The Kumamoto Dialect in Selected Mangas [†]

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The period of "reinvention of the Japanese dialect" began toward the end of the 1970s; however, the changing attitude of the Japanese society toward dialects and its speakers became more visible in pop culture in the twenty-first century. I analyzed mangas where the characters use the Kumamoto dialect, and sought to answer three questions: what is the typical role of the dialect-speaking character?; how is the dialect used?; and how does it appear? I identified that the typical dialect-user is a school-age character who is young, with traits such as friendliness, eagerness, and the culture/tradition promoting function. Moreover, dialect is mostly used—publicly and privately—with hierarchically lower or equal classes. Finally, as the dialect is represented the most by grammatical and phonetic expressions, it is simplified for intelligibility.

Keywords: *Kumamoto dialect, Yakuwarigo, Manga*

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), the attitude toward dialects in Japan has been changing every few decades. Until 1951, the aim of the government was to eradicate all dialects through strict enforcement of a standard variety (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 52). Owing to this policy, some dialects, such as those in the Tohoku region, were stigmatized—this attitude continues, almost unchanged (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 44–45). However, as the Kansai dialects were considered central languages prior to the Meiji period, and influenced the standard variation (Shibatani 1990, 186), they have retained their associated prestige (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 44). The period, called the "reinvention of dialects", began toward the end of the 1970s (Bauman and Briggs 2003, 163), implying that dialects were considered a part of the Japanese tradition (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 53). As

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of 1998, middle school students have been learning about their local dialects, and when they should use it (Gottlieb 2005, 10). Officially, dialect speakers should use code-switching—that is, use the dialect at home and the standard variety at school or work (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 53). However, they often only change the proportion of the used dialect (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 98–105).

This attitude toward certain dialects is influenced by official statements of the government, the educational policy, as well as by representation in mass media. My research is based on the theory of yakuwarigo, the role language, of Kinsui (2003, 205). He describes yakuwarigo as "... *a set of spoken language features (such as vocabulary, grammar, and phonetic characteristics) that can be psychologically associated with a particular character type. (Character's attributes include age, gender, occupation, social status, appearance, and personality.).*" The role of language has been researched by many scholars from different perspectives (Unzer-Schultz 2015, 2020; Dahlberg-Dodd 2018; Hiramoto 2010, and others). However, research on the usage of a dialect as a part of yakuwarigo is scarce.

According to Kinsui (2003, 57), the used dialect is more likely to be called a fake or fictional dialect. The dialect speakers are usually depicted as people living in the countryside, keeping the traditions, and mostly playing only marginal roles. They are usually older people or females, who are unsophisticated, and simple. SturtzSreetharan (2015, in Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, 72) states that a dialect speaker in the media is usually warm, sincere, and friendly. Tanaka (2012) examines different regions and describes the Kyushu dialect in the media as man-like, friendly, rough or violent, simple, unsophisticated, interesting, and emotional.

Based on these characteristics, I will analyze selected pieces of manga, where Kumamoto dialect speakers are represented. My hypothesis is that, along with changing attitudes toward the dialect in everyday life, the fictional world characters and their usage of dialect should also change. I will attempt to answer three questions. First, what is the typical role of dialect-speaking characters compared to previous research? Second, is there any stereotype regarding speech usage, such as typically male speech, using dialect only in private, etc.? Third, what kind of dialect expressions are used, and what is the most typical?

2 Data and methodology

I analyzed five mangas published in the twenty-first century, where is at least one character who spoke a dialect. The number of analyzed volumes was set as up to 10 books per manga. As the dialect distribution in these comics differs, the number of volumes was not set as equal to the manga with the fewest chapters.

Although most of them are written for an adult male audience, the story arc, setting, and characters differ. *Keroro Gunso* (KG), "Sgt. Frog," is set in Tokyo toward the end of

Table 1 Selected works for analysis

	Author	Publication year(s)	Number of volumes (Number of analyzed volumes)	Genre	Speech in dialect
Keroro Gunso	Yoshizaki Mine	1999–	32 (10)	Shonen manga	159
Pyu to Fuku! Jaguar	Usuta Kyosuke	2000–2010	20 (1)	Shonen manga	26
Hokago teibo nisshi	Kosaka Yasuyuki	2017	9 (7)	Seinen manga	807
Kyo doko san iku to	Kanakogi Tomori	2018	3 (2)	Seinen manga	447
Koharu Haru!	Arai Harumaki	2020	3	Seinen manga	1547

the twentieth century. Aliens from planet Keron, who are similar to frogs, try to invade planet Earth. A small troop arrives in Tokyo, but they are separated and defeated by the siblings Fuyuki and Natsumi Hinata. The troop leader, sergeant Keroro, begins to live in their home, and one by one other troop members are discovered (Tamama, Giroro, Kururu, and Dororo). All of them become friends and while pretending they still want to conquer the planet, they are actually enjoying themselves and trying to stay hidden from earthlings. The Kumamoto dialect is used by the aliens.

Pyu to Fuku! Jaguar (PTF), "Blow! Jaguar," is set in Tohoku and follows the story of two young boys who want to become professional musicians. The Kumamoto dialect is limited to one volume (12), where it is used by robots and a reporter in Kyushu.

Hokago teibo nisshi (HTN), "Diary of Our Days at the Breakwater," is set in the Kumamoto prefecture in Ashikita in contemporary Japan. A 15-year-old named Hina moves there and, somewhat accidentally, becomes a member of a fishing club at her high school. With three members of this club (Kuroiwa Yuuki, Oono Makoto, and Hodaka Natsumi) she fishes often and enjoys her time at the sea. The local dialect is mostly spoken by the leader of the club, Kuroiwa Yuuki, and minor characters, such as old fishermen, shop owners, etc.

Kyo doko san iku to (KDSIT), "Where Are You Going Today?," is also set in the Kumamoto prefecture. A young office worker, Tobeshita, is asked by his superior, Kamitsukasa to join her on her weekend car rides, and they visit both famous and obscure places in the prefecture. Both of them use the local dialect, as do most of the side characters.

Finally, *Koharu Haru!* (KH) is similar to HTN as both are set in the Kumamoto prefecture and follow the adventures of a 15-year-old girl in a high school club. In this manga, the main character, Oshimi Koharu, is a native Kumamoto dialect speaker, and is part of a cheerleading club. Most of the characters speak in the Kumamoto dialect.

The corpora contain 2,836 speeches from 112 different characters, sorted by the character's age, gender, setting, addressee, and text type. During corpus creation, several problems arose. First, a few speeches were unrecognizable, and one or more categories

could not be filled in. This data could, therefore, not be used in the later analysis. The second problem was the unequal representation of works in corpora as speeches in KG constitute 5.3% of the entire corpora, PTF 0.87%, HTN 27%, KDSIT 14.9%, and KH 51.8%. I am analyzing the data, not only as a whole but also for each work. Although there are many different characters, most of them are marginal, with very few lines to say. The personality traits are, therefore, analyzed only for the main characters listed at the beginning of the manga volume. By using this corpus, I can identify answers to the first two hypotheses about stereotyped characters and dialect usage.

Based on the data in the first corpus, I created another corpus containing 5,096 expressions in the dialect, analyzing only speech patterns. The speeches were divided and converted into concordances. The main aim was to determine which forms of dialect are used the most. First, all the occurrences were labeled as phonetical, morphological, or lexical features. A few were labeled as more than one. Thereafter, I categorized them more accurately. Phonetical features contain groups such as reduction, palatalization, and other different pronunciations. Morphological features include occurrences of the auxiliary verbs yoru and toru, unique forms of adjectives ending with -ka, unique forms of polite speech, potential forms of verbs, negative forms ending with -n, forms of the verb imperative, conjugation of ichidan verbs, and particles. I consider as the lexical type all words that are not used in standard Japanese, or whose meaning is different in the dialect. This contains groups such as nouns and auxiliary nouns, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and conjunctions.

Several problems appeared in this part. First, how to differentiate dialect from standard Japanese? Some words are mentioned in dialect dictionaries but are commonly used in colloquial or standard Japanese, such as the suffix "-ppoi." If it was used as standard, it was not considered a dialect in this corpus. If used colloquially and inspired by western dialects, those phenomena were included, such as the expression "-jan." Another problem was the categorization of particles, which could be both lexical and morphological. As those appearing in the corpus are mostly modifying speech in grammatical terms, they are labeled as morphological. A few lexical features are close to the phonetic ones because the words in the dialect and standard Japanese have the same origin. The group of lexical features includes both content and function words.

3 Stereotyped characters

As discussed above, the dialect-speaking characters were described as marginal, old, unsophisticated, and simple in previous works. Kyushu dialect speakers were also mentioned as emotional, tough, friendly, and manly.

First, I will analyze the age of those characters. I created four age categories: 1) school age and young adult, 2) working age, 3) retired age, and 4) unknown. As the age of a few characters is not known, I put in the first category everyone who clearly attends

Table 2   Named character's age by manga

Manga	School age	Working age	Retired age	Unknown
Keroro Gunso	7	1	2	9
Pyu to Fuku! Jaguar		3		1
Hokago teibo nisshi	5	8	2	
Kyo doko sani ku to?		12		1
Koharu Haru	44	12	3	2
Total	56	36	7	13
Percentage	50%	32.2%	6.25%	11.6%

**Figure 1**   Speaker's age in percentages by manga
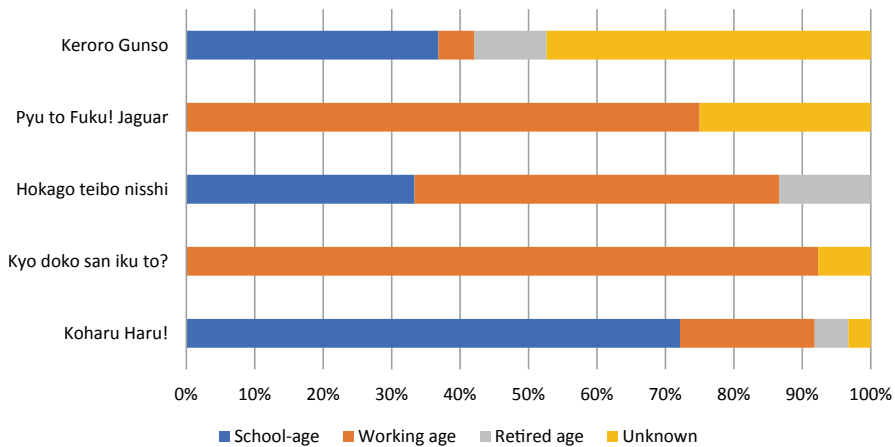
any type of school, who is young and is not yet clearly employed. Similarly, the third category includes all characters who are depicted as old, grandparents, or seemingly retired. The last category contains unrecognizable or non-human characters.

School-age characters represent 50% of the corpora; 6.25% of characters are old or retired. This demonstrates that the Kumamoto dialect speakers are no longer depicted as old—they represent the youth. There is also the visible influence of the number of characters and setting. There are more people of working age in KDSIT, which is set in an office, whereas middle school or high school mangas (KG, HTN, KH) have more school-age characters. Even in KDSIT, the main characters are young adults. The unknown age group in KG mostly comprises aliens. They are certainly not children because they are soldiers sent to conquer Earth; however, they behave more like children than adults.

Additionally, it is possible to determine how much the characters in these age groups

Table 3   Speaker's age by the number of speeches

Manga	School age	Working age	Retired age	Unknown
Keroro Gunso	14	1	4	139
Pyu to Fuku! Jaguar		24		2
Hokago teibo nisshi	731	49	6	7
Kyo doko san iku to		439		3
Koharu Haru	1359	138	35	15
Total	2104	651	45	166
	70.4%	21.8%	1.5%	5.5%

**Figure 2**   Speaker's age in percentages by number of speeches
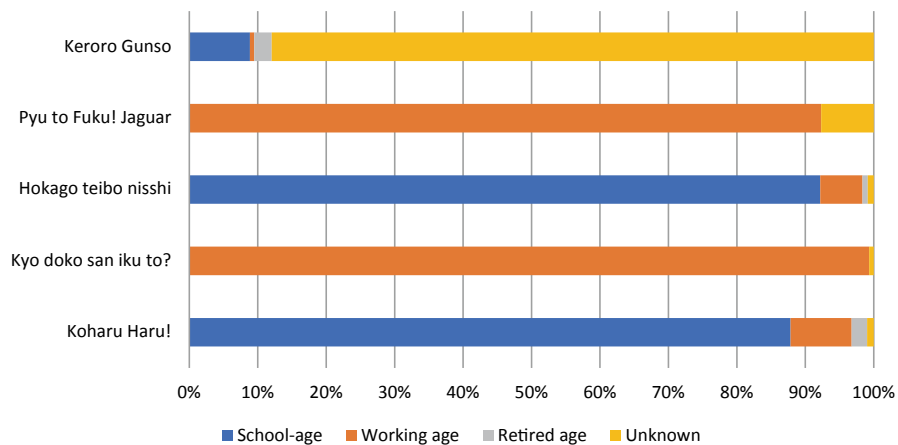
speak in the dialect. **Table 2** shows that working age people outnumber school age people in HTN. However, according to this table, working-age characters are mostly side or marginal characters, because there are more speeches by school-age characters.

Regarding gender, one would expect more male characters because the Kyushu dialect, generally, is considered more man-like; **Table 4** presents the gender of characters. In the corpora, it is not always possible to identify a speaker—for example, a voice in the crowd, etc. These are not counted as specific characters, and are, therefore, not listed in the table. Figures in brackets represent the number of main characters—that is, characters listed at the beginning of the volume—using the dialect by gender.

Gender plays an insignificant role when it comes to dialect-speaking characters. There is some influence of the genre, such as KG being for boys and having more male characters. This trend was visible in the mangas of the twentieth century as well, such as the Prince of Tennis—a shonen manga, including mostly boys, where some of them used the Kumamoto dialect. This trend is changing toward a more balanced representation,

Table 4   Character's gender by manga

Manga	Male	Female
Keroro Gunso	16 (6)	3 (3)
Pyu to Fuku! Jaguar	2	2
Hokago teibo nisshi	5	9 (5)
Kyo doko san iku to	9 (2)	4 (2)
Koharu Haru	24 (5)	37 (3)
Total	57	55
	50.8% (11.6%)	49.1% (11.6%)

Figure 3   Character's gender in percentages

■ Male main characters ■ Male other characters ▨ Female main characters ■ Female other characters
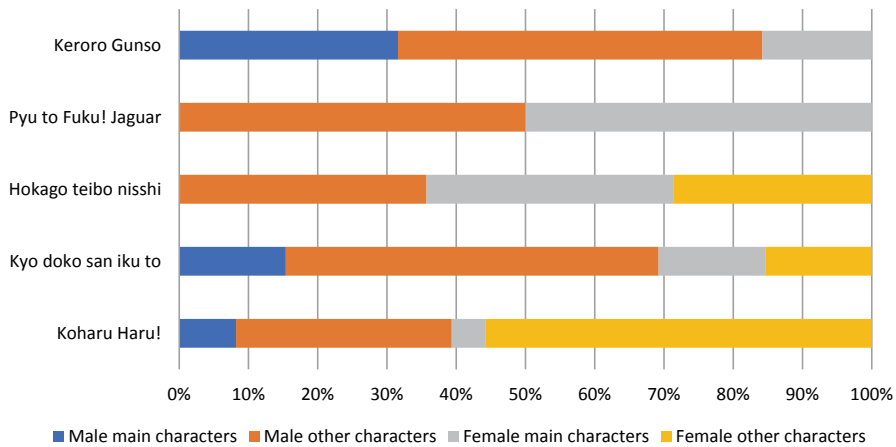
with even mangas for adult men, such as KH, including many female characters.

The role of those characters cannot be easily described. The dialect is used by the main, side, and marginal characters. The highest percentage (52.7%) is for marginal—usually nameless— characters. Additionally, their speeches do not represent most of the corpora speeches. Approximately everyone represents a good person with a few flaws—the mangas mostly belong in the "slice of life" category. Very few characters are villainous (3); however, there are characters with shades of both friend and foe—for example, the frogs in KG, or certain rivals during high school competitions.

A few characters do not use the dialect systematically; they merely repeat another character's dialogs, use specific words, or use speech patterns similar to colloquial speech. Eliminating these, I focused on 16 main characters and one side character, who is playing the main role in his chapter. If the trait can be used to describe the character, it is marked with ○; if it corresponds only partly, it is marked with △; and others are marked with ×.

Table 5   Characteristics connoted by the Kumamoto dialect

Character	Emotional	Manly	Rough, violent	Friendly	Unsophisticated, simple
Keroro	○	○	○	○	○
Giroro	○	○	○	×	○
Tamama	○	○	○	○	○
Dororo	○	○	○	×	○
Reporter	○	○	×	×	×
Kuroiwa	×	△	×	△	×
Kamitsukasa	×	×	×	○	×
Tobeshita	×	×	×	○	×
Yuge	○	×	×	○	×
Suga	×	×	×	○	×
Oshimi	×	△	×	○	×
Yoshida	×	○	×	○	×
Kosugi	×	○	×	○	×
Kogamaru	×	×	×	○	×
Etou	×	○	×	○	×
Asami	×	×	×	○	×
Hasegawa	×	○	×	○	×

Emotional traits are expressed when characters are emotional during their dialect speech; when they are without stress or excitement, they speak mostly standard or colloquial Japanese. The manly trait is based on their behavior like a man, and not only on their speech. Two female characters (Kuroiwa and Oshimi) behave less girly than expected, which is why they are assigned partially true symbols. Characters from series at the beginning of the 21st century have more of the traits described by Tanaka and Kinsui than others. Some characters of newer series also share some of these traits, but I believe this is more based on their characteristics and role in the story, and not on their usage of the dialect. Characters in recent mangas also act partly as promoters of the region, traditions, etc. Kuroiwa plays the role of a teacher, explaining fishing and characteristics fish-related things in the Kumamoto and Nagasaki prefectures. Oshimi and the rest of the cheerleading team from KH often participate in not only high school matches but also festivals and other events demonstrating life in Kyushu. Lastly, Kamitsukasa and Tobeshita show various places to visit in Kumamoto prefecture. Koharu, Hasegawa, Yuge, Tobeshita, and most of the frogs could also be described as eager. The main characters in KH are mostly hardworking. Most of the characters love fun and enjoy their life to the

fullest.

Based on the data, I conclude that Kumamoto dialect speakers, represented in the selected mangas, can be described as young people of school age or young adults of working age; they are friendly, eager, or tough to some extent. They do not play the role of bad guys, enemies, or rivals; if they do, they do so with friendly motives. Some characters may seem unsophisticated or simple, but this mostly applies to marginal older characters. The main or side characters support traditions and promote the prefecture or island itself, but they also enjoy modern life. Since most of the talk is carried out in everyday life situations, it should be no longer connoted with an emotional speech. The speakers are represented almost equally by all genders.

4 Speech usage

The aim was also to determine in which situations the dialect is used regardless of the emotional aspects of the speech. This is analyzed based on the location of the situation, whether the dialect is used in a private or public place, and the addressee.

The public or private character of the place where the speaker is may influence whether the speaker decides to use the dialect. This is because, generally, the dialect is mostly used privately. In this part, I do not consider whether the characters are alone in the location; rather, it is important to consider if their speech can also be heard by strangers. I therefore consider places such as a car, home, hotel room, and club, as private places. In contrast, public places include streets, restaurants, festival areas, parks, shops, etc. Surprisingly, 70.5% of the speeches are made in public places, and only 26.3% are made in private. The rest are unspecified.

The addressees were split into six groups: strangers (e.g., customers, viewers, and visitors), people who are higher in hierarchy (e.g., teachers, parents, and older people), people who are hierarchically at the same level (e.g., classmates, friends, and coworkers), people who are lower in hierarchy (e.g., younger people, subordinates, and children), soliloquies, and undistinguishable (people of different status or unknown addressees).

Table 6   Types of addressees

Strangers	55
Hierarchically higher	264
Hierarchically the same level	1279
Hierarchically lower	1028
Soliloquy	242
Undistinguishable	118

As expected, addressees are usually people on the same hierarchical level, or lower, which corresponds with the policy of not using dialect with a socially superior individual, or the crowd—this is supported by the speech of Tobeshita from KDSIT. In the first volume, he speaks with his superior Kamitsukasa using standard and colloquial Japanese; however, in his thoughts, there are many utterances in the dialect. Additionally, there are instances where the addressee is—or, apparently, is—socially superior. This corresponds with a few theories that dialect users do not distinguish between dialect and standard Japanese, but the proportion of dialect expression differs based on occasion and addressee—that is, with hierarchical superiors, the proportion could be smaller, but not necessarily zero (Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith, 2016: 98–105). The usage of the dialect can be perceived as less polite, but it is often balanced through usage of, for example, polite forms of verbs. Two influences on this result can be considered. First, the story and number of characters of a certain group are different; therefore, there are, in all probability, more occasions to use dialect toward the same level, or lower-positioned, characters. Second, although the hierarchy is evident, a few characters' relationships change over volumes, and enhanced familiarity increases dialect usage proportion—this is represented by the Tobeshita–Kamitsukasa relationship in later volumes.

There are several text categories in mangas. Unzer-Schultz (2015, 40) groups them as lines, thoughts, narration, onomatopoeia, background text, background lines/thoughts, comments, and titles. The Kumamoto dialect is most frequently used as lines; others are mostly thoughts and background lines/thoughts; there are four examples of dialect in narration; and no examples of onomatopoeia. Comments are usually used to explain unrecognizable dialect words; however, there are no comments in the dialect itself. The background text is mostly used as notes or text messages between characters. This result is expected because the narration or comments are usually in standard or colloquial Japanese.

5 Speech pattern

The hypothesis is that words and phrases in dialect would be reduced to intelligible small phonetic differences or morphological—mostly ending—occurrences. Many unique words—common in Kumamoto or on Kyushu Island—would necessarily lead to incomprehension and the reduced attractiveness of the title for readers.

Figure 4 shows that 64% of speeches contain morphological occurrences, whereas 12% are phonetical—this is contrary to the hypothesis as I assumed that lexical occurrences will be the least. A closer examination reveals that 55.7% of lexicum are conjunctions batten (shikashi, "however") and ken (kara, "because") and another 28% are pronouns (mostly demonstrative pronouns) and auxiliary nouns. Most of them are comprehensible even without the knowledge of the dialect, or there is little need to understand the speech itself. Nouns constitute 3%, adjectives 4.7%, verbs 5.5%, and
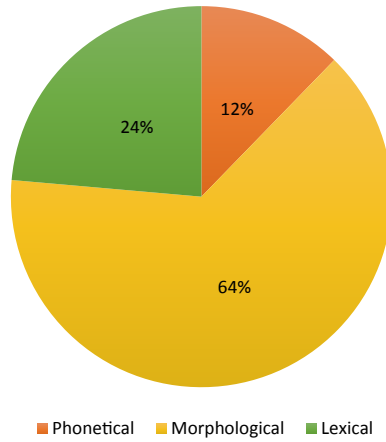
Figure 4   Graph of dialect forms

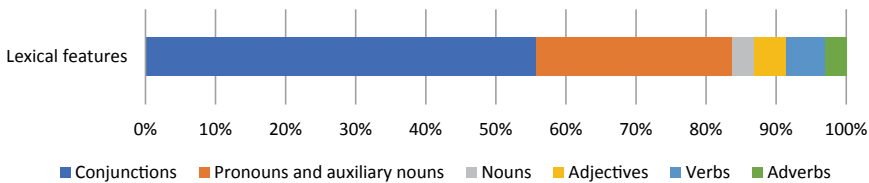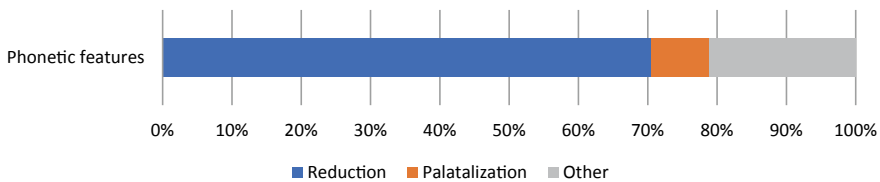**Figure 5**   Groups of lexical features

Figure 6   Groups of phonetic features

adverbs 3%. It is apparent that content words constitute the least.

Regarding phonetic occurrences, the most typical is reduction (71%); palatalization is 8.3%; and other types of different pronunciation are 21.3%. The words are, therefore, extremely similar to those in standard Japanese, and still comprehensible.

From the perspective of morphology, the most common are adjective forms ending with -ka instead of -i (yoka (ii), naka (nai), omoshiroka(omoshiroi), ...). Another common feature is special particles. These can be case particles (ba (o), no (ga), san (e)) or end particles (bai, tai, kai, to). End particles constitute 52.5% and case particles account for 46%, where it is usually the direct object marker ba (o in standard Japanese). Polite particles—I include those in the special group "polite forms and particles"—could also

Figure 7   Groups of morphological features
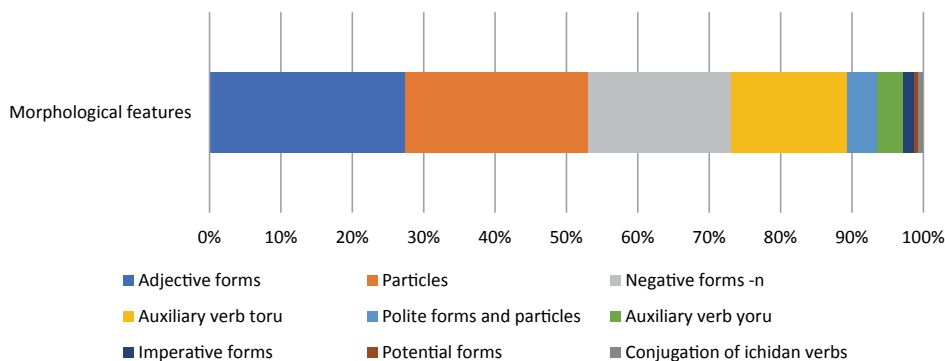
occur here because they appear as end particles and a few end particles could impact the politeness of the sentence.

Negative forms -n are common across western Japan, and therefore, appear more than other morphological features in works where the dialect is kept to the minimum, such as Keroro Gunso. Hence, the hypothesis is proven to be true. The content words are used the least; thus, the manga is comprehensible. To demonstrate that the characters are speaking the Kumamoto dialect, the speech includes typical—and intelligible—morphological, lexical, and phonetical features. A few of them are not unique to the Kumamoto prefecture; they belong to the whole of Kyushu Island or even the western dialect region. Therefore, these speeches could not be marked as genuine Kumamoto dialect, but as a fictional Kumamoto dialect, which the readers expect, and which is simplified for comprehension.

6 Conclusion

The attitude toward dialects in Japan has changed over the last few decades. In the previous century, they were not viewed as particularly prestigious and their usage in public spaces, such as schools or mass media, was scarce. This attitude has changed and dialects across Japan have gained prestige and are considered part of tradition. Consequently, their representation in mass media has also changed.

In this study, I analyzed selected mangas where the characters use the Kumamoto dialect, and attempted to prove certain hypotheses based on existing studies. I divided the analysis into three parts:

Stereotype of the dialect-speaking characters
Stereotype of the dialect usage
Stereotype of the used dialect

In the first part, the hypothesis was that dialect-speaking characters would be: a) marginal characters, mostly old people in rural areas living a traditional life, or b) enemies or rivals. In general, their personality was expected to be emotional, tough, friendly, and unsophisticated or simple; the characters were also supposed to be mostly men. This was proven to be wrong. Most characters were of either school-age or young working-age, represented by both males and females, and portrayed multiple roles: main characters, minor characters, rivals, friends, marginal characters, etc. In the works from the beginning of the twenty-first century, the personalities corresponded with the hypothesis; however, recent works showed certain changes. Although certain personality traits are typical, such as friendliness or manliness (male characters), the lack of sophistication, simplicity, or emotional usage is no longer true. The characters, in contrast, also promote their region, connect the modern and traditional, and are often eager and hardworking.

I assumed that the dialect would be mostly used in privacy (at home, in the car, etc.) and in intimate circles (family, friends, etc.) or with hierarchically lower or same class of characters. The dialect in the selected mangas was used the most in public places, such as streets, shops, schools, etc. As it was also used with hierarchically lower characters or those on the same level, the degree of privacy was retained. The dialect was used with hierarchically superior characters also (teachers, supervisors, etc.), but the number of dialect words was limited, and politeness was variously expressed. Additionally, familiarity, even with teachers or supervisors, impacted the extent of dialect usage.

The last hypothesis argued that expressions in the dialect would not use many content words and would instead, by means of morphological or phonetic features, make the speeches sound local. This is valid because most expressions used different morphology, grammatical words, or small phonetic changes. Although the setting is the Kumamoto prefecture, and the speakers mostly use the Kumamoto dialect, the used features are common, not only in this area but also in other parts of the Kyushu region—and even across Western Japan. The use of unique words or expressions is scarce and the authors, occasionally, use comments to explain the meaning. I, therefore, conclude that the fictional Kumamoto dialect has mostly morphological features, such as forms of adjectives, negative forms –n, usage of auxiliary verbs, and different case and end particles. Phonetic features, such as reduction or palatalization, also make the speech more local and colloquial. This fictional dialect does not contain many content words and their usage is limited. These speeches are, therefore, comprehensible and complete the region's image. Thus, I agree with Kinsui's statement that the dialect used in media is fictional—it does not represent the actual dialect.

I demonstrated that although the usage of the Kumamoto dialect and its used forms remains similar to those used in previous works, the typical role of the dialect-speaking character has changed since the beginning of the twenty-first century. I believe that this trend would continue in the future. The used corpus was limited; expanding it may reveal new trends and tendencies.

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