

From Manipulative Masterminds to Flirtatious Fools: An Examination of Male Sweet Voice Archetypes in Anime

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Abstract: In Japanese animation (anime), characters make use of many linguistic features, such as grammatical patterns, vocabulary, and vocal quality, to index specific character traits or archetypes. This includes both “role language”, associated with membership in social groups, and “character language”, associated with more abstract traits such as personality. This paper aims to expand upon the description of the archetypes conveyed through a traditionally feminine vocal quality called “sweet voice” and discusses how the use of this style in anime has broadened to encompass more masculine characters and archetypes as well. While women using sweet voice tend to be considered mature and genuine, interpretation of male sweet voice can range from gentlemanly, to morally questionable and manipulative, to something closer to flirtatious comic relief. Male sweet voice characters, similar to their female counterparts, have certain patterns in their word choice and grammatical speaking styles, although these stylistic patterns are less universal for male characters. Not only are the male sweet voice archetypes in anime different from those of female sweet voice characters, but these male characters are also able to freely swap styles, in vocal quality, vocabulary and grammar, where female characters cannot. Furthermore, the use of female sweet voice patterns by male voice actors can be used specifically to code characters as transgender women, something not possible with female sweet voice. These differences demonstrate that male sweet voice is not just female sweet voice overlaid onto male characters, but rather a specific evolution of the female styles specific to male characters.

Keywords: Linguistics, Sweet Voice, Voice Acting, Anime, Gender

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Introduction

People can frequently make judgements about others based on the characteristics of their voices. While the stereotypes that people connect to different kinds of voices may not always be accurate in reality, they are used in media to guide people towards a particular perception of a character, simply by changing how they speak. For example, “Silencing Nonstandard Speakers: A Content Analysis of Accent Portrayals on American Primetime Television” by Dragojevic et al. discusses how media from the United States will often portray characters who speak with a nonstandard American English dialect as less intelligent than both standard American English and foreign Anglophone speakers,¹ as well as less physically attractive than speakers of any other dialect.² This sort of media portrayal can play a role in cementing those stereotypes, especially among consumers who have little real, non-media exposure to the minority group, and can have a noticeable social effect on the groups that use those dialects in real life.³

Just as in English, Japanese media has many linguistic tools it uses to craft fictional characters. The use of specific kinds of language to convey information about characters is extremely prevalent in Japanese media, particularly anime. While the concept and term for Japanese role language (“yakuwarigo”) were first introduced as referring to a set of linguistic features that are associated with particular character archetypes, a later work more specifically splits it into two separate categories: “role language” and “character speech.” In Japanese, the term “yakuwarigo” more generally refers to a type of role-based language that is used in fictional settings, like anime and manga, to indicate various traits of characters, such as age, gender, or class.⁴ In the aforementioned split framework, “role language” refers to linguistic features associated

specifically with social groups and stereotypes and must be broadly culturally recognizable. On the other hand, “character language” refers to linguistic features used more for expressing personality traits than social or cultural group membership.⁵ For a more concrete example of the difference between the two, the character Hattori Heiji, from the anime *Case Closed* (1996-ongoing, *Meitantei Conan*) is from Osaka, part of the cultural group that would typically use Osaka dialect. He also displays personality stereotypes associated with the region, so this usage would be considered “role language.” In contrast, the protagonist of the movie *Like Father, Like Son* (2013, *Soshite chichi ni naru*) is not from Osaka, but an approximation of Osaka dialect is intentionally used to draw a contrast between his parenting style and that of another father in the film.⁶ This usage thus falls under “character language” instead. What this paper discusses as yakuwarigo would primarily be considered character language in this updated framework, as it is used to convey personality traits rather than any type of social membership.

While role and character language usage in media often reflects and reinforces real life stereotypes and ideologies, that is true even of anime protagonists’ intentionally unmarked speech. For example, the choice between two different first-person pronouns, “ore” and “boku,” for the male protagonists of shōnen animeⁱ has been shown to be affected by the shifting of ideal Japanese masculinity brought about by the country’s economic development.⁷ Thus, even the most standard, unmarked form of a language can reflect dominant linguistic ideologies of the time period in which it was used.

ⁱ Shows aimed towards an audience of young boys

This manipulation of how characters speak to fit recognizable archetypes is not limited only to word choice and speech style but also vocal quality. For example, when it comes to Japanese people's perception of heroic or villainous characters in their media, vocal quality factors such as the position of the larynx while speaking or the presence of breathy voice can influence the types of characteristics people will assign to characters.⁸ One especially interesting concept in a similar vein to this is "sweet voice," a term coined by Rebecca Starr, and is described as a feminine vocal style in anime.⁹

Characters who use this sweet voice style are often female and fall into an established archetype of relatively older supporting women in traditionally feminine roles.¹⁰ Therefore, most of the discourse around this vocal style is centered around women characters in anime. Starr addresses the male version of sweet voice briefly towards the end, where she primarily focuses on one character, Yagami Light,ⁱⁱ from the show *Death Note* (2006), who uses sweet voice, and discusses how the sweet voice's connections to a performance of femininity help shape the audience's perception of Light's character. Specifically, she brings up three main effects that the sweet voice has. Firstly, the relative rarity of sweet voice in male characters causes people to immediately feel as though something is amiss with Light. Secondly, the mismatch between his feminine vocal style and masculine presentation may serve to code him as gay in some manner. Finally, the connection to ideas of beauty and perfection that the sweet voice has in female characters is carried over to Light. Thus, the use of sweet voice can make his character feel somewhat fake or off to the audience.¹¹

ⁱⁱ Voice actor: Miyano Mamoru

Starr's discussion of male sweet voice is still very closely tied into the idea of this voice as an exclusively female style. In other words, the male sweet voice here is not able to stand on its own; the analysis of how it conveys character information to the audience is based on either the pre-existing notions of what female sweet voice conveys, or the juxtaposition and novelty of a female vocal style being used by an otherwise male-presenting character. This is productive in the context of Starr's analysis being the intersection of sweet voice and Japanese ideologies of femininity. However, an alternate lens through which to view male sweet voice is as a vocal phenomenon that is related to, yet separate from, the female sweet voice. In this paper, I explore male sweet voice and propose that while it may have started out as a tool to code characters as inhuman, gender non-conforming, or gay through their unconventional vocal ties to femininity, the male sweet voice has come to index distinct character archetypes or traits that are not directly connected to the feminine qualities historically represented by sweet voice.

1. Methodology and Data

The dataset consists of twelve characters from anime that first released anywhere from 1995 to 2021. As sweet voice is a Japanese vocal style, performances from English dubbed versions of shows are not being examined here. All the characters are male and voiced by men, with the exception of Sohma Yuki from the 2001 version of *Fruits Basket*, who was voiced by a woman, something which will be addressed later on. Some actors, such as the aforementioned Miyano Mamoru, frequently use male sweet voice, but efforts were made to ensure a balanced list of actors utilizing the style. The included characters are chosen from fan discourse, looking at articles about voice actors,¹² as well

as looking through character role compilations on YouTube.¹³ A couple characters, those being the characters from *Case Closed* as well as *Monthly Girl's Nozaki-kun's* Mikoshiba Mikoto, were also chosen due to the author's background knowledge, having heard their voices in anime before beginning this project.

As this paper is not focused on the actual phonetic realization of the male sweet voice, but rather the patterns of its use in media, the choice of characters as users of sweet voice is based off of the perceptual “sweetness” of their voice. This was judged using the standards Starr listed in the perceptual qualities of sweet voice section of her paper, such as light timbre and tense resonance.¹⁴ According to Starr's analysis, sweet voices sound high despite not being abnormally high in pitch and have a “smiling” quality to it.¹⁵ Additionally, as Yagami Light (*Death Note*) was referenced by Starr as a textbook example of male sweet voice, other characters' voice clips were compared to those of Light from the first episode of *Death Note* to serve as a baseline.

Vocal performances were analyzed from the best source accessible for each series: official streams or video sharing websites. For the latter option, both Youtube and the Japanese site Niconico Douga were used. Following Teshigawara's example in *Voices in Japanese Animation: A Phonetic Study of Vocal Stereotypes of Heroes and Villains in Japanese Culture*, self-directed utterancesⁱⁱⁱ were included as samples, due to the fact that such utterances in media are there for the benefit of the audience and therefore not truly self-directed.¹⁶ In some cases, a compilation of every qualifying line said by a character was recorded. In other cases, especially when the character is the protagonist

ⁱⁱⁱ Dialogue of characters speaking to themselves

such as *Death Note*'s Yagami Light, a smaller sampling from the start, middle, and end of the show were examined to get a sense of general patterns.

After examining the shows and selected clips, the thirteen characters were split into two different types of sweet voice usage. The first category, which this paper will call “classic” sweet voice style, includes characters who consistently use sweet voice as their natural vocal style. The second category, “variable” sweet voice style, includes characters who use both sweet voice and non-sweet voice, with their sweet voice being of an affected style of speech.

The characters are then listed below and sorted into their sweet voice style categories, along with their voice actor, anime, and release year. Note that for characters who did not appear in the show starting from the first episode, the release year will be the year in which the first episode they appeared in came out rather than the release year of the show as a whole.

Table 1. Classic Sweet Voice Characters

Character	Voice Actor	Anime	Release Year
Nagisa Kaworu	Ishida Akira	<i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i>	1996
Hakuba Saguru	Ishida Akira Miyano Mamoru	<i>Case Closed</i> <i>Magic Kaito 1412</i>	2001 2010
Sohma Yuki	Hisakawa Aya Shimazaki Nobunaga	<i>Fruits Basket</i>	2001 2019
Yagami Light	Miyano Mamoru	<i>Death Note</i>	2006
Akise Aru	Ishida Akira	<i>Future Diary</i>	2011
Akabane Karma	Okamoto Nobuhiko	<i>Assassination Classroom</i>	2015

Table 2. Variable Sweet Voice Characters

Character	Voice Actor	Source	Release Year
Kuroba Kaito/Kaitō KID	Yamaguchi Kappei	<i>Case Closed</i> <i>Magic Kaito 1412</i>	1997 2010
Lelouch Lamperouge	Fukuyama Jun	<i>Code Geass</i>	2006
Suoh Tamaki	Miyano Mamoru	<i>Ouran High School Host Club</i>	2006
Mikoshiba Mikoto	Okamoto Nobuhiko	<i>Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun</i>	2014
Akechi Goro	Hoshi Sōichirō	<i>Persona 5 The Animation</i>	2018
Minamoto Teru	Uchida Yūma	<i>Toilet-bound Hanako-kun</i>	2020

2. General Timeline and Early Instances of Male Sweet Voice

As the point of this paper is to argue that the male sweet voice has diverged to some degree from the female sweet voice regarding both usage patterns and types of traits they index, it would be useful to look at the characters chronologically. The chronological order of characters is shown in the chart below, along with their classification. The *Magic Kaito 1412* versions of both Kuroba Kaito and Hakuba Saguru are left off this chart, as their vocal styles do not significantly change from their original debuts in *Case Closed*. In other words, any analysis of these two in one show can also be applied to the other.

Table 3. Characters in chronological order

Character	Classification	Release Year
Nagisa Kaworu	classic	1996
Kuroba Kaito/Kaitō KID (CC)	variable	1997
Hakuba Saguru (CC)	classic	2001
Sohma Yuki (original)	classic	2001
Yagami Light	classic/variable	2006
Lelouch Lamperouge	variable	2006
Suoh Tamaki	variable	2006

Akise Aru	classic	2011
Mikoshiha Mikoto	variable	2014
Akabane Karma	classic	2015
Akechi Goro	variable	2018
Sohma Yuki (remake)	classic	2019
Minamoto Teru	variable	2020

While it is hard to say for certain whether or not he was the first male character to utilize this consistent sweet voice style, Nagisa Kaworu (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*) is the earliest example that was found for this dataset. If it is assumed, as Starr seems to suggest, that female sweet voice is the default, with male sweet voice originally as an uncommon variation on that, then the early use of male sweet voice would naturally have connotations of femininity. As Starr discussed in her analysis of Yagami Light, this connection to femininity can shift to imply homosexuality for male characters. Kaworu is both inhuman and canonically gay, so Starr's argument that the use of male sweet voice indicates something is unnatural about a character and implies a queer sexuality through the vocal proximity to femininity holds true here.

Interestingly, the first example from this set of a character variably using sweet voice comes the year afterwards, from episode 76 of *Case Closed*,¹⁷ in the form of the Arsène Lupin-esque phantom thief Kaitō Kid/KID, the alter ego of high schooler Kaito Kuroba. KID's sweet voice is not used consistently like Kaworu's is, but rather indexes his position as both a respectable gentleman thief and as the host of his magic show themed heists. According to Starr, female sweet voice characters are typically ladylike, mature, refined, and in roles of traditional female authority. It is possible that there is overlap between those ideas of maturity and refinement and KID's strategic use of male sweet voice here. When Kaito wants to portray himself as the professional, capable, and

chivalrous thief Kaitō Kid, he uses sweet voice, but when he's not filling that role, he has a pretty typical young male anime protagonist voice. This vocal code-switching is even more pronounced in the 2010 show *Magic Kaito 1412*, where Kaito/KID is the protagonist. This is likely due to *Magic Kaito 1412* showing him in more contexts than *Case Closed*, where he was merely a minor antagonist. By showing Kaito outside of his role as a phantom thief, we are able to see more of his style shifting between sweet and non-sweet voice in his day-to-day life.

As another example from early *Case Closed*,¹⁸ the Japanese-British genius teen detective Hakuba Saguru represents a classic sweet voice character. His use of sweet voice may be in part to emphasize his foreignness or strangeness, similar to Kaworu. However, while his character is indeed foreign to a degree and certainly has some odd quirks, that is unlikely to be the primary reason sweet voice is employed here. It is more likely that sweet voice here is used for a similar reason as KID's: to emphasize Hakuba's "proper", mature, and collected character traits. Unlike KID, however, Hakuba speaks with sweet voice consistently, rather than it being an affectation. This vocal quality is carried over into his *Magic Kaito 1412* portrayal as well.

For the final early male sweet voice character, there is Sohma Yuki from the original 2001 version of the anime *Fruits Basket*. Yuki was originally voiced by a woman, Hisakawa Aya,¹⁹ which is not unusual for younger or more feminine male characters in anime. What is more interesting is that Hisakawa seems to be using sweet voice in her performance, rather than the more typical young boy tone of voice that many women who voice male characters employ. Although he is supposed to be very feminine, being voiced by a woman performing a stereotypically female vocal style

makes his character come off as particularly dissonant and contributes to the idea that there is something amiss with him even beyond his feminine appearance. In Yuki's case, that implied "something" is his supernatural nature. In the 2019 remake, Yuki is instead voiced by a man,²⁰ who still uses sweet voice. It is possible that this shift to using a male voice actor in the more recent version indicates that the male sweet voice is a more recognizable phenomenon, and that it on its own can serve as an indication of Yuki's unnaturalness, rather than having to rely on using drastic gender non-conformity in his vocal style to accomplish this.

This analysis of sweet voice in the four earliest examples shows how they tended to be strongly linked to femininity either directly, through things such as looks or sexuality, or indirectly, through being in a mature, polite, responsible role more typically expected of female characters than young male ones. Additionally, three of these four early examples are classic sweet voice characters, which may suggest that the use of variable male sweet voice as a linguistic tool to convey character to the audience was much more limited in the earlier years of male sweet voice. If we assume that this was an era where male sweet voice had yet to properly become its own style and was instead still reliant on audience perceptions of the female sweet voice to index character traits, then this limited use of variable sweet voice makes perfect sense. As Starr noted, it is rare that female sweet voice is presented as an affected rather than natural style of speech. Thus, these early examples of male sweet voice merely seem to be following that pattern.

This changes if we look at the classic and variable sweet voice character numbers across all examples examined here. There are six classic characters and six variable

characters, a far more balanced number than found in Starr's female sweet voice collection. The fact that male sweet voice is being used in that variable manner rather commonly while the same cannot be said of the female sweet voice already serves to draw a clear line between the two. One cannot claim that the male sweet voice is just the female sweet voice with a male resonance, as the ways and strategies in which the two are employed differ, helping to cement the male sweet voice as its own phenomenon.

3. The Shift Towards Deception

While the connection to femininity and unusually feminine roles is the dominant association driving the perception of the early instances of male sweet voice in particular, there appears to be a subtle shift potentially starting in the mid to late 2000s towards a different sort of archetype being represented with the use of sweet voice. This paper proposes that this character archetype is presented as clever, mildly unhinged, and manipulative. This manipulator archetype appears to be evenly split between classic and variable types. The difference between the two types is interesting in that there are two different impressions of sweet voice being utilized.

Table 4. Manipulator Archetype Characters

Character	Classification	Release Year
Yagami Light	classic	2006
Lelouch Lamperouge	variable	2006
Akise Aru	classic	2011
Akabane Karma	classic	2015
Akechi Goro	variable	2018
Minamoto Teru	variable	2020

The primary difference between classic and variable manipulator characters is that while classic manipulator characters tend not to be hiding their nature, variable ones feel the need to hide their manipulative traits, resulting in sweet voice being used as a component of their social mask. Sweet voice for these characters is used as a front, while their internal or “true” voice is noticeably less sweet. The character, in-universe, is drawing upon the idea of sweet voice as something that marks a person as well-mannered, mature, and genuine due to the unfalsifiable nature of the more common female sweet voice. On a meta level, however, this is subverted as the audience is shown that this supposedly unfalsifiable voice of innocence is in fact a farce, which then contextualizes the characters’ use of sweet voice as something inherently fake and deceitful.

Code Geass’s Lelouch Lamperouge and *Persona 5 The Animation*’s Akechi Goro both use sweet voice to hide criminal activity behind the façade of a good, proper, law-abiding high school student. Lelouch actively plots a rebellion to overthrow the occupying Holy Britannian Empire and oust them from Japan, while Akechi acts as an assassin for a corrupt politician. Lelouch primarily uses sweet voice while in a school setting with classmates,²¹ using mostly non-sweet voice in his thoughts²² and while acting in his capacity as a leader of the rebellion.²³ Akechi, on the other hand, seems to only drop his sweet voice once he turns on the protagonist.²⁴ This difference can likely be attributed to the fact that Lelouch is the viewpoint character for the audience, while Akechi is not.

Toilet-bound Hanako-kun’s Minamoto Teru is the other manipulator character on this list who appears to use variable sweet voice. He is considered extremely

handsome, kind, and popular at his school, sometimes referred to as the school's prince. While Teru does not reach the same level of highly questionable morals as the literal serial killers discussed above, he is shown to have a very black and white view on the lives of supernatural beings. In contrast to how the show itself humanizes the ghost characters, Teru considers them all to be inherently evil monsters that deserve to be killed. His sweet voice is generally used for lines reflecting his public-facing princely image,²⁵ while non-sweet voice tends to be used for lines reflecting his stance on the supernatural.²⁶

On the other hand, classic manipulator characters such as Akise Aru (*Future Diary*) and Akabane Karma (*Assassination Classroom*) do not appear to be hiding their true nature. Both are extremely intelligent, capable, and have unique ways of thinking and solving problems. Karma leans heavily towards the psychotic side with how skilled he is at fighting and assassination strategies, plus his unbridled excitement at being tasked with killing his teacher. Akise is an aspiring detective, and more conventionally normal. While he is more than willing to lie, commit crimes, and use others to achieve his goals, he also comes across as fairly open and shameless about it. It is also worth noting that Akise is canonically in love with the show's protagonist, another boy,²⁷ thus continuing the trend that Starr discussed of male sweet voice being used as a tool for indexing a character's homosexuality.

Both of the characters mentioned in the previous paragraph are explicitly noted by the characters around them as strange,^{28, 29} showing that they make no attempt to hide the less socially acceptable parts of their personalities, unlike what is seen with the variable sweet voice characters, who are more often seen as perfect to those around

them. As such, the impressions of sweet voice with these types of characters are more straightforward, since they lack the layer of deception inherent to their variable counterparts.

Characters around a variable character will perceive the sweet voice as indicative of things such as maturity and politeness, while those around a classic character will more often perceive the sweet voice as indicative of things such as strangeness and disregard for social conventions. As such, it appears that the impression that sweet voice gives off in-universe is fluid, allowing the use of this vocal quality to be more freely used as a tool to convey information to the audience without being limited to one particular interpretation.

The semantic shift discussed in this section is not a very large leap from the sweet voice's roots in femininity, as Starr noted that some of the qualities originally indexed through the use of sweet voice by male characters is unnaturalness, foreignness, or a sense that something is off. Here, this sense of wrongness is reinterpreted—where in older characters such as Nagisa Kaworu (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*) and Sohma Yuki (*Fruits Basket*), it appears to emphasize the presence of literal inhuman qualities, in more recent characters, it seems to distance them from other people in a more social sense. In other words, these characters are typically not literally inhuman or alien, but they often have a significant disconnect from people as a whole. This could be an afterimage of the connotations of literal inhumanness that the male sweet voice historically conveyed. This can be something as dramatic as Yagami Light's (*Death Note*) god complex and willingness to personally act as judge, jury, and executioner for

the world, or as relatively normal like Akabane Karma (*Assassination Classroom*) distancing himself from others after a betrayal.

4. Parody Use: Dramatic Comedic Relief

This section will be addressing a pattern that emerges when we look at sweet voice used in parody anime, specifically of shōjo.^{iv} The characters discussed in this section are able to, on a situational basis, be confident and shamelessly charismatic, but outside of that tend to be caring, easily shaken, and crave attention. In other words, they put all their points into charisma and absolutely none into constitution. They are often dramatic and can come across as naïve or childish regardless of their actual intelligence. The two examples listed here both use the variable rather than classic form of sweet voice.

Table 5. Dramatic Comic Relief Characters

Character	Classification	Release Year
Suoh Tamaki	variable	2006
Mikoshiha Mikoto	variable	2014

Suoh Tamaki (*Ouran High School Host Club*) and Mikoshiha Mikoto (*Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun*) are generally perceived by their peers as being popular, charismatic flirts and, while in the midst of said shameless flirting, they both slip into a sweet voice register.^{30, 31} Both characters are sensitive to the opinions of and crave the attention and approval of those around them. This is shown through things like Tamaki's incessant need for his host club to see themselves as a family with himself as the father figure and

^{iv} Anime marketed toward young girls

Mikoto's need for one of his clubmates to acknowledge him as her senpai, or more experienced member. In these sorts of everyday, less flirty situations characters do not tend to use sweet voices.^{32, 33}

If the manipulator archetype evolved from the use of sweet voice by inhuman or alien characters, this dramatic idiot archetype has stronger connections to the sort of performative sweet voice that Kaitō KID (*Case Closed*; *Magic Kaito 1412*) employs. While it seems that Tamaki at least aligns quite well with that idea of sweet voice being used to convey a more gentlemanly, mature persona, Mikoto's use conveys something more of a playboy image. Considering the two characters are from media with an eight-year gap, the latter may be a slight expansion of how more flirtatious gentlemanly characters like Tamaki use variable sweet voice.

5. Patterns in Yakuwarigo Usage

5.1. Overview

As mentioned earlier, the term “yakuwarigo” refers to patterns of language primarily used in media in order to indicate to the audience various character traits such as age, gender, or class.³⁴ Starr writes that female sweet voice is very closely connected to the use of hyper-feminine styles of yakuwarigo and typically indicates characters fit into mature and ladylike female archetypes.³⁵ These associations are typically fairly inseparable. That is, if a character uses female sweet voice, they can be reliably assumed to also use feminine yakuwarigo. However, Starr also notes that this relationship is one-way, as the use of feminine yakuwarigo does not always mean a character will also have a sweet voice.

Unlike the female sweet voice, there does not appear to be any one particular style of speech associated with male sweet voice. From the characters observed, male sweet voice characters seem to have more flexibility in their speaking styles than female ones. There is a broad range of styles used across the group, even when keeping in mind that a character's way of speaking may change contextually. Some characters, such as Kaitō KID (*Case Closed; Magic Kaito 1412*) tend to speak in keigo, or honorific language. Others, the two in this set being Akabane Karma (*Assassination Classroom*) and Mikoshiba Mikoto (*Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun*), are on the opposite end of the formality spectrum. They both use rougher or more masculine forms of speech alongside sweet voice, some examples of which are shown below with samples of Akabane Karma's speech taken from the third episode of *Assassination Classroom*.³⁶

Table 6. Samples of the character Akabane Karma's dialogue

kudaran ee koto kangaeta "I had a silly idea"	kaerou ze "Let's head home"	ore "I"
kaeri meshi kutte kou yo "We'll eat on the way home"	oshi ete yaru yo "I'll show/teach you"	anta "you"

While some of the above ("ore," "anta") are generally rough, impolite speech, and are thus frequently considered to be appropriate speech styles for men, some of these can be approached as distinct elements of yakuwarigo. Japanese has a rich collection of first and second person pronouns. The primary ones relevant to these dialogue examples are the first-person "ore" and "boku," as well as the second person "anta" and "anata" pronouns. In contrast to "boku" having the impression of a softer, more educated form of masculinity, "ore" has more of an image of aggressive, hot-blooded masculinity.³⁷ In modern anime, the pronoun "ore" is frequently used by male protagonists, as the most

unmarked form of speech to convey modern-day ideals of masculinity.³⁸ While the second person “anata” is the most general of the second-person pronouns in Japanese and considered more polite than most others, “anta”, a modified and shortened version of it, is rougher and more familiar, typically being used to refer to others whom the speaker sees as equal or lower in status. It is generally used as part of a masculine speech style, for both younger and older male characters.³⁹

In addition to pronouns, Japanese uses variation in sentence final particles and copula as an important part of role language. In this particular case, “ze” is used. When used as yakuwarigo, this particle gives characters a somewhat affected impression, as if they’re trying to come across as cool. It is also a part of masculine speech and sounds more crude or vulgar than other particles with similar meanings.⁴⁰

Finally, there are elements of word choice that can be considered to have role language implications, with “kuu”^v being the relevant one here. This verb, meaning “to eat,” is a rough, impolite version of the typical Japanese verb “taberu.” As a part of role language, “kuu” is used overwhelmingly by male characters. There are a variety of different character archetypes that may use this, including, but not limited to, naive young boys, hardboiled lone wolves, rural characters speaking dialect, and supernatural beings.⁴¹ As such, the use of “kuu” alone cannot firmly pinpoint which sort of archetype a character is supposed to be representing and must be taken into consideration with the rest of the character’s speech characteristics.

As one of the defining characteristics of female sweet voice is the ubiquitous use of specific yakuwarigo, it is notable that there is no such universal speaking style for the

^v Conjugated in the example as the connecting form “kutte”

male sweet voice. The primary speaking style used by the characters looked at in this paper, which will be discussed in the following section, does not get close to how ubiquitous the use of feminine language is to female sweet voice characters.

5.2. Foreign Masculinity and The Yaa Speech Style

As the use of such rough language is relatively rare among male sweet voice characters, it is certainly not the most noticeable pattern that exists. In work on informal non-Japanese masculinity in Japanese media, Nakamura discusses the construction of a type of fictionalized speech that conveys a sort of casual and cool foreign masculinity.⁴² She calls this yaa style after its most distinctive feature: the use of the phrase “yaa” as a greeting. This style has overlap with unmarked varieties of casual masculine speech, such as them both using either first-person pronoun “ore” or “boku” with second-person pronouns “kimi” or “omae”, but some of the more distinctive features to the yaa style are shown below. This does not mean the below features cannot overlap with normal masculine styles, it is just less common.

Table 7. Characteristics of yaa speech style

yaa	sa	kai; dai
“hey” (greeting)	sentence final particle	interrogative particles

This sort of speech style is quite common among the sweet voice characters collected in this paper, as approximately half of them use it in some form or another, listed below. As a note, for the variable characters, the use of yaa style generally appears to be relatively contained to just when they are putting on a sweet voice and not as often used when that is dropped.

Table 8. Yaa style characters

Character	Classification	Source	Release Year
Nagisa Kaworu	classic	<i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i>	1996
Hakuba Saguru	classic	<i>Case Closed</i> <i>Magic Kaito 1412</i>	2001 2010
Lelouch Lamperouge	variable	<i>Code Geass</i>	2006
Akise Aru	classic	<i>Future Diary</i>	2011
Akechi Goro	variable	<i>Persona 5: The Animation</i>	2016
Minamoto Teru	variable	<i>Toilet-bound Hanako-kun</i>	2020

There are a couple of things to note regarding the characters' use of this style of speech. Firstly, despite Nakamura's paper describing how yaa style is used to index a particular type of foreign or non-Japanese masculinity, only three of these characters are not entirely Japanese: Nagisa Kaworu, not even human; Hakuba Saguru, half-British; and Lelouch Lamperouge, British royalty. Aside from these three, where their literal foreignness could well be a factor in their use of yaa style, the use of this marked foreign style by characters who are supposed to be regarded as Japanese may serve to emphasize those characters' more metaphorical foreignness already suggested by their use of sweet voice.

Following from that, these are all characters who would be most comfortably categorized as the manipulator archetype. Though admittedly Hakuba is something of an edge case. The main thing that sets Hakuba apart from the other two detectives is that they fall into a moral gray zone, as expected of manipulator characters, while he is a typical morally upstanding detective. This very specific type of detective character aside, the fact that neither of the shōjo examples use this yaa style of speaking seems potentially significant. Primarily because *Ouran High School Host Club's* Suoh Tamaki

is, similarly to Hakuba, portrayed as foreign, being half-French, and yet doesn't use yaa style. This also supports the idea introduced above that that yaa speech may be used with sweet voice to emphasize the characters' figurative rather than literal foreignness.

It is worth noting that Nakamura's study specifically looks at the use of yaa speech styles in English to Japanese translations, so the dynamics of yaa speech could very well be different when talking about characters in works that are written in Japanese originally.

5.3. Indexing Transgender Identities

While the vast majority of characters who use male sweet voice do also identify as men or boys, there are various instances of male sweet voice being used as a tool to convey a transgender identity, in this case meaning specifically transgender women and girls. As the main phonetic distinction this paper makes between female and male sweet voice is the resonance or timbre that gives listeners hints to the probable gender of the speaker, these characters will be considered to be using male sweet voice despite being women and girls. That said, the way that they use sweet voice often seems to line up better with that of female sweet voice. Specifically, they tend to use it as their natural speaking voice, as well as frequently make use of hyper-feminine yakuwarigo. Due to the rather complicated position these characters are in, being female characters who use male sweet voice in a feminine manner, the example characters for this phenomenon are excluded from the other portions of the paper, and are only discussed here, listed below.

Table 9. Transgender Women Characters

Character	Voice Actor	Source	Release Year
Kanamori	Kishio Daisuke	<i>Heaven's Design Team</i>	2021
Nagi Arisuin ('Alice')	Asanuma Shintarou	<i>Chivalry of a Failed Knight</i>	2015

As mentioned earlier, these characters use sweet voice in a way which patterns after the female usage (consistent sweet voice quality across contexts, highly feminine speaking style) rather than what this paper considers the male usage.^{vi} This presents the characters as inherently feminine in the same nigh unfalsifiable way that female characters who use sweet voice are, as discussed in an earlier section. This use of male sweet voice can be distinguished primarily by its use with feminine yakuwarigo, as it is quite rare to find male-identifying characters who use both of these linguistic tools at the same time in their speech. Johann, from the 2021 anime *The Case Study of Vanitas*,^{vii} is a character who does fit those particular criteria, but he is further set apart from the transgender characters by the fact that he uses variable sweet voice. He mostly speaks with male sweet voice^{viii} and feminine language but will drop the sweet voice in moments where he turns serious. Interestingly, he continues to use feminine language during those moments. One notable example being his line shown below.

watashi no kazoku ni te wo dashitara, korosu **wa yo**
 “If you lay a hand on my family, I’ll kill you”⁴³

In the anime, he delivers this line without sweet voice, yet still uses that stereotypically feminine “wa yo” sentence final particle combination. Interesting though

^{vi} potentially variable sweet voice quality, neutral to masculine speaking style

^{vii} Voice actor: Yusa Kōji

^{viii} Sweet voice quality produced by a male voice actor

this is, characters like Johann seem to be the exception to the tendency of male sweet voice in combination with feminine language to index a transgender identity.

This transgender usage also indicates how the male sweet voice is distinct from the female sweet voice. Specifically, that it is doing something here that the female sweet voice cannot, displaying again how the archetypes associated with male sweet voice have diverged.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, while the male sweet voice may have started out as simply a gender-swapped version of the female sweet voice use to connect male characters to various aspects of femininity, its ability to index character traits has since extended beyond that. The most notable being a semantic shift towards marking characters as a very particular type of morally gray, clever, and manipulative character. In addition to that, however, there are also instances of it being used in types of parody to index a type of dramatic and flirtatious performance by characters. The different usage patterns of male sweet voice as compared to female sweet voice also serve to support the argument that the former is its own distinct phenomenon. For example, female sweet voice is rarely used in a situational manner and is inextricably linked with the use of hyper-feminine forms of *yakuwarigo*, but male sweet voice is frequently used variably and has a much broader range of acceptable speaking styles available to use. Yaa style is one of the more frequently occurring patterns.

The analysis has brought up aspects of male characters' use of sweet voice that could be examined more in the future. One in particular is patterns of male sweet voice

in *anime* aimed towards an audience of young girls,^{ix} as most of the examples come from shows generally aimed towards a male audience.^x Would there be a difference in how male sweet voice characters are presented in female-directed versus male-directed media, and if so, could that show a difference in how gender non-conformity in men is perceived by the target audiences? Another future direction for research would be the use of yaa style as used in native, rather than translated, Japanese media, which could potentially shed some light on the purpose of the style when used by sweet voice male characters. Additionally, do some non-personality characteristics predispose a character to be likely use sweet voice? For example, a quarter of the characters listed are detectives, so are detective characters more likely to utilize this style? Or is it less direct, that detective characters are more likely to have personality traits that are indexed by this style?

Male sweet voice started out being used to characterize men by their proximity to “feminine” characteristics, whether that be politeness, attraction to men, androgyny, or other such traits. Part of the point of using the style was likely to make the characters stand out due to how odd it would be to see a male character so directly linked to femininity. However, nowadays there is no shortage of male characters who use some form of sweet voice, with some voice actors, such as Akira Ishida and Mamoru Miyano, even getting a reputation for specializing in the style. Overall, charting the way that male sweet voice has evolved over time may be able to shed some light on the development of acceptable portrayals of masculinity outside of the constraints of both hegemonic masculinity and comparisons to traditional femininity.

^{ix} shōjo

^x shōnen or seinen

- ¹ Dragojevic, Marko, Dana Mastro, Howard Giles, and Alexander Sink. “Silencing Nonstandard Speakers: A Content Analysis of Accent Portrayals on American Primetime Television.” *Language in Society* 45, no. 1 (2016): 59–85. doi:10.1017/S0047404515000743.
- ² Dragojevic et al.
- ³ Dragojevic et al.
- ⁴ Kinsui, Satoshi & YAMAKIDO, Hiroko. (2015). Role Language and Character Language. *Acta Linguistica Asiatica*. 5. 29. 10.4312/ala.5.2.29-42.
- ⁵ Kinsui, Satoshi & YAMAKIDO, Hiroko.
- ⁶ King, Sara, Yi Ren, Kaori Idemaru, and Cindi Sturtzsreetharan. “Sounding like a Father: The Influence of Regional Dialect on Perceptions of Masculinity and Fatherhood.” *Language in Society* 51, no. 2 (2022): 285–308. doi:10.1017/S0047404520000925
- ⁷ Dahlberg-Dodd, Hannah E. “Talking like a Shōnen Hero: Reframing masculinity in post-bubble era Japan through the lens of boku and ore.” (2016).
- ⁸ Teshigawara, Mihoko. “Voices in Japanese Animation: A Phonetic Study of Vocal Stereotypes of Heroes and Villains in Japanese Culture,” (2003.)
- ⁹ Starr, Rebecca L. “Sweet voice: The role of voice quality in a Japanese feminine style.” *Language in Society* 44 (2015): 1 - 34.
- ¹⁰ Starr, Rebecca L.
- ¹¹ Starr, Rebecca L.
- ¹² Takahashi Katsunori. “甘い声”の声優さんといえど？【男性編】木村良平、神谷浩史、福山潤...多彩な甘々ボイス集結♪ <21 年版> [‘Who Is the Voice Actor with the Sweetest Voice? [Male Edition] Ryohei Kimura, Hiroshi Kamiya, Jun Fukuyama... A Collection of Sweet Voices ♪ <21st Edition>’].” Web log. Cho Animedia, March 10, 2021. <https://cho-animedia.jp/article/2021/03/10/23423.html>.
- ¹³ SAME VOICE. “Light Yagami Japanese Voice Actor In Anime Roles [Mamoru Miyano] (Death Note, Steins Gate).” YouTube video, 2:10. May 23, 2021. <https://youtu.be/IECXoUa2KL0>.
- ¹⁴ Starr, Rebecca L.
- ¹⁵ Starr, Rebecca L.
- ¹⁶ Teshigawara
- ¹⁷ Kodama, Kenji, dir. *Case Closed*. Episode 76, “Conan vs Kaitou Kid.” (Nippon Television Network System, 1997).
- ¹⁸ Kodama, Kenji, dir. *Case Closed*. Episode 219, “The Gathering of the Detectives! Shinichi Kudo vs. Kaitou Kid.” (Nippon Television Network System, 2001).
- ¹⁹ Daichi, Akitaro, dir. *Fruits Basket*. (TV Tokyo, 2001.)
- ²⁰ Ibata, Yoshihide, dir. *Fruits Basket*. (TV Tokyo, 2019.)
- ²¹ Taniguchi, Goro. *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion*. Season 1, Episode 3, “The False Classmate.” (Japan News Network, October 6, 2006.) 6:03-6:08.
- ²² Taniguchi, Goro. *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion*. Season 1, Episode 3, “The False Classmate.” 6:12-6:16.
- ²³ Taniguchi, Goro. *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion*. Season 1, Episode 4, “His Name is Zero.” 10:01-10:12.
- ²⁴ Ishihama, Masashi, dir. *Persona 5: The Animation*. Season 1, Episode 26, “I won’t let it end here.” (Tokyo MX, April 8, 2018.) 21:09-21:15.
- ²⁵ Ando, Masaomi, dir. *Toilet-Bound Hanako-Kun*. Season 1, Episode 5, “Apparition 5: The Confession Tree.” (Japan News Network, January 10, 2020.) 16:21-16:25.
- ²⁶ Ando, Masaomi, dir. *Toilet-Bound Hanako-Kun*. Season 1, Episode 5, “Apparition 5: The Confession Tree.” 17:47-17:59.
- ²⁷ Hosoda, Naoto, dir. *Future Diary*. Season 1, Episode 9, “Blocking Calls.” (Chiba TV, 2011.)
- ²⁸ Hosoda, Naoto, dir. *Future Diary*. Season 1, Episode 8, “New Model.”
- ²⁹ Kishi, Seiji, dir. *Assassination Classroom*. Season 1, Episode 3, “Karma Time.” (Fuji Network System, January 9, 2015.)
- ³⁰ Igarashi, Takuya, dir. *Ouran High School Host Club*. Season 1, Episode 1, “Starting Today, You Are a Host!” (Nippon TV, April 5, 2006.) 4:18-4:39.

³¹ Yamazaki, Mitsue, dir. *Monthly Girls' Nozaki-Kun*. Season 1, Episode 2, "Say Hello to the New Heroine." (TV Tokyo, July 7, 2014.) 1:00-1:10.

³² Igarashi, Takuya, dir. *Ouran High School Host Club*. Season 1, Episode 1, "Starting Today, You Are a Host!" 16:51-16:57.

³³ Yamazaki, Mitsue, dir. *Monthly Girls' Nozaki-Kun*. Season 1, Episode 2, "Say Hello to the New Heroine." 1:00-1:10.

³⁴ Kinsui, Satoshi & YAMAKIDO, Hiroko.

³⁵ Starr, Rebecca L.

³⁶ Kishi, Seiji

³⁷ Dahlberg-Dodd, Hannah E.

³⁸ Dahlberg-Dodd, Hannah E.

³⁹ Kinsui, Satoshi. 役割語小辞典 (Abridged dictionary of Japanese role language). (Kenkyusha, 2014), p22-24

⁴⁰ Kinsui, Satoshi. 役割語小辞典 (Abridged dictionary of Japanese role language). p108-110

⁴¹ Kinsui, Satoshi. 役割語小辞典 (Abridged dictionary of Japanese role language). p74-75

⁴² Nakamura, Momoko. "The formation of a sociolinguistic style in translation: cool and informal non-Japanese masculinity." *Gender and Language* 14 (2020): 244-262.

⁴³ Itamura, Tomoyuki, dir. *The Case of Vanitas*. Season 1, Episode 14, "The Witch and the Young Man." (Tokyo MX, July 3, 2021.) 16:25-16:29.

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