

A Lexical-Pragmatic Approach to Japanese *Wakamono* *Kotoba* ‘Youth Language’ *yabai*

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Abstract

This study uncovers the morphosyntactic properties of *yabai* and its clipped forms. It aims to arrive at an understanding of how the forms and the meanings might be associated. A lexical-pragmatic-based analysis was carried out using Twitter and speech corpus data. The findings reveal the following picture of the lexeme: (a) when *yabai* undertakes an adjective role, modifying a noun, it is likely that a negative evaluation is invited. In this regard, *yabai* fulfils a lexical function. (b) The adverb use of *yabai* presents two variations: modifying a verb or modifying an i-adjective. At any rate, the adverb use describes the degree of an event or an object, leading to the assumption that *yabai* fulfils a grammatical function. (c) The predicate function presents the following diversities: the negative-denotation *yabai* and *yabee* are lexical items; the positive/neutral-denotation *yabai*, *yabee* and *yaba* are grammatical items. The clipped forms, i.e. *yaba*; *yabee* and *yabe* are limited to interjection use and adverb use, which are signs of complete grammaticalisation. A quantitative analysis via KH Coder suggests that *yabai*'s adverb function appears to be limited to women friendships, with parent-child relationship and vertical relationship being ruled out.

Keywords: Japanese, Youth language, Lexical pragmatics, Twitter, Speech corpus, *yabai*

1. Introduction

Language is constantly changing in meaning and in form (morphology). The extension of semantic meaning, and the derivation of parts of speech, are often tackled via: (a) a diachronic approach, treating the alternation as an outcome of grammaticalisation and lexicalisation (e.g. Traugott and Heine 1991, Givón 1971); or (b) a synchronic approach, addressing the shift from a cognitive semantic perspective. In this line of research, ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonymy’ are usually adopted to uncover the projection from the source domain to the targeted domain.

Japanese *wakamono kotoba* ‘youth language’ is a constantly altering linguistic phenomenon. It refers to phrases using words and expressions that are grammatically ill-formed but that are used and understood by young people. Extensive work has been devoted to this subject: see, for instance, the sociolinguistic approach, represented by Horiuchi (1989) and Hinoda (1998), or the psycholinguistic approach, represented by Ishihara et al. (2020). Theoretical accounts of *wakamono kotoba* do not appear to have been exhaustively set out, except for two case studies: (a) Seraku and Akiha (2019), who apply the notion ‘attenuation’ (Seeger and Treis, 2018) to address the innovations of Japanese *poi*; and (b) Seraku’s (2020) discussion of the properties of the Japanese nominalising suffix *-mi* in the framework of nominalisation proposed by Masayoshi Shibatani.

The present study is devoted to another case study: the Japanese i-adjective (Note 1) *yabai* (‘risky’). The study investigates its morphosyntactic properties and semantic meanings, based on a speech corpus and Twitter data. With this in place, it aims to arrive at an understanding of how forms and meanings are associated.

The point of departure for this study is the fact that *yabai* has changed a lot since earlier times. Originally, it was a noun, i.e. 厄場 *yaba* ‘prison’. During the Edo Period (1603–1868), the noun 厄場 morphed into a na-adjective and was written in kana ‘やば’. Since then, *yabana* has been registered as a na-adjective in all dictionaries. Below is an illustration from a *Kokkeibon*: *Tookaidochuu Hizakurige* (1802-1809).

(1) **Na-Adjective** (*yabana*)

Odore-ra yabana koto hatarakikusaruna

You.pl. risky things do-neg.imper.

‘You, do not do risky things!’

[*Tookaidochuu Hizakurige*: 1802–1809]

It was in the early Showa Period that the na-adjective *yabana* shifted into being an i-adjective and morphologically altered, becoming the form *yabai*. An illustration is provided in (2).

(2) **I-adjective** (*yabai*)

Watashi to aruku no wa yabai

Me com walk.adnml formal noun top bad

kara oyoshinasai

conj hon.stop.hon

‘It is bad to walk with me. Therefore, please stop.’

(Asakusa Kurenaidan (1929–1930))

It also ought to be noted that in the Early Showa Period, *yabai* conveyed only a negative reading. Until the Heisei Period (1989–2019) *yabai* was officially listed as an i-adjective in

dictionaries, conveying a positive sense and yielding new parts of speech (e.g. adverb, interjection). These syntactic and semantic variations are exemplified by (3)–(8).

(I) Adjective

The adjective *yabai* plays two roles: as a predicate (3) and modifying a noun (4).

(3) *Taroo no keekaku wa yabai.* (Predicate)

Taroo GEN plan TOP awful/marvellous

‘Taroo’s plan is awful/marvellous.’

(NINJAL-LWP)

(4) *Yabai koto wa nai desu yo* (Modifies a noun)

awful.ADNM thing TOP neg PRED EXCL

‘There are no awful things.’

(NINJAL-LWP)

Bear in mind that the predicate use of *yabai* may denote a positive meaning ‘marvellous’ or a negative meaning ‘bad’. The interpretation relies entirely on the context.

(II) Adverb-like

yabai also has an adverb function, modifying an i-adjective (5), a na-adjective (6), or a verb (7).

(5) **Adverb *yabai* modifies an i-adjective**

Kono baggu wa yabai takai.

Dem bag TOP very expensive

‘This bag is extremely expensive.’

In fact, the combination of two i-adjectives in finite form is ruled out in standard Japanese, but it occurs quite often.

(6) **Adverb *yabai* modifies a na-adjective**

Taroo wa suugaku ga yabai joozuda.

Taroo TOP math NOM very talented

‘Taroo is really very good at math.’

(7) ***Yabai* modifies verb**

Taroo no hon wa yabai ureteiru yo.

Taroo GEN book TOP very well sell INTER

‘Taroo’s book sells well.’

Another noticeable example is (8), where *yabai* behaves like an interjection.

(III). Interjection *yabai*

(8) *Yabai!* *denwa no henji wa wasureta.*

INTER phone call GEN response FOC forget-PAST

‘Uh-oh, I forgot to ring back’

The innovation further extends to a phonological change: the interjection *yabai* can be clipped into *やばっ/ヤバっ yaba*; *やべー/ヤべー yabee*; and *やべっ/ヤべっ yabe*.

A search in the NINJAL-LWP (National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics and Lago Language Institute) suggests that there are about 1,360 instances of *yabai*. The various parts of speech are distributed as follows:

Table 1. The distribution of *yabai*’s multiple parts of speech (accessed in 2020. Dec.)

<i>The combination of yabai + other parts of speech</i>	<i>Frequency (token)</i>
<i>adjective</i> (predicate)	674
<i>adverb</i> (<i>yabai</i> + verb)	5
<i>adverb</i> (<i>yabaku</i> + verb)	14
<i>adverb</i> (<i>yabai</i> + adjective)	17
<i>adverb</i> + <i>yabai</i>	150
<i>adjective</i> (modifying a noun)	464
<i>yabai</i> + suffix (<i>yabame</i> , <i>yabasoo</i> , <i>yabasa</i>)	22
<i>yabaki</i> + noun	1
Interjection	13

It was discovered that the most frequent role of *yabai* is the predicate function (674 tokens). The second largest number of tokens was attributed to *yabai* modifying a noun (464 tokens). The combination [adverb modifying *yabai*] also proved common, accounting for 150 tokens. 36 tokens are the adverb use and 13 tokens are the interjection use. Moreover, we noted the following additional results: [*yabai* + suffix (*yabame*, *yabasoo*, *yabasa*)] (22 tokens); [*yabaki* + noun] (one token).

At this stage, we can pause and draw a map of *yabai*’s shifts in morphosyntax and phonology.

(I). Morphosyntactic shift

Noun: *yaba* (Period: unknown)

↓

Na-adjective: *yana-na* (Edo Period)

↓

I-adjective: *yabai* (Showa Period)

↓

Noun form: *yabaki* (Heisei Period)

Adverb-like (modifies an adjective or a verb)

Interjection

(II) Phonological change: realised by clipping (*yaba*; *yabee* and *yabe*)

Figure 1. *Yabai*'s morphosyntactic and phonological shift

Among the various functions that *yabai* conveys, the adjective use, which modifies a noun, is likely to render a negative reading. This inspires us to ponder whether perhaps the syntactic category is linked with semantic meaning: such as that the adjective function is likely to convey a negative sense whilst the adverb function invites a positive reading. To this end, we carry out a lexical-pragmatic approach, examining the morphosyntactic properties and the evaluations that *yabai* denotes.

The database for this research consists of corpus data and posts from Japanese Twitter: the Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation (CEJC, provided by the National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics). NINJAL-LWP (provided by the National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics and the Lago Language Institute) is employed for the frequency investigation. It should be noted that there were 148 instances of *yabai* in the CEJC, and the Twitter data was accessed on 14 December 2020. Since the central goal of this paper resides in the innovated use of *yabai*, it is thus the very data of the predicate, interjection and adverb use that will be delved into in depth.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 1 has set the stage for what follows by giving a brief introduction to the multiple functions and meanings of *yabai*. Section 2 provides an insight into the previous work that has tackled *yabai* in the past: a descriptive account and a theoretical account. Building on this, it proposes a generalisation to *yabai*'s various characteristics. Section 3 analyses the morphosyntactic derivation, as well as semantic extension based on corpus and Twitter data. Section 4 turns to the functions and meanings in the clipped forms: *yaba*; *yabee* and *yabe*. Section 5 highlights the results and addresses the theoretical implications of this study.

2. Previous Studies

This section draws on previous work that has tackled the word *yabai* in the past, investigating descriptive work and theoretical studies. Building on this, a hypothesis is put forward to generalise the diverse functions and meanings of *yabai* and its clipped forms.

(9) Two streams of work on *yabai* in the past

a. *Descriptive work*: Sano (2005); Horasawa and Iwata (2009); Sano (2012); Kumagai (2014);

Imano (2015); Kudoo (2019).

b. *Theoretic studies (cognitive semantics)*: Voßagen (1999); Sakaguchi (2013); Takeuchi (2007).

The descriptive work on *yabai* mostly departs from a sociolinguistic perspective. Sano (2012) and Horasawa and Iwata (2009) conduct an investigation of 3,000 people over 16 years old across the country and calculate the frequency of using ‘youth language’. Kumagai (2014) looks into the acceptance of *yabai* among different generations, ethnicities and genders. The descriptive work has well addressed the character of *yabai* and its use among different generations. Yet a theoretical account of the morphosyntactic properties of *yabai* remains unattempted.

Different studies have been undertaken at the theoretical level, tackling a variety of phenomena. Cognitive semanticists suggest that *yabai*’s semantic extensions are facilitated at a conceptual level. This comprises a metonymic approach to the relationship between the source and the target domain (i.e. cause/effect, part/whole, possessor/possessed), e.g. Voßagen (1999); Sakaguchi (2013). Another pathway is that taken by Takeuchi (2007), who applies a cognitive-pragmatic approach, adopting the framework of ‘relevance theory’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995) (Note 2) to address the double-interpretation conveyed by *yabai*’s adjective function.

Cognitive semantics is helpful in that it accounts for the semantic extension, which is grounded in metonymic operations. However, the following phenomena are not accounted: the interjection and adverb uses of *yabai*, and the clipping. Therefore, the cognitive approach might not help us to arrive at a unified understanding to the multiple faces of *yabai* as it pays too little attention to the syntactic functions, and to the link between form and meaning. This study, identifies the following classes:

(10) A generalisation to utilise the diverse parts of speech and meanings in *yabai*

The various functions and semantic readings that *yabai* provides in Modern Japanese fall into two strands.

a. The adjective, predicate use of *yabai* fulfills a lexical function.

b. The adverb and interjection use of *yabai* fulfil a grammatical function (Note 3).

To further support this position, an analysis is carried out in the following section.

3. *Yabai*'s Morphosyntactic Functions and Semantic Meanings

Our starting point is *yabai*. This study randomly drew 60 tokens of *yabai* from CEJC and calculated the frequencies, the meanings that each category conveys in light of KH Coder (produced by Kooichi 2017).

N	抽出語	品詞	合計	左合計	右合計	左5	左4	左3	左2	左1	右1	右2	右3	右4	右5	スコア
1	寒い	形容詞	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.200
2	可愛い	形容詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.000
3	外	名詞C	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
4	高い	形容詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.000
5	残る	動詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.000
6	上手	形容動詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.000
7	道	名詞C	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
8	売れる	動詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.000
9	爆弾	名詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.000
10	変身	サ変名詞	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1.000
11	太郎	人名	4	3	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.950
12	見る	動詞	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.533
13	バッグ	名詞	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.500
14	威圧	サ変名詞	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.500
15	巻	名詞C	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.500
16	規模	名詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.500
17	吸う	動詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.500
18	計画	サ変名詞	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.500
19	終わる	動詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.500
20	初めて	副詞	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.500
21	数学	名詞	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.500
22	雷	名詞C	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.500

Figure 2. The distribution of *yabai*'s multiple parts of speech

KH Coder analysis brought us to the point that the 1st lexeme on the right side of *yabai* attributes the most tokens, which in turn suggests that *yabai* is more likely to modify an adjective or a verb, fulfilling the duty of an adverb.

The following presents a closer picture: the most common option in terms of *yabai* is the interjection use (29 tokens). The predicate function is equally common, accounting for 27 tokens. Four tokens apply to the adverb use.

Table 2. *yabai*'s pragmatic function

<i>Parts of speech</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>
Predicate		22	5
Interjection	13	13	3
Adverb (<i>yabai</i> + i-adjective)			2
Adverb + <i>yabai</i>		2	

Having examined this data, we are now in the position to analyse *yabai*'s morphosyntactic functions and semantic meanings.

3.1 Interjection *yabai*

As suggested by Table 2, a common option for *yabai* is to fulfil the interjection function. This is illustrated by the examples in (11).

(11) [The writer saw the dawn in Japan for the first time and writes:]

<i>Yabai,</i>	<i>hajimete</i>	<i>miru</i>	<i>nihon no yoake.</i>
INTER	for the first time	see.ADNML	Japan GEN dawn

'Oh, dear, I am looking at the dawn of Japan for the first time.' [Twitter 4/Dec/2020]

Syntactically, *yabai* appears initially and individually; semantically, it renders no evaluations. This option is further detected in (12), where the nuance 'oops' is implied in *yabai*.

(12) *Yabai,* *kono tsuuito o mite omoidashimashita.*

Oops	DEM	Twitter	ACC	see.gru	recall-HON.PAST
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Nengajoo yatteinai.

New Year's card make.PROG.NEG

'Oops, Twitter reminds me that I have not made the New Year's card yet.'

[Twitter 2/Dec/2020]

In the following illustration of interjection use, a nuance of surprise is implied.

(13) *Yabai,* *yabai, yaro ano ano soo yuu nantoka*

INTER	INTER	PRED	DEM	DEM	DEM	say.CONCL	somehow
-------	-------	------	-----	-----	-----	-----------	---------

Nanka ga aru wake janain.

Something like	NOM	have	case	PRED.NEG
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'What? What? That, that, there must be some way out.' [CEJC_K001_013]

At this stage, it can be suggested that the interjection function appears to be a *kuchiguse* 'habit of saying' and, crucially, such a habit of saying can vary from individual to individual. This would suggest that the interjection function of *yabai* fulfills a grammatical function.

3.2 Predicate *yabai*

The second largest token number among *yabai* come from the adjective function, which may render a predicate or modify a noun. A search in NINJAL-LWP shows that among the 245 tokens (73 types) of *yabai*'s modifying a noun, all tokens appear to convey a negative reading. This having been said, the following Twitter data presents a different picture: *yabai* renders a positive reading.

(14) adjective *yabai* renders a positive reading

Moo onrii toshite wa yabai daikibo ni nattete.

Already ONLY as FOC very big scale DAT become.GER

‘As for the company ONLY, the scale of (this event) is very big.’

[Twitter 29/Nov/2020]

Yabai describes the size of the scale of the event. The noun that it modifies is a Sino-Japanese word: *daikibo* ‘big scale’, where there is already a modifier, i.e. *dai* ‘big’. This inspires us to deduce that *yabai* is modifying a modifier and ought to be deemed as an adverb. One may argue that *dai* is not an independent word but a prefix, attached to the noun *kibo* ‘scale’, and thus *daikibo* ought to be deemed a noun. Pulling these strands together, we cannot but contend that *yabai* is fulfilling the adverb function and ought to be considered as a grammatical item.

Such data is only detected once. The other data of [*yabai* + noun] all convey a negative evaluation. It is thus to the predicate function that we will now turn.

As suggested by Table 2, the predicate *yabai* renders two evaluations: negative and positive. A typical example would be (15):

(15) Negative reading

Densha ippon noriokurete mo mata kuru kedo

Train one miss.GER FOC till come CONC

Hikooki ippon okuretara yabai shi.

flight one miss.PROV bad EXCL

‘If one misses a train, he/she can still catch the next; if a flight is missed, that would be a disaster.’ [CEJC_T004_006]

A salient property of this *yabai* is that it has an original meaning: it describes the consequence of missing a flight, i.e. bad. With this in place, *yabai* here has a lexical function.

The following example is another illustration of the predicate use, presenting a different picture.

(16) Positive reading

[The writer wrote about how marvellous the animation *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (Demon Slayer) was and particularly how he is fond of the last chapter]

Kimetsu saishuukan ga yabai.

Kimetsu no yaiba last chapter NOM interesting

‘The last chapter of Demon Slayer is really interesting.’ [Twitter 4/Dec/2020]

Building on the context, we assume that *yabai* here renders a positive reading. This piece of data leads us to assume that *yabai* here fulfils a grammatical function.

3.3 Adverb *yabai*

The grammatical function seems to be further tied to the adverb use of *yabai*. Consider the following data.

(17) [A couple is talking about kendo ‘Japanese fencing’, one referred to his skill and the other praised him.]

yabai sugoi yo ne, hitori dake sasareru tte.

extremely marvellous excl excl along solely stab.pote part

‘That shot was indeed marvellous! It is said that he can stab on his own.’

[CEJC_K003_012a]

yabai sugoi can be reformed as *yabai gurai sugoi* ‘awful-nearly-marvellous’. In this regard, *yabai* describes the degree of the next adjective, i.e. *sugoi* ‘marvellous’. Another illustration is seen in (18).

(18) *Shooga ni shooyu o kakeru to, yabai umai.*

ginger dat soy sauce acc put on conj adv delicious

‘If soy sauce is put on the ginger, the ginger will be very delicious.’

[CEJC_K003_012a]

The data from the CEJC suggests that, when *yabai* modifies an adjective, it is likely that the adjective itself renders a positive reading. Thus, the whole expression is positive. The following data is drawn from Twitter, where *yabai* is followed by an adjective that yields a neutral reading.

(19) *Soto yabai samui.*

Outside ADV cold

‘It is extremely cold outside’ [Twitter 8/Dec/2020]

The above data indicates that when *yabai* modifies an adjective, it does not carry any evaluation but merely describes the degree of the following adjective. Building on this, we contend that the adverb *yabai* fulfils a grammatical function.

Additional intriguing data is noted, i.e. [*yaba* + dative case particle *ni*]:

(20) [The writer indicates the scale of the event for the company]

Moo onrui toshite wa yabai daikibo ni nattete.

Already ONLY as FOC very big scale DAT become.GER

yabai ni natteru

big scale DAT become.PROG

‘As for the company ONLY, the scale of (this event) is very big. It turns out to be a very big scale.’ [Twitter 29/Nov/2020]

It is important to notice that the first appearance of *yabai* modifies a noun, cf. *yabai daikibo ni nattete*. It is the second *yabai* that we are concentrating on, which is followed by the dative case particle *ni*, cf. *yabai ni natteru*. This expression yields a positive reading, i.e. how big the event is. The construction [*yabai* + dative particle *ni*] suggests that *yabai* is either a noun or a na-adjective. Or, alternatively, perhaps an ellipsis is involved in this *yabai*. In the database, such an expression is only detected once. With this being the case, it is not appropriate to contend that *yabai* displays a noun or a na-adjective function.

4. The Clipped *yabai*

Having drawn a picture of *yabai* conveying an interjection, an adverb and a predicate, this section presents a further picture: three clipped forms of *yabai*, i.e. *yaba*; *yabee* and *yabe*. To provide an adequate account of the morphosyntactic properties and the semantic meanings of the clipped *yabai*, this study took 81 tokens from Twitter at random and calculated the distribution of their functions.

Table 3. *yaba*, *yabee* and *yabe*’s syntactic functions and semantic meanings (Note 4)

	<i>yaba</i>	<i>yabee</i>	<i>yabe</i>
Interjection	8	8	7
Na-adjective	0	3	0
I-adjective (modifying a noun)		18 negative; 5 positive; 2 neutral	1 negative
Adverb use (modifying a verb/)	1	4	
Adverb use (modifying an adjective)	1	2	
Predicate	3 positive; 1 negative	15 negative; 8 neutral; 10 positive	1 negative; 1 positive
Total tokens	14	57	10

Most tokens of *yaba* and *yabe* come from the interjection use, which leads us to deduce that *yaba* and *yabe* may have lost their original function, i.e. as an adjective, modifying a noun. It was also discovered that *yabee* bears four parts of speech, with the adjective as the main function and the predicate use as the second.

4.1 *Yabee*

The multiple morphosyntactic properties of the clipped *yabai* are particularly pronounced in the form *yabee*. Apart from the basic function, i.e. an adjective, modifying a noun (1), four innovations are observed: na-adjective; adverb, predicate and interjection. Among them, the na-adjective function is particularly worth commenting on.

(21) Adjective *yabee*

[The writer praises his vacuum cleaner, which is not expensive but works very well.]

3000 en no soojiki wa yabee gurai suu wa.

3000 yen GEN vacuum cleaner TOP ADV PART suck up EXCL

‘The 3000 yen vacuum cleaner sucks everything up.’ [Twitter 2/Dec/2020]

4.1.1 Na-adjective *yabee*

The following examples presents an intriguing picture: *yabee* is followed by an adnominal lexicon ‘na’ and thus is alleged to be a na-adjective, modifying the noun ‘*owa* (ending)’.

(22) *yabee na owa toru.*

Bad ADML ending have

‘The ending is badly taken.’ [Twitter 1/Dec/2020]

The na-adjective use is worth commenting on. Recall that is was during the Edo Period (1603–1868), when the na-adjective function was derived from the noun 厄場 *yaba* ‘prison’.

The data in (1), however, differs from the one centuries ago: *yabee*, as a na-adjective nowadays, is an adverb, modifying a VP. To put it another way, although *yabee* appears to be a na-adjective, it actually modifies a VP. Here, it refers to ‘badly’. Thus, the nuance of *yabee na owa toru* turns out to be: ‘the ending is badly taken’.

4.1.2 Adverb *yabee*

The adverb use of *yabee* presents two variations: modifying a verb (23) or modifying an i-adjective (24).

(23) *Yabee* modifies a verb

a. *Yabee nokotta wa.*

Much left.PAST EXCL

‘A lot has been left.’ [Twitter 3/Dec/2020]

b. *Nokori no futari ga yabee bakudankakaete soo.*

Left GEN two persons nom very much carrying a bomb AUX

‘The left two persons appear very much likely to carry a bomb.’ [Twitter 2/Dec/2020]

(24) *Yabee* modifies an i-adjective

Chotto mukoo gawa no a, soo, soo, ...

A bit other side GEN EXCL oh yest

yabee natsukashii.

ADV longing

‘Go toward the other side a bit more, yes, that’s it, so longing.’ [CEJC_T006_008a]

4.1.3 Predicate *yabee*

Turning to *yabee*’s predicate function, a common function of *yabee* is to render a negative meaning. An illustration is provided in (25).

(25) Predicate *yabee* (negative reading)

[On a snowy night, the writer posts a photo of a car, which is fully covered by snow. The writer says: by tomorrow, the car would be a disaster!]

Koitsu wa, ashita no asa, yabee.

This guy TOP tomorrow GEN morning, INTER

‘By tomorrow morning, this car would turn out to be a mess.’ [Twitter 10/Dec/2020]

Another use of the predicate *yabee* is to render a positive meaning, as shown in (26).

(26) Predicate *yabee* (positive reading)

[On a snowy road, two cars are progressing with difficulty, when a BMW approaches with ease. The poster cannot help but narrate that the BMW is powerful]

X5 no iatsukan yabee na

X5 GEN over-power feeling strong EXCL

‘X5’s over-power feeling is strong.’ [Twitter 8/Dec/2020]

In the database, a neutral reading of the predicate *yabee* is also observed, cf. (27).

(27) Predicate *yabee* (neutral reading)

[The writer tries to understand which direction he can walk in to prevent pollen flying into his eyes. Then he follows a suggestion that is proposed by a friend, and it works.]

Koo yatte, aruku to, kafen ga me ni

DEM do.GER walk.CONCL CONJ pollen NOM eye DAT

Hairanaitte, hontooda, yabee!

Come.NEG.COMP, true.PRED INTER

‘By walking in this direction, it really works, the pollen would not come into the eyes.’ [Twitter 11/Dec/2020]

This leads us to the observation that the predicate *yabee*, when yielding a neutral or a positive reading, is fulfilling a grammatical function.

4.1.4 Interjection *yabee*

The interjection use of *yabee* is represented by (28), where a light negative nuance is implied.

(28) *yabee*, *chikoku* *da*. *Isoge*.
 INTER be late PRED hurry up. imp

‘Oh dear, we are late. We must hurry up.’ [Twitter 9/Dec/2020]

Having all this in mind, we can say

- I. When *yabee* behaves as an adjective, its fundamental role is to modify a noun with a negative evaluation, and thus we deduce that the adjective *yabee* is a lexical item.
- II. The na-adjective function of *yabee* is an innovation. It should be borne in mind that although *yabee* appears to be a na-adjective, it actually modifies a VP, and thus ought to be deemed as an adverb, fulfilling a grammatical function.
- III. The adverb use of *yabee* presents two variations: modifying a verb or modifying an i-adjective. At any rate, the adverb use renders a degree of the event and is deemed to be a grammatical item.
- IV. The predicate function presents the following diversities: the negative-denotation *yabee* is a lexical item; the positive/neutral-denotation *yabee* fulfills a grammatical function.
- V. In addition, when *yabee* renders an interjection function, it is a grammatical item.

4.2 *Yaba*

It is the second clipped form, i.e. *yaba*, to which we now proceed. A typical example of the interjection use would be (29):

(29) Interjection *yaba*
 [The writer posts a picture of snow and writes:]
 Yaba!!! yuki da.

‘Look, it’s snowing!’ [Twitter 10/Dec/2020]

It also seems that *yaba* may act as an adverb, modifying an i-adjective, cf. (30).

(30) **Adverb *yaba***

Minna *no* *henshin* *yabai* *kawaii*.
 All of you GEN transformation very cute

‘Your transformations are very cute’. [Twitter 11/Nov/2020]

The predicate use is also seen.

(31) predicate *yaba*

[The poster posts a photo of Hankyū Densha #3324 and writes]

3324 *kiree* *sugite yabakatta.*

3324 beautiful SUF PRED

‘Hankyū Densha #3324 is very beautiful.’ [Twitter 10/Dec/2020]

Yaba in (31) denotes a positive reading. In our randomly taken database, there are 30 tokens of predicate use; among them, 37% (11 tokens) are applied to a positive reading. The following is another illustration of predicate *yaba*, which suggests a negative nuance.

(32) [The poster displays a photo of a heavily snow-covered road and says:]

kono michi yabakatta.

Kaori HON ADJ.PAST

‘Miss Kaori is so cute’. [Twitter 10/Dec/2020]

Incorporating these observations, we deduce that the original meaning is retained in the function of a predicate, which in turns indicates it as a lexical item. The interjection, adverb, and the positive predicate use of *yaba*, contribute a grammatical function.

So far, the multifaceted functions and meanings of *yabee* and *yaba* have been analysed. There is one remaining issue, i.e. the third clipped form *yabe*. It is not as favoured as *yabee* or *yabai*. In the randomly collected database, only ten tokens are detected, seven out of which render an interjection use. One token applies to the basic function and meaning, one token is attributed to a negative reading, as a predicate, and one is attributed to a positive reading, as a predicate. These diversities indicate that *yabe* is also a two-faced lexeme, fulfilling a grammatical function, on the one hand, and functional a lexical function on the other.

4.3 Summary

Based on the morphological, syntactic and semantic evidence given above, that the diverse parts of speech and semantic meanings split into two categories: (a) a grammatical function is applied to the interjection, positive/neutral-denotation predicate, adverb and na-adjective functions; and (b) a lexical function is fulfilled by a negative-denotation predicate and adjective that modifies a noun.

A further look at the cooccurrence network of *yabai* via KH Coder (cf. Figure 3) reveals that,

- a. *yabai* is mostly likely to cooccur with adjectives, where *yabai* fulfils an adverb duty.
- b. *yabai*’s adverb function is mostly seen in conversations among women friends than official conversations in company or government.
- c. *yabai*’s adverb function appears to be limited to friendships and is ruled out by parent-child and vertical relationships.

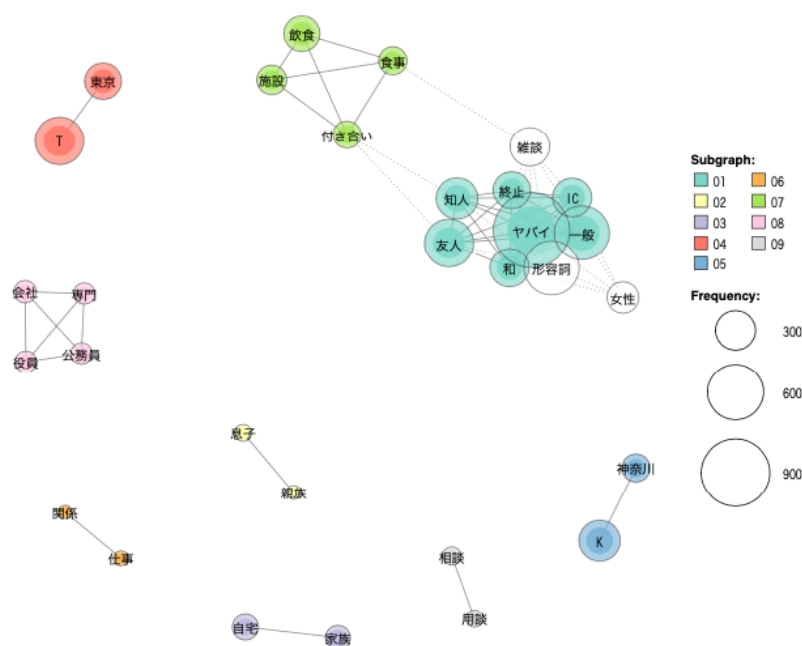


Figure 3. The cooccurrence network in regard to *yabai*

5. Concluding Remarks

Modern Japanese has a quite developed *wakamono kotoba* ‘youth lexicon’, e.g. the suffixes *-mi*, *-poi*, *-sugiru*, *-kusai* have established syntactic functions and semantic meanings that are different from standard Japanese. The study of *yabai* is of particular interest in the study of lexical pragmatics because, apart from its meaning being extended, it appears to have innovated an adverb use and an interjection function. The main goal of this study was to uncover the morphosyntactic properties of *yabai* and its clipped forms. It aimed to arrive at an understanding of how the forms and the meanings might be associated. A lexical-pragmatic-based analysis, based on Twitter and corpus data, was carried out. The finding yield the following picture of the lexeme.

- I. When *yabai* and *yabee* undertake an adjective role, modifying a noun, it is likely that a negative evaluation is invited. In this regard, *yabai* and *yabee* fulfil a lexical function.
- II. The adverb uses of *yabai* and *yabee* presents two variations: modifying a verb or modifying an i-adjective. At any rate, the adverb use describes the degree of an event or an object. Incorporating this, the adverbs *yabai* and *yabee* fulfil a grammatical function.
- III. The predicate function presents the following diversities: the negative-denotation *yabai* and *yabee* are lexical items; the positive/neutral-denotation *yabai*, *yabee* and *yaba* are grammatical items.
- IV. The interjection *yabai*, *yaba*, *yabe* and *yabee* fulfil a grammatical function.

Yabai awaits further research, i.e. driven by cognitive semantics delving into the extension process; a diachronic study, searching for the evolution path at different historical stages. The

interjection, adverb use of *yabai* is probably down to grammaticalisation. The clipped forms, i.e. *yaba*; *yabee* and *yabe*, as Table 3 suggests, no longer render an adjective function. Their functions are limited to interjection use and adverb use. The completely lost original part of speech, and the morphophonological change (i.e. clipping), are signs of complete grammaticalisation. In terms of *yabee*, it does not seem to have reached the end of grammaticalisation, as there are still tokens indicating a negative evaluation as an i-adjective. The positive and neutral readings of the predicate *yabai* and *yabee* have to do with semantic extension.

It is clear that there is much work to do in this field, but nevertheless we hope this work has provided a sound base for further research.

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative
ADJ	adjective
ADML	adnominal
ADV	adverb
AUX	auxiliary
COMP	complement
CONC	concessive form
CONJ	conjunction
COP	copula
DAT	dative
DEM	demonstrative
EXCL	exclamatory
FOC	focus particle
GEN	genitive
GER	gerund
HON	honorification
NEG	negative
INTER	interjection
IMP	imperative
PART	casual quoting particle
POTE	potential form
TOP	topic

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Notes

Note 1. Japanese adjectives fall into two groups: *i*-adjectives (1) and *na*-adjectives (2).

(1) Hanako wa kabe o **shiroku** nutta. (*i*-adjective)

Hanako TOP wall ACC white paint.PAST

‘Hanako painted the wall white.’

(2) Hanako wa kabe o **masshiro** ni nutta. (*na*-adjective)

Hanako TOP wall ACC completely COP paint.PAST

‘Hanako painted the wall completely white.’

Note 2. In the study of discourse and conversation, two approaches are influential: (a) the cooperative principle (Grice 1975), which suggests that the communicator follows four principles: quantity, quality, manner and relevance; and (b) relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995 [1986]), according to which ‘the greater the cognitive effects and the smaller the processing effort, the greater the relevance’.

Note 3. The terms ‘lexical’ and ‘grammatical’ were initially put forward by Shibatani, Masayoshi, in his work on nominalisation (cf. 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019) and were developed by Seraku Tohru’s (2020) work on Japanese nominalisation suffix *mi*.

Note 4. The number in the table refers to the ‘token number’. Since only the data that fulfills a lexical function would carry a positive, a negative or a neutral evaluation, the data that undertake a grammatical function do not bear an evaluation for they merely convey a grammatical function, only the following data – (a) the adjective function that modifies a noun; (b) the predicate use; (c) the noun use; and (d) the *na*-adjective use – are marked with evaluations.

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