance. Through such usage, speakers maintain alignment while avoiding overly strong or face-threatening assertions.

5.5 Summary of Findings

The analysis shows that Japanese L2 speakers use youth-language-like expressions as interactional resources to manage conversation, convey evaluation, foster solidarity, and hedge speaker stance, realized through recurrent forms such as intensifiers and sentence-final expressions.

Sections 5.2–5.4 demonstrate that these expressions are systematically positioned within interactional sequences rather than used randomly. Intensifiers such as *chō* (超) and *metcha* (めっちゃ) upgrade assessments and sustain evaluative sequences, facilitating conversational flow and conveying imagery. Expressions such as *yabai* (ヤバい) contribute to shared stance and interpersonal alignment, while sentence-final forms such as *-kedo* (～けど) and *-tte iu ka* (～っていうか) hedge speaker stance and maintain interactional harmony.

Importantly, these expressions are not treated as youth language in a strict categorical sense, but as context-dependent interactional resources that display youth-language-like functions in interaction. While some forms also occur in general colloquial Japanese, their role in informal peer interaction justifies their inclusion in the present analysis.

Overall, the findings indicate that youth-language-like expressions constitute an important interactional resource in Japanese L2-only conversations, highlighting how L2 speakers co-construct interaction using resources beyond standard or classroom-based language.

6. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 5 in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. It focuses on the communicative functions of youth-language-like expressions in Japanese L2 interaction and considers their implications for conversation analysis, sociolinguistic research, and Japanese language education. It also clarifies how these expressions function as interactional resources in L2 contexts.

6.1 Youth Language in Japanese L2 Interaction: Summary and Interpretation

The present study examined the use of *wakamono kotoba* in L2-only Japanese conversations. Using conversation analysis and post-conversation interviews, this study identified a range of youth-language-like expressions, revealing three primary communicative functions: facilitating conversation and conveying imagery, fostering solidarity, and hedging speaker stance. As shown in Chapter 5, intensifiers and sentence-final expressions were systematically used to manage evaluation, stance, and interpersonal alignment.

L2 speakers actively employ these expressions in peer interaction, suggesting that such resources are not restricted to native-speaker socialization, although their usage is shaped by accessibility and learning context rather than full sociolinguistic competence. In particular, while similar communicative functions have been reported in native-speaker interaction, the present data suggest a greater reliance on hedging-related expressions, likely due to their accessibility and lower sociolinguistic markedness for L2 speakers. In contrast, functions such as entertainment or more creative wordplay, which are often noted in native-speaker youth language, were less evident in the present dataset.

This pattern is consistent with previous research suggesting that differences between foreign language and second language learning environments, particularly in terms of opportunities for contact, play a key role in shaping learners' use of interactional resources (Leng, 2025, pp. 30–33, esp. p. 32). While Leng (2025) focuses on fillers and related resources, the present findings extend this perspective by showing that youth-language-like expressions are similarly shaped by accessibility and exposure in L2 interaction.

Interview data further support this interpretation. Several participants reported that their use of youth-language-like expressions was influenced primarily by media exposure and peer interaction, and some expressed a desire to sound more natural or closer to native speakers when using such expressions. Their awareness of distinctions between youth language and standard forms, however, remained partial.

Not all functions discussed by Yonekawa (1996), such as buffering or concealment, were observed in the present data, which may reflect the nature of L2 interaction, where learners tend to rely on more accessible and widely shared expressions. In contrast, functions such as conversation facilitation, solidarity, and imagery were consistently observed, indicating that these represent more accessible interactional resources in L2 contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate that youth-language-like expressions in L2 interaction are functionally comparable to those in native-speaker interaction, while showing greater reliance on hedging expressions (e.g., *-toka*, *-kedo*). This reflects how L2 speakers manage uncertainty and maintain interactional smoothness under constraints of accessibility, exposure, and sociolinguistic awareness.

6.2 Implications for Conversation Analysis and Sociolinguistics

This study contributes to conversation-analytic research on Japanese L2 interaction by highlighting youth language as an interactional resource. While previous research has focused on turn-taking and repair, the present findings show that L2 speakers also employ evaluative and stance-related expressions to organize interaction.

From a conversation-analytic perspective, the findings support the view that L2 interaction constitutes a legitimate site of linguistic practice rather than a deviation from native norms. Speakers collaboratively construct interaction using available resources, including youth-language-like expressions.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the presence of such expressions in L2-only interaction suggests that youth language is not strictly age-bound or group-exclusive, but rather a flexible set of practices shaped by peer interaction, media exposure, and multilingual experience.

These findings are broadly consistent with Yonekawa's (1996) functional perspective, while extending it by demonstrating how such functions are realized in L2 interaction.

6.3 Implications for Japanese Language Education

The findings also have implications for Japanese language education. Although youth language is often excluded from formal instruction, the present analysis shows that it plays a role in everyday interaction among L2 speakers.

Rather than treating youth language as peripheral, language education may benefit from acknowledging its functions. Explicit attention to features such as hedging and stance expression may support the development of learners' interactional competence.

6.4 Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted. The dataset is relatively small and limited to dyadic conversations, and the study does not include direct comparison with native-speaker interaction. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. They also indicate the need for further empirical investigation in more diverse interactional settings.

Future research could expand the dataset and incorporate comparative analyses with native-speaker conversations. Further investigation of learners' language attitudes, for example through questionnaire-based methods, would also contribute to a deeper understanding of youth-language use in L2 contexts.

7. Conclusion

This study shows that youth language is actively employed in Japanese-language conversations among international students who are L2 speakers of Japanese, and that such usage fulfills important communicative functions. By integrating conversation analysis with post-

conversation interviews, the study provides evidence that youth-language-like expressions function as shared interactional resources even in L2-only settings.

The findings contribute to research that views L2 interaction not as a deficient form of native-speaker communication, but as a legitimate site of linguistic practice. In this context, youth language emerges as a flexible resource that supports interactional alignment, stance expression, and conversational coherence.

Although this study does not propose specific pedagogical interventions, the results suggest that youth-language-like expressions constitute an important pragmatic resource in L2 interaction. Future research may explore how such resources can be incorporated into discussions of Japanese language education.

Overall, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of youth language and L2 interaction, and provide a basis for further research in sociolinguistics and Japanese language education.

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