THE LANGUAGE OF CUTENESS IN JAPANESE ADVERTISING DISCOURSE: THE KAWAII PHENOMENA

Oana-Maria Bîrlea
PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract:With focus on sociocultural semiotics and pragmatics the proposed paper tries to expose the particularities of Japanese advertising discourse constructed around kawaii ('cute') symbols in order to reveal the mechanism through which persuasion is achieved by appealing to the semiotics of cuteness. Advertising discourse has the capacity to mirror and at the same time to change society by being a vehicle for transmitting ideologies and values, thus in the case of Japanese advertising discourse construction we believe that kawaii signs work as an indispensable tool for delivering powerful messages by appealing to emotions. We are mainly interested in analyzing the presence of the 'lovable' in print ads and its role in discourse construction. The aesthetic of kawaii ('cute') and its intrinsic vocabulary have the capacity to seduce the receiver and to fulfill the primare goal of an advertisement, persuasion. Through the analysis of two non-commercial advertisements from a 2018 campaign targeting commuters we intend to expose the chameleonic nature of this concept and its manifestations. Starting with Hofstede's (2003, 2010) cultural dimensions we intend to develop an analysis model which can be applied to advertising discourse analysis concerned with this phenomena.

Keywords: Japanese advertising discourse, kawaii, cute studies, persuasion, sociocultural semiotics

Introduction

The term ‚discourse' in its essence is difficult to be defined universally and impossible to be framed in a singular, universal paradigm. The polysemy of the term appears from the interferences with other fields, thus we can discuss about political discourse, medical discourse, feminist discourse and so on and each type comes with its specific perticularities. Nevertheless, ‚discourse' analyzed as a whole consists of text and context interacting, there are no bare acts of communications.[1] In this case we refer to advertising discourse, a complex type of discourse in which pictures and music (if the case) along with text combine and form meaning having persuasion as the main purpose. Argumentation and persuassion are the key points in any advertising discourse, thus it is extremly important to implicate the receiver in the process in order to achieve this goal. Discourse types and typologies (or sometimes refferd to as genres[2]) are possible considering discourse form, norms and language use and these constraints have ideological implications. In the case of advertising there can be traces of description and/or narration, argumentation, conversations, jokes, cartoons etc., thus it is a mix of genres and this mechanism works perfectly fine, therefore a clear-cut definition is hard to pin down, but in the end the main function that differentiates this discourse from other types is persuassion[3].

Following this idea we believe that conducting an analysis on advertising discourse from a sociocultural perspective demands a deep knowledge of that specific culture in which

[1] Guy Cook, The Discourse of Advertising, New York, Routledge, 2001, p.4.
[2] Ibidem p.7.
[3] Ibidem p.10.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

discourse is constructed. In this regard Hofstede's Dimensions of National Cultures (1984, 1991, 2001, 2010) can offer significant insight on culture differences which can be further used and applied to discourse construction in order to develop a thorough investigation. The six dimensions (revealed uptil now): power distance, uncertainity avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long/short term orientation and indulgence/restraint were empirically verifiable and applied to more than 50 nations. By applying the data provided by this study on Japanese society to advertising discourse analysis I intend to explain how discourse is contructed, which are the recurrent elements and how persuassion is achieved through ‚cute' (‚*kawaii*') language. It is of high importance to adapt the message to the receiver considering that society's particularities, but regardless of any cultural and social differences people's reactions are based on instincts and perceptions. Based on these primare assertions in order to seduce or manipulate the receiver through advertisements it is important to stimulate the receiver by also taking into account cultural and social specificities. Japan has a long history in depending upon another's benevolence and presume upon another's love[4], thus this feeling nurtured from infancy to adult life manifests in various forms and in the case of advertising discourse any connotations in this direction work as a persuasion tool. This concept is called ‚*amae*' and comes from the verb ‚*amaeru*' and has the same roots as the adjective ‚*amai*' meaning ‚sweet'[5] and it was presented by dr. Doi in 1956 as a key concept in understanding Japanese personality, but not as to be perceived as a peculiarity of the Japanese people. This constant search for attention and need of unconditional care does not bear any negative connotations as its quasiequivalent phenomena expressed by the English word, ‚spoil'. In the same account another key concept (we would say) in understanding Japanese perceptions over the world is ‚*kawaii*', mostly translated in ‚cute', ‚adorable', ‚lovable' etc. This is also a concept that has its roots deep in Japanese culture since the Heian period (794-1185) and it has shaped values and global perceptions especially after 1970s. The first mentions appear in the novel, "Genji Monogatari" ("The Tale of Genji") by Murasaki Shikibu and also in "*Makura no sōshi*" ("The Pillow Book") by Sei Shōnagon, both court ladies. The Japanese word ‚*kawaii*' is perhaps the most common word used in daily conversations to express emotions and good feelings and also *kawaii* symbols and aesthetics have a significant role in many advertisements. Most Japanese words expressing emotions, feelings or any sort of human nature characteristics are constructed around the word *ki*.[6] Considering the fact that this is a common word, not a technical one we are interested in analyzing its function and purpose in advertising discourse and thus, revealing its chameleonic nature. Having briefly explained the history of these main concepts that contribue to the importance of this phenomena in Japanese culture and society we intend to look at the implications of what we call ‚*kawaii*'/‚cute' signs and symbols in Japanese print advertisements and also to build an index of *kawaii* (‚cute') words used in print advertisements.

Advertising discourse like any other type of discourse can provide vital information regarding values, norms and trends in a certain society within a certain timeframe because it can work as a mirror that reflects views of the world. In Japan, the so called „cute culture" appeared around the mid-1960s-70s among teenagers, especially women as a means of „rebellion" against traditional norms and values and manifested at first through the use of a

[4] Takeo Doi, Understanding Amae: The Japanese Concept of Need Love, Collected Papers of Twentieth Century Japanese Writers on Japan, vol. 1, Kent, Global Oriental, 2005, p.9.
[5] Ibidem.
[6] Ibidem p.12.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

new style of handwriting and then by the appearance of slang words in the same note[7], but it seems that it has its roots in Japanese traditional aesthetics based on imperfection. This phenomena has gained popularity and spread in different industries quickly based on capitalising on cute style.[8] This new type of aesthetics was dominated by "small, pastel, round, soft, loveable, not Japanese traditional style"[9] which is characterized by lack of artifice and simplicity. Moreover, cute slogans and taglines were mostly written in Japanglish (a misuse of English words) and were used for creating the sense of "light fun".[10]

Although studies on the concept of *kawaii* have emerged especially after 2000(Kinsella, 1995, 2000; Shiraishi, 1997; McVeigh, 2000; Yomoda I., 2006; Klapper, 2009; Endo K, 2014; Ohkura M., 2016 etc.) most research is constructed around describing the phenomena considering cultural and/or social implications without a practical approach, thus our aim is to explore *kawaii* appeals in Japanese print advertisements in order to contribue to a better understanding of this key concept.

Brief history of *kawaii* and its role in Japanese advertising discourse

This culture keyword in understanding Japanese way of being and perceiving the world has been first indexed in a dictionary in the Taishō Era (1912-1926) as "*kahohayushi"* (顔映し) or shortened "*kahayushi*/*kawayushi*" and changed after the war in "*kawayui*"[11] literally meaning ‚glowing face' resulting in the idea of embarrassment and was ultimately changed to "*kawaii*". The initial meaning was that of "ashamed, unbearable to see, pathetic, vulnerable, embarrassed, loveable, small"[12] and it has changed over time retaining most of the first nuances, but in the current period its first meanings are that of "adorable, cute, loveable". Its impact on culture and society is easy to recon considering its rapid spread in different areas being used even as an instrument in external politics (through *kawaii* ambassadors).

As previously mentioned, references to *kawaii* can be traced in the very first writings of the Heian period. In "Makura no sōshi" ("The Pillow Book") by Sei Shōnagon *kawaii* is defined as something childish, innocent and pure: "*Kawaii to wa osanakute, muku de, jyunsuina mono*" and also as anything small: „*Nandemo, chīsai mono wa minna kawaii*". It is almost impossible to universally define this concept because as any other concept it changes over time and gains or loses parts of its meaning, but it seems that the main characteristic that of stirring human affection was retained. The idea of cuteness was explored through *kawaii* (cute) images in paintings and woodblock illustrations (Takehisa Yumeji's work known as *bijinga*, literally ‚pictures of beautiful women') in Edo period (1603-1869)[13] long before capitalizing on cuteness in the 1970s. Nowadays, the adjective *kawaii* is the ultimate compliment through which people in Japan express themselves freely and it has become sort of like an automatism, a reflex especially in daily conversations. The concept has gained popularity overseas too due to *anime* (Japanese animations) and *manga* (Japanese comic books/graphic novels), but also with the help of the so-called *kawaii* (cute) ambassadors appointed in 2003 by Prime Minister Koizumi as part of a campaign for promoting Japan.[14]

[7] Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan". In: Skov, L. and Moeran, B. (eds.) Women, Media and Consumption in Japan. Curzon Press, London, 1995, p. 225.
[8] Ibidem.
[9] Ibidem p. 226.
[10] Ibidem p.227.
[11] Ibidem p. 221.
[12] Shogakukan, Nihon kokugo daijiten [the unabridged Japanese dictionary], 2nd. ed. Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2000.
[13] Joshua Paul Dale, Cute studies: An emerging field, 2016, p. 5.
[14] Christinao Yano, Pink globalization: Hello Kitty's trek across the Pacific. Duke University Press, London, 2013, p. 258.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

Mostly translated as "cute", *kawaii* embodies in fact much more than its English (quasi)equivalent and it can even refer to opposite elements such as *kawaii* (‚cute') grotesque.[15]

Themes constructed around another pivotal keyword, *kokoro*,meaning ‚heart', a word encompassing Japanese sensibility was widely used in advertising during the 1970s, the same period when *kawaii* culture was at its peak. Besides these two emblematic ones other words frequently used were *ōraka* ("generous"), *odayaka* ("tranquil"), *azayaka* ("fresh"), *sawayaka* ("invigorating"), *yutaka* ("abundant")[16] or even *chisei* ("intelligence") and *chiteki* ("intelligent") in advertisements targeting young women, but in fact they were "emptied" from their essence and were used to refer to describe looks, rather than mental capacity.[17] The word *kawaii* along childlike symbols have the capacity to evoke friendliness, sympathy and deep affection, thus are more effective than others. This phenomena can be explained through cultural background aspects in the sense that societies with a strong community sense (such as the case of Japan) tend to pay much more attention to group harmony and work towards creating relationships based on the sense of care and consideration towards others. "Collectivistic cultures are considered to be high-context communication cultures, with an indirect style of communication"[18] according to Hofstede's culture dimensions, thus in the case of Japan this indirect style is mediated by signs that communicate the loveable and which help in preserving group harmony. In Japanese there is no particular morphological marker for vocative forms[19] (*kokaku*) but "vocative-emotive phrases"[20] can be expressed through the use of different pronouns, ending particles such as *yo*, tonality (when the case) etc. For example, the personal pronoun is omitted in most cases, but when it is used it has a specific purpose: to emphasize on the doer by creating the sense of exclusivity (in the case of advertisements) or to give clear reference regarding gender. *Watashi* ("I") can be used independently of gender, but *atashi* ("I") can be used exclusively by women and *boku* ("I"), exclusively by men. Thus, in the case of print advertisement addressed to women, *atashi* or *watashi* will be most likely used. This is also valid for ending particles mentioned earlier, which can mark the gender of the speaker. Most advertisements are constructed around linguistic forms which indicate women's voice, especially in the case where the main theme is constructed around *kawaii* signs. These particularities and preferences, among others are statements for the idea that women's language (associated directly to 'cute' language) is the language of commerce in selling products[21]and that cute language works as a mediator.

Advertising themes (the central, recurring idea) constructed around cute symbols are a common practice not only in Japan and the main reason for this is that affect and emotions facilitate persuasion based on the principle that people "allude to an approachable,

[15] Ito Ujitaka, "Kawaii" is the mainstream of Japanese aesthetics; encompassing a nuance of grotesque and infiltrating the surroundings, https://www.meiji.ac.jp/cip/english/research/opinion/Ujitaka_Ito.html.
[16] Takie Sugiyama Lebra, William P. Lebra (eds.), Japanese Culture and Behavior: Selected Readings, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1986, p. 73.
[17] Keiko Tanaka, Advertising Language. A pragmatic approach to advertisements in Britain and Japan, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 111.
[18] Merieke de Mooji and Geert Hofstede, The Hofstede model Applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research, International Journal of Advertising, 29(1), pp. 85-110, 2010, p. 89.
[19] Haruo Kubozono, Mikio Giriko (eds.), Tonal Change and Neutralization, Mouton de Grutyer, Berlin, 2018, p.45.
[20]Senko K. Maynard, Linguistic Emotivity. Centrality of place, the topic-comment dynamic, and an ideology of pathos in Japanese discourse. John Benjamins B.V., Amsterdam, 2002, p. 124.
[21]Miyako Inoue, Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2006, p.7.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

affectionate other"[22] and affect words are "comprised of features standardized into templates or styles that communicate the lovable."[23] The object of affection does not have to necessarily be human and in most cases it is not, thus in many advertisements cute characters are used instead of real persons. These characters along cute language have the role to persuade the receiver, the capacity to embellish anything and also to help in formulating delicate requests (in the case of manner advertisements) in a more considering manner.

The language of ‚cuteness'. A proposed glossary

In the idea that we can discuss about the language of music, arts, medicine or in a more general context about that of love or anger we refer to language of ‚cuteness' to any sign or symbol that conveys the meaning of adorable, lovable, vulnerable and that of need-love in accordance with the specificities of that culture. What we mean is that symbols used in discourse need to follow that culture's particularities mainly because meaning can differ significantly from one culture to another. For example, in American advertisements the representation of an act of kissing or hugging can have a totally different impact on the receiver than it would in a less emotionally (in the Western sense) expressive country such as Japan where respecting other's privacy is fundamental. Thus, the appropriateness of representing a gesture or another can varry both at individual and community level from a receiver to another considering various factors. In this case we are focusing on the impact of words in context considering that "every word has a unique history of usage accross populations of audiences who can continue to affect a word's impact in contemporanous messages."[24]

Besides the preference for using certain words over others (idea discussed earlier in the paper) when constructing an advertisement graphology is an important aspect because it can imply different connotations and since capitalization is not possible in Japanese there is another mechanism used for the purpose of emphasizing. For example the word *kawaii* is usually written using *hiragana* (ひらがな, the first Japanese syllabic script) or *kanji* (漢字), but when it is used in advertisements it is written in an unconventional style using *katakana* (カタカナ, the second Japanese syllabic script). By "unconventional style" we refer to the deviations from the traditional orthographic rules that state that: "Kanji are used for content words, and hiragana are used for some content words with Japanese native origin, as well as function words such as particles, conjunctions, and the inflected part of conjugating verbs/adjectives. Katakana are used for some content word, as well as loanwords […] and onomatopoeic rendintions."[25] Along this category of Japanese words traditionally written using Chinese ideograms (*kanji*) a series of loanwords that have been phonologically nativized are used at the expense of Japanese words with fairly equivalent meaning. For example, *kawaii* is often written in *katakana* in order to have a greater visibility or even replaced by its English origin counterpart, 'cute', *kyūto* (キュート); the adjective *oshare* ("elegant") can be substituted by *ereganto* (エレガント) and also *gāri* (ガーリー) from the English adjective "girly" is preferred in advertisements targeting young women. In some cases there is no Japanese synonym, therefore this mechanism of creating new words enriches the vocabulary and brings plus value and without doubt Japanese advertising discourse has

[22] Joel Gn, „A lovable metaphor: On the affect, language and design of cute" in East Asian Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 2 nr. 1, p.51.
[23] Ibidem.
[24] David S. Kaufer, Kathleen M. Carley, Condensation Symbols: Their Variety and Rhetorical Function in Political Discourse, Vol. 26, No. 3 (1993), p. 201.
[25] Yuko Igarashi, The Changing Role of Katakana in the Japanese Writing System:
Processing and Pedagogical Dimensions for Native Speakers and Foreign Learners, Dissertation, University of Victoria, 2007, p.15.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

most benefits. For example, the loanword, *gāri* ("girly") can be formed in Japanese by adding the noun, in this case *onna no ko* ("girl") + the suffix *ppoi* (indicating tendency[26]) resulting in the adjective *onna no ko ppoi* ("girly"), a procedure similar to English, noun + ly/ish etc, but regardless of this possibility loanwords (*gairaigo*) are more used in advertising discourse. Also, another important aspect worth mentioning is that along Japanese words written in *kanj* and *Japanglish* words (a fusion of Japanese and English words often misspelled or misused) foreign words (mostly English) are frequently used in advertisements in order to create and send a cool, *kawaii* message to the audience. One possible explanation for this tendency to use loanwords as part of an advertising technique resides in the meanings they carry, in connotations, in the capacity to create a sense of freshness, novelty and last, but not least, for eye-catching purposes.

Our research on cute language is an ongoing one, thus in the following chart we have indexed some of the most frequently used words encountered until now in written advertisements in Japan that have the capacity to convey the idea of affection and loveable, generally referred to as 'cute language':

***Kawaii* register**	**Meaning**	**Example**
*Kyūto*キュート	"cute"	*Gāri ando* ***kyūto***("girly and cute")
*Kokoro*ココロ	"heart"	*Mānā wa* ***kokoro*** (lit. "Manners are heart";) → "Be considerate of others"
*Arigatō*ありがとう	"thanks"	*Jikan o mamotte* ***arigatō*** ("Thanks for being on time")
*Yasashii*やさしい	"kind"	*Kokoro* ***yasashii*** ("Kind hearted")
Kimochi 気持ち	"feeling"	*Omoi yari no* ***kimochi*** *o ippai ni* ("With more consideration")
Waku waku わくわく	"excited" (onomatopoeia)	***Waku waku***! ("Exciting!")
mochi *mochi*もちもち	"soft, silky" (for products)/ "chewy" (for food)	***Mochi mochi*** *hada* ("Soft skin") ***Mochi mochi*** *dōnatsu* ("Chewy donuts")
*Minna*みんな	"together"	***Minna*** *ga kimochi ii.* ("Everyone is feeling good")
Chicchai 小っちゃい	"tiny"	***Chicchai*** *koe de hanashimashō* ("Let's keep quiet!"); usually: "Keep quiet!"
Mashō~〜ましょう	"let's~" (the idea of doing something together)	*Manā o mamori****mashō*** ("Let's have good manners!")

As exposed above in the chart starting with nouns, adjectives, onomatopoeia, verb endings any signs can belong to the so-called *kawaii* register as long as it conveys the loveable, stresses on human feelings and emotions, the idea of togetherness etc. Along 'cute' language, cute visuals (the use of cute characters, pastel colours etc.) contribute to the completeness of the message. We shall emphasize on *kawaii* aesthetics as a form of communication in the following part. Advertisements are multimodal messages, but in the case of print advertisements we refer basically only to linguistic and visual signs along their implications in discourse construction.

Case study: non-commercial print advertisements

[26]Stefan Kaiser, Yasuko Ichikawa, Noriko Kobayashi, Hilofumi Yamamoto, Japanese: A Comprehensive Grammar, 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York, 2013, p.182.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

Advertisements are of different types and target different audiences. Studies on advertising are concentrated on a variety of subjects, such as sociology, linguistics, media studies etc. and in the era of globalization the research of advertising gains more and more importance considering the rapid changes in discourse construction. This paper is concerned with analyzing the language of cuteness in Japanese print advertisements within the framework of pragmatics and sociocultural semiotics, therefore we have selected two examples in this sense. The advertisements have been displayed on walls and in buses, have a non-commercial character and are part of a 2018 campaign targeting commuters. The intended purpose is to persuade commuters to pay more attention to other's needs when using public transport.

Both commercial and non-commercial ads intend to manipulate, or seduce the receiver in order to fulfill its goal. In order to do so, a successful advertisement needs to take into consideration the cultural value dimension because cultural values have a significant impact on the way people interact, react and how they process information.[27] Japan is described as in interdependent society in which the emphasis is on fitting in, on preserving group harmony and looking after others.[28] These values often reflect in advertisements and are depicted through *kawaii* signs and affect words. We shall further discuss how persuasion is achieved in Japanese print advertisements by appealing to emotions. We have briefly described in the first part of this article that *kawaii* has its roots deep in traditional Japan since the Heian period and its impact on Japanese society and culture is significant.

The first example (Plate 1) is a 2018 print advertisement for a Japanese bus company, Odakyu Bus. Discourse is constructed around *kawaii* signs starting with cute visuals and cute language use. These cute characters "are less of an expression of individual creativity than a representation of a particular style with an intrinsic visual vocabulary."[29] That is, in this example the lovely mascot, yellow and orange, a brown puppy, soft and silky, charming, with a big cute head and heart-warming appearal, Kyunta has the responsability to give examples of good behaviour while commuting since 2012. At a first glance the poster seems part of a *manga* series because of its design and overall structure. This is quite a usual practice in Japanese print advertisements targeting commuters and similar examples can be found in Tokyo Metro and Keio Transport campaigns. Not all cute objects, figures are humanized and this is the case of cute typography, for example, but overall all elements work towards creating and sending a message constructed around affection and caring. Quite far from a real representation of a dog, Kyunta plays the central role in delivering the message and creating a relationship with the receiver. The animal is accessorized with human-like sentiments and stimulates human behaviour just like Sanrio's famous Hello Kitty figure, thus becoming a metaphor. Kyunta is not regarded as



Plate 1: Odakyu Bus Campaign, 2018. Source: https://www.odakyubus.co.jp/cs/odb/csr/manner.h

[27]Tao Deng, "Selling "Kawaii" in Advertising: Testing Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Kawaii Appeals", Master's Thesis, 2014, p. 25.
[28] Hazel Rose Markus, Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self. Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation". In: Psychological Review 98, pp. 224–253, 1991, p.224.
[29] Joel Gn, „A lovable metaphor: On the affect, language and design of cute" in East Asian Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 2 nr. 1, p.51.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

an inanimate, childish representation of a dog, but as a representation of good manners and treated as an example for society.

The text is surrounding the image in which Kyunta is the most visible character and gives further explanations regarding the situation: *Zaseki wa yuzuriai no kimochi ga taisetsu da ne.* ("It is important to considerate others and give up your seat, isn't it?"). Our proposed translation takes into account the nuances of the ending particle "*ne*" and tries to implicate the receiver in the dialogue by addressing him directly, "isn't it?", "don't you agree?" etc. These nuances are often omitted in English and the message is somehow neutrally and objectively conveyed through simple constructions such as: "Please give up your seat for elderly passengers". Below the image we have the recurrent motto in every poster from the series which states: *Kaiteki manā de, kimochi no yoi jyōsha no hitotoki o*. ("Please be considerate of other commuters and enjoy the ride!"). A literal translation would be: "Have good manners and enjoy a pleasant/comfortable ride!" In this example along the word *kimochi* ("feeling") and the ending particle *ne* through which the receiver is invited to participate in the dialogue the cute mascot, Kyunta enables the transfer of affect and persuades the receiver. The audience will "search through their encyclopaedic knowledge of words"[30] such as *kimochi*, *daiji* ("important") for a number of assumptions and the illustrations will help in decoding the most relevant meaning in this specific situation. That is, *kimochi* is an affect word which will be associated with the elderly in this case and the adjective *daiji* connects the two in formulating the idea of consideration of others, which is a key concept in Japanese culture and society.

The second example represented in Plate 2 is part of the same campaign and illustrates another possible unpleasant situation that could arise while using public transport. The personified dog, Kyunta is again responsible for giving a good example for others and sits back in the line until everyone is onboard. The text is placed again on the right side of the illustration explaining the situation: *Shanai no ushiro made susumeba, minna ga noreru ne.* ("Please move to the very back of the bus so that everyone can get in"). Constructed in the same note as the previous one words like *minna* ("everyone") and the ending particle *ne* together with *kawaii* visuals contribue to creating a persuasive discourse by appealing to emotions. Under the illustration we have the same motto placed above a heart-shaped figure (*kokoro*) through which commuters are reminded to take into consideration other passengers in order to preserve group harmony. In this case too, cuteness communicates the loveable and simulates human interactions within specific groups.



Plate 2: Odakyu Bus Campaign, 2018.

Source:

Conclusions

The language of cuteness and *kawaii* visuals are significant factors in creating a persuasive message and its manifestations are strongly related to culture and society specifics. Thus, in the case of Japan, a collectivistic society, preserving group harmony and acting in the interest of the group are key elements. These particularities can be observed in discourse construction through cute mascots and anthropomorphism, typography and word preference. Through the analysis conveyed we have revealed that Japanese advertisements are based on signs that have the capacity to communicate the loveable in order to create a relationship of

[30]Keiko Tanaka, Advertising Language. A pragmatic approach to advertisements in Britain and Japan, Routledge, London, 1994, p.92.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

need-love between the character which symbolises national values and the receiver. The short index of words from the *kawaii* register reveal that most of them are part of women discourse, thus there is a connection between expressing emotions in advertisements and the preference for using more gender specific words, in this case mostly feminine. We conclude by saying that the aesthetic of *kawaii* ('cute') and its intrinsic vocabulary have the capacity to seduce the receiver and to fulfill the primare goal of an advertisement, persuasion and it is not a matter of individual creativity, but a representation of a particular style with an intrinsec vocabulary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

COOK, Guy, *The discourse of advertising.*2nd edition, Routledge, London, 2001.

DOI, Takeo, *Understanding Amae: The Japanese Concept of Need Love*, Collected Papers of Twentieth Century Japanese Writers on Japan, vol. 1, Global Oriental, Kent, 2005.

KINSELLA, Sharon, "Cuties in Japan". In: Skov, L. and Moeran, B. (eds.) *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*. Curzon Press, London, 1995, pp. 220-254.

Shogakukan, *Nihon kokugo daijiten [the unabridged Japanese dictionary]*, 2nd. ed. Shogakukan, Tokyo, 2000.

DALE, Joshua Paul, "Cute studies: An emerging field". In *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, pp. 5–13, 2016, doi: 10.1386/eapc.2.1.5_2.

Yano, C.R., *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's trek across the Pacific*. Duke University Press, London, 2013.

UJITAKA, Ito, "Kawaii" is the mainstream of Japanese aesthetics; encompassing a nuance of grotesque and infiltrating the surroundings", https://www.meiji.ac.jp/cip/english/research/opinion/Ujitaka_Ito.html(accessed on 5th May, 2019).

LEBRA, Takie Sugiyama, LEBRA, William P. (eds.), *Japanese Culture and Behavior: Selected Readings*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1986.

TANAKA, Keiko, *Advertising Language. A pragmatic approach to advertisements in Britain and Japan*,

Routledge, London, 1994.

MOOJI, de M., HOFSTEDE, G., "The Hofstede model Applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research". In *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 29, pp. 85-110, 2010.

KUBOZONO, Haruo, GIRIKO, Mikio (eds.), *Tonal Change and Neutralization*, Mouton de Grutyer, Berlin, 2018.

MAYNARD, Senko K., *Linguistic Emotivity*. *Centrality* of *place*, the *topic-comment dynamic*, and an ideology of pathos in Japanese discourse. John Benjamins B.V., Amsterdam, 2002.

INOUE, Miyako, *Vicarious Language*: *Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 2006.

GN, Joel, „A lovable metaphor: On the affect, language and design of cute" în *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 2 nr. 1, p. 49–61, doi: 10.1386/eapc.2.1.49_1, 2016.

KAUFER, David S., CARLEY, Kathleen M., "Condensation Symbols: Their Variety and Rhetorical Function in Political Discourse", Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 201-226, 1993.

IGARASHI, Yuko, "The Changing Role of Katakana in the Japanese Writing System:

Processing and Pedagogical Dimensions for Native Speakers and Foreign Learners", Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor in the Department of Linguistics, University of Victoria, 2007.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)

KAISER, Stefan, ICHIKAWA, Yasuko, KOBAYASHI, Noriko, YAMAMOTO, Hilofumi, *Japanese: A Comprehensive Grammar*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York, 2013.

DENG, Tao, "Selling "Kawaii" in Advertising: Testing Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Kawaii Appeals" (2014).*Master's Theses (2009 -).*, http://epublications.marquette.edu/theses_open/278 (accessed on 9th May 2019).

MARKUS, Hazel R., KITAYAMA, Shinobu, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation". In: Psychological Review 98, pp. 224–253, 1991.

BDD-V4873 © 2019 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:27:15 UTC)