

Stickers on the Rear of Vehicles as Linguistic Landscapes : Analysis from a Stylistic Point of View

| | |
|-------|--|
| メタデータ | 言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2023-04-07 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Nishijima, Yoshinori, 西嶋, 義憲 メールアドレス: 所属: |
| URL | https://doi.org/10.24517/00069145 |

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 International License.



Stickers on the Rear of Vehicles as Linguistic Landscapes: Analysis from a Stylistic Point of View¹⁾

Yoshinori NISHIJIMA

Abstract

In Japan, a variety of signs installed in public and commercial facilities is found throughout cities to provide specific textual information to citizens, forming the linguistic landscape of Japanese society. However, textual information is seen not only on these fixed signs but also on moving vehicles in the form of car stickers. To clarify the linguistic landscape in Japan as a whole, stickers on cars should also be included in such research. However, some of them, such as *akachan-ga notte masu* [‘baby is on board’], are too vague to be regarded as signs, as their intentions cannot be immediately understood. Car stickers do not always appear to have a clear intention, even though they are supposed to provide certain information to drivers of following vehicles. This study aims to analyze the linguistic expressions of car stickers from a stylistic point of view. This research is expected to contribute to the elucidation of the Japanese communication style, which requires interpretation by the interlocutors, through car stickers as an aspect of the linguistic landscape in Japan.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, car sticker, style, public sign, playfulness

1. Introduction

Linguistic landscapes are understood as the linguistic expressions printed on public and commercial signs that are installed in a particular area or district and naturally come into view to passersby (cf. Landry & Bourhis, 1997). However, linguistic landscapes cannot be restricted to fixed signs installed in public spaces, for textual information can be found in a variety of places in Japan, and these as a whole can be said to form the linguistic landscape there. For example, stickers on mobile vehicles as a form of public signs are also considered an important component of the linguistic landscape of Japanese society. If we now turn our attention to another country, for example, Germany, such stickers on cars are rarely seen in German society. If this is the case, then, in this sense, we can focus on car stickers as part of the Japanese linguistic landscape. Furthermore, the linguistic expressions printed on them and the way in which information is presented through them may be characterized as a communication style reflecting the Japanese cultural background. The stylistic features here refer to a set of expressions with vocabulary, grammar, contents, and functions specific to the stickers. The aim of this study is fourfold:

- (1) to regard stickers on mobile vehicles (hereafter referred to as “car stickers”) as a part of linguistic landscapes, i.e., to show the diversity of linguistic landscapes in Japanese society by focusing on car stickers;
- (2) to analyze, from a stylistic point of view, what is being conveyed and how and with what intention, based on the expressions on the car stickers;
- (3) to show that the messages of car stickers confirm the characteristics of communication in Japanese because they require active interpretation by the readers; and
- (4) to point out that certain car stickers can reflect driving habits in Japanese car society.

2. Description of the Problem

The study of linguistic landscapes in Japan has developed from its origins in economic linguistics (Inoue, 2000; 2011). Until now, the focus has mainly been on fixed signs installed in public spaces, and researchers have analyzed what information is written on them and in what language from the perspective of clarifying the characteristics of the area (Shoji et al., 2009). Kurabayashi (2020) considers public signs from a stylistic perspective and attempts to identify the distinctive styles of expression found on them. Studies of linguistic landscapes found in public spaces have in any case focused on fixed signs in cities, such as the following:



Figure 1 Sign on a road in Germany



Figure 2 Multiple signs in a station in Japan



Figure 3 Sign written in two languages



Figure 4 Sign written in four languages with a pictogram

Figure 1 shows an image of a sign on a German road that reads *Hunde sind an der Leine zu führen* [‘dogs must be kept on a lead’]. The signs in Figure 2 say *kakekomi joosha-wa kikendesukara oyamekudasai* [‘please do not rush into the car, as it is

dangerous’], which is multiply attached on the stair to a platform in Japan. These are monolingual signs (in Japanese). Figure 3 shows a sign written in two languages (Japanese and English): *tachiiri kinshi* [‘entrance forbidden’] and *KEEP OUT*. Figure 4 is a sign written in four languages (Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean) with a pictogram. These signs are classified as multilingual signs. These four-language type signs are becoming standard in Japanese cities, especially in airports and railroad stations.²⁾

However, the textual information found in the city is not limited to fixed signs. There is also much other textual information in the city. For example, textual information can also be found on vehicles driving through the city, as in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Car-stickers

Let us consider the two signs framed in squares in the images in Figure 5 and explain them as repeated in Figures 6 and 7 below.



Figure 6 Baby sign



Figure 7 Dashcam sign

Figures 6 and 7 say *akachan-ga nottemasu* [‘baby is on board’] and *doraibu rekoodaa rokugachuu* [‘dashcam is just recording’], respectively. Both of these stickers describe the situation of the vehicle in question, but it is difficult to understand what they are intended to convey to those who see them. This is discussed in a later section, so we will not go any further into this issue here.

Such textual information may be characteristic of a particular society. If this is the case, the textual information on such moving vehicles also constitutes part of the linguistic landscape of the society, and unless this is included in the linguistic landscape research, it is not possible to grasp the whole picture of the linguistic landscape found in that society. Therefore, this study focuses on the stickers attached to cars in the city and attempts to analyze them from the perspective of style, regarding whether or not unique linguistic expressions can be found on them.

To begin with, why do people in Japanese society put stickers on their cars? Taking this question as a starting point, this study attempts to elucidate the style of stickers by expanding the scope of conventional linguistic landscape research and considering how and what information is transmitted from the perspective of style (cf. Nishijima, 2018).

In this study, the following four research questions (RQs) are set:

(RQ 1) In Japanese society, car stickers such as *akachan-ga nottemasu* [‘baby is on board’] are often observed. However, in other countries, e.g., Germany, such stickers are basically non-existent, not even a *shoshinsha maaku* [‘beginner mark’].³⁾ What can be assumed to be the reason for this?

(RQ 2) What features of the linguistic expressions of stickers characterize them as styles? Do they differ from other linguistic landscapes such as public signs?

(RQ 3) Some linguistic expressions on stickers are clear in their intent, while others are not. Behind such stickers with unclear intentions, is there a demand for “consideration” of others, as exemplified by the *shoshinsha maaku* [‘beginner mark’]?

(RQ 4) However, some stickers cannot be explained by a “consideration” demand for others. Why do they display the driver’s own hobbies and preferences? What are they trying to communicate by doing so?

3. Methodologies

3.1. Materials

When looking at the rear of a vehicle, drivers of following vehicles have a wide range of information in their field of vision. For example, in addition to the vehicle manufacturer's name, logo, model name, and vehicle rating grade, they can also see the beginner's mark, the elderly mark, the disabled mark, ribbon stickers, vehicle storage marks, vehicles meeting fuel efficiency standards, and other stickers. However, the target of this study is not these types of stickers, but stickers with mainly Japanese expressions printed on them, such as *akachan-ga notte masu* ['baby is on board'] or *doraiburekoodaa satsueichuu* ['drive cam is just recording'], which are voluntarily attached by drivers.

The stickers to be analyzed were those attached to the rears of the vehicles that the author saw when driving. The linguistic information on these stickers was collected by taking notes or pictures (images such as illustrations depicted on the stickers are not included in the analysis of this study). As such, this study is not an exhaustive survey, but is positioned as a preliminary research report for a full-scale and systematic survey in the future.

3.2. Method of analysis

To identify the stylistic features of the linguistic expressions of stickers, the analysis is conducted from three perspectives: Expressive forms, semantic contents, and functions. The display area of car stickers is small. Therefore, the linguistic expressions on them are subject to space constraints. However, the information provided must be conveyed precisely in that small space. If this is the case, car stickers are likely to use sticker-specific language expressions as a kind of register. Linguistic expressions belonging to a particular register have a certain vocabulary and grammatical form, which convey a certain semantic content. They are then related to functions in that they are uttered on specific occasions and thus urge some action on the part of the reader. Thus, as linguistic expressions are at least related to

a certain form of expression (vocabulary and grammar), a certain semantic content, and a certain function, and the combination of these is considered to form the characteristics, or style, of linguistic expressions, the linguistic expressions of car stickers will also be analyzed from these three perspectives.

4. Results and Discussion

Some of the data that could be collected are presented below.

Akachan-ga notte masu [‘baby is on board’], *Baby in car*, *Baby on board*,⁴⁾ *ninpu-ga notte masu* [‘pregnant woman is on board.’], *tokidoki mago-o nosetemasu* [‘sometimes I carry my grandchild on board’], *jijii-ga untenchuu* [‘old man is just driving’], *koohoo rokugachuu. doraiburekooda toosaichuu* [‘rear recording is in progress. dashcam is equipped’], *Now on recording, seimitsukikai unpanchuu* [‘I am just transporting precision machinery’], *sokudoyokuseisoochi tsuki* [‘speed suppression device equipped’], *sangyoohaikibutsu unpansha*⁵⁾ [‘industrial waste transporting vehicle’], *hooteisokudo-o mamotteimasu* [‘I am obeying the legal speed limit’], *anzenuntensengensha* [‘safe driving declaration vehicle’], *yukkuri untenshiteimasu* [‘I am driving slowly’], *ochikakudemo doozo* [‘available even if your destination is close by’], *osaki-ni doozo. sokudoyokuseisoochi souchakusha* [‘after you. vehicle equipped with speed suppression device’], *shakankyori chuui* [‘be careful about the distance between vehicles’], *kaado ok* [‘credit card accepted’], *ken’nai zaijuu*⁶⁾ [‘I am living in the prefecture’], *ie-ni neko-ga imasu* [‘I have a cat at home’], *suiyoo doodeshoo*⁷⁾ [‘how about Wednesday’, i.e., the name of a TV-program], *heta-desu-ga nani-ka* [‘I’m not good at it, but so what?’], *doraneke* [pun on *dorareko*, abbreviation of ‘drive recorder’; *doraneke* means ‘stray cat’], etc.

4.1. Forms of Expressions

The formalities of sticker expressions can first be broadly divided into two categories according to the presence or absence of predicates: Predicate sentences and non-predicate sentences. Predicate sentences are further divided into three types according to the type of sentence (or sentence form): “Declaratives,” “interrogatives,” and “imperatives,” but as there are no “imperatives” in the data at hand, they are omitted here. Non-predicative sentences are sentences without predicates, and were classified further into four types based on the sentence-final word types in the data at hand: “Noun-stop sentences,” “adverbial-stop sentences,” “English-noun-stop sentences” and “combined sentences.” The “noun-stop sentences” are sentences ending in nouns, while “adverbial-stop sentences” end in adverbs such as “please.” An “English-noun-stop sentence” would normally be classified as an “English clause” if it consisted of English words, even if it was not grammatically correct, but here it is classified as a noun sentence as a kind of cliché. Sentences consisting of combinations of these four non-predicate sentences were considered “compound sentences.”

As mentioned above, the display area of a sticker is not large. Since it includes information that will generally only be visible for a short time, concise and straightforward expressions will be chosen. Thus, a sentence consisting of a noun and ending in a noun, such as *anzenunten sengensha* [‘safe driving declaration vehicle’], fits the conditions. It is also easy to understand that polite forms, such as “*masu*” and “*deshoo*” in *akachan-ga nottemasu* and *suiyoo doodeshoo*, are chosen because the recipient of the information is most likely a stranger. The use of the formulation *ochikakudemo doozo* [‘available even if your destination is close by’] is also reasonable from the point of view of providing straightforward information. English-language stickers such as *Baby in Car* are frequently seen, even if this is an unnatural expression in English. This expression has the same semantic information as *akachan-ga nottemasu* [‘baby is on board’], but not choosing to use it and instead putting on a sticker with the English expression can be interpreted as a kind of fashion or as having the symbolic function of showing off that the driver has English

language skills.

Table 1 Classification of Expression Forms

| With or without predicate | Sentence Type | Examples |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Predicate sentence | Declarative sentence | <i>akachan-ga notteimasu</i> ['baby is on board'], <i>tokidoki mago-o nosetemasu</i> ['sometimes I carry my grandchild on board'], <i>yukkuri untenshiteimasu</i> ['I am driving slowly'], <i>hotei sokudo-o mamotteimasu</i> ['I am observing the legal speed limit'], <i>ie-ni neko-ga imasu</i> ['I have a cat at home'], etc. |
| | Interrogative sentence | <i>hetakuso-desuga nanika?</i> ['I'm not good at it, but so what?'] |
| Non-predicate sentence | Noun stop sentence | <i>anzen'uten sengensha</i> ['safe driving declaration car'], <i>seimitsu kikai unpanchuu</i> ['I am just transporting precision machinery'], <i>sokudoyokuseisoochi tsuki</i> ['speed suppression device equipped'], <i>sangyoo haikibutsu unpansha</i> ['industrial waste transporting vehicle'], <i>kaado ok</i> ['credit cards accepted'], <i>suiyoo doodeshoo</i> ['how about Wednesday' (the name of a TV-program)], etc. |
| | Adverbial stop sentence | <i>ochikakudemo doozo</i> ['available even if your destination is close by'] |
| | English noun stop sentence | <i>Baby on board</i> , <i>Now on recording</i> , etc. |
| | Combined sentence | <i>osaki-ni doozo. sokudo yokusei soochitsuki</i> ['after you. speed suppression device equipped'] |

4.2. Semantic Contents

The semantic contents can be classified into seven categories depending on the object referred to in the sticker: Presence of passengers (objects), objects to be carried, presence of vehicle-mounted equipment, operational status of vehicle-mounted equipment, driver attributes or driving attitude statements, attributes of vehicles, driver's hobbies and preferences, and instructions for following vehicles.

For passengers of a passenger car other than the driver, the subject is referred to in the form *XX-ga notteimasu* ['XX is on board']. Similarly, in vehicles for transport, such as trucks, reference may be made to the contents being transported on the job in the form *XX unpanchuu* ['I am transporting XX']. Such stickers may also refer to the fact that a specific device is attached to the vehicle by using expressions such as *XX tsuki* ['XX equipped'] or *XX toosaisha* ['vehicle equipped with XX']. Furthermore,

there are also stickers that state that the installed equipment is in operation, such as *XX rokugachuu* [‘XX is just recording’].

Table 2 Classification of Semantic Contents

| Mentioned Contents | Examples |
|---|--|
| Passengers (objects) | <i>akachan</i> [‘baby’], <i>ninpu</i> [‘pregnant woman’], <i>mago</i> [‘grandchild’], etc. |
| Transported goods | <i>sangyoo haikibutsu</i> [‘industrial waste’] |
| Vehicle-mounted equipment | <i>sokudo yokusei soochi</i> [‘speed suppression device’], <i>doraibu rekoodaa</i> [‘dashcam’], etc. |
| Working condition of vehicle-mounted equipment | <i>rokugachuu</i> [‘just recording’], etc. |
| Attributes and attitudes of drivers | <i>jijii</i> [‘old man’], <i>hootei sokudo-o mamotteimasu</i> [‘I am observing the legal speed limit’], etc. |
| Attributes of vehicles | <i>Sokudoyokuseisoochi tsuki</i> [‘speed suppression device equipped’], <i>doraiburekoodaa toosaisha</i> [vehicle equipped with dashcam], etc. |
| Driver’s residence, hobbies | <i>ken’nai zaijuu</i> [‘I am living in the prefecture’], <i>ie-ni neko-ga imasu</i> [‘I have a cat at home’], <i>suiyoo doodeshoo</i> [‘how about Wednesday’ (the name of a TV-program)], etc. |
| Instructions to following vehicles (e.g., warnings and recommendations) | <i>shakankyori chuui</i> [‘be careful about the distance between vehicles’], <i>osaki-ni doozo. sokudo yokusei soochi tsuki</i> [‘after you. speed suppression device equipped’], etc. |

As for the drivers themselves, the sociodemographic attributes of the driver may be clearly (and in some cases ridiculously or in a self-mocking way) stated in the form of “XX is driving” like *jijii-ga untenshiteimasu* [‘old man is driving’]. There are also stickers that state the driver’s attitude or policy statement that they are driving according to the rules, such as *hooteisokudo-o mamotteimasu* [‘I am observing the legal speed limit’]. All of these express aspects related to the vehicle being driven or the driver’s mobility, but there are also stickers that do not seem to be directly related to traffic or operation, such as *ie-ni neko-ga imasu* [‘I have a cat at home’]. This can be seen as an expression of the driver’s hobbies and preferences. Others can also be seen with the content of a warning or recommendation to following vehicles.

4.3. Functions

There are seven types of function: Caution, recommendation, explanation of

the situation, statement of driving attitude, self-promotion, statement of a sense of belonging (identity), and making fun (playfulness).

Table 3 Classification of Functions

| Functions | Examples |
|--|---|
| Caution | <i>shakankyori chuui</i> ['be careful about the distance between vehicles'], etc. |
| Recommendation | <i>osaki-ni doozo. sokudo yokusei soochisoochakusha</i> ['after you, please. vehicle equipped with speed suppression device'] |
| Explanation of the situation | <i>akachan-ga nottemasu</i> ['baby is on board'] |
| Statement of driving attitude | <i>hooteisokudo-o mamotteimasu</i> ['I am obeying the legal speed limit'], <i>anzenunten sengensha</i> ['safe driving declaration vehicle'], <i>hokooshahogo-notame u-sasetsuji oodanhodoo temae-de saijokoo ichijiteishi shimasu</i> ['for pedestrian protection, I slow down and pause before the pedestrian crossing when turning right and left'] |
| Self-promotion | <i>uchi-ni neko-ga imasu</i> ['I have a cat at home'], <i>ken'nai zaijuu</i> ['I live in the prefecture'] |
| Statement of sense of belonging (identity) | <i>Suiyoo doodeshoo</i> ['how about Wednesday' (the name of a TV-program)] |
| Making fun (playfulness) | <i>doraneko</i> [pun for 'drive recorder'], <i>jijii-ga nottemasu</i> ['old person is driving'] |

As stickers are often selected from a range of commercially available products and intentionally affixed to the rear of a vehicle, they are expected to have the purpose of conveying some message to the following vehicle. For example, a sticker that reads *shakankyori chuui* ['be careful about the distance between vehicles'] can easily be understood from the expression printed on it as a warning or caution to the following vehicle to keep a safe distance from the vehicle. However, very few stickers clearly state the purpose or intention in the wording itself. Many stickers, as we have seen in the above section, merely present a situation in which they express information about the passengers, the equipment attached to the vehicle, their working condition, the goods being carried, the driver's social attributes, driving attitude or fun, etc. It is not always easy to read the intention from such expressions, because the purpose or intention is not clearly expressed in the presentation of information only. In some cases, for example, the information is written but the content is not directly related to the operation of the vehicle, such as *ie-ni neko-ga imasu* ['I have a cat at home'].

4.4. Classification of Stickers

Based on the above, the collected sticker expressions can be divided into two main categories: Those in which the intention of the sticker can be clearly seen and those in which the intention of the sticker is not so clear. Furthermore, among those whose intentions are not clear, some do not appear to be directly related to driving a vehicle on public roads. This section discusses four types of stickers according to the degree of clarity of their intentions and whether or not they are related to driving on public roads: “purpose-first,” “information-first,” “self-promoting,” and “fun-first” stickers. Purpose-first stickers clearly express the driver’s intention or purpose, for example, *shakankyori chuui* [‘be careful about the distance between vehicles’]. An information-first type simply provides specific information without the driver clearly stating its purpose, for example, *akachan-ga notteimasu* [‘baby is on board’]. This is expected to be interpreted by subsequent drivers as to its intention. Self-promotional stickers are stickers that present information not directly related to driving a car on public roads, e.g., *ie-ni neko-ga imasu* [‘I have a cat at home’], or *suiyoo doodeshoo* [‘how about Wednesday’ (the name of a TV-program)], but which appeal to the driver’s hobbies and personal taste. Fun-first stickers also convey information not directly related to traffic affairs, such as *hetadesga nanika?* [‘I’m not good at it, what about it?], which expresses a sense of fun or self-mockery playfully. The following table shows the data collected.

Table 4 Classification of Stickers

| Types | Examples | Functions |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Purpose-first type | <i>osakini doozo. sokudo yokusei soochitsuki, shakankyori chuui, etc.</i> | recommendations, cautions |
| Information-first type | <i>akachan-ga notteimasu, doraburekoodaa rokugachuu, anzenunten sengensha, seimitsukikai unpansha, hooteisokudo-o mamotteimasu, etc.</i> | providing traffic-related information |
| Self-promotion type | <i>ie-ni neko-ga imasu, suiyoo doodeshoo, ken'nai zaijuu, etc.</i> | providing non-traffic-related information |
| Fun-first type | <i>hetadesga nanika?</i> | amusing |

Quantitative research has not yet been conducted, so it is not possible to provide

definitive figures, but the impression is that the majority of stickers seen on a daily basis seem to be of the information-first type. If this is the case, then subsequent drivers who see them are expected to interpret the intentions of the sender based solely on the information presented. This mode of communication is often observed in Japanese discourse. This tendency has been characterized by Hinds (1987) as reader/listener-responsible language in terms of discourse classification.

Hinds (1987) states that English is classified as a writer/speaker-responsible language and Japanese as a listener (reader)-responsible language in terms of where the responsibility for understanding discourse lies. This is easy to understand if we consider, for example, typical statements uttered in the same situation. For example, if a student is speaking in a classroom and the speaker's voice is too quiet to be heard, the English speaker would say "Speak more loudly please," while the Japanese speaker would say *kikoemasen* ['I can't hear you']. English makes its intentions clear to the listener and actively encourages them to take action, whereas Japanese only presents the situation and leaves the interpretation of its intentions to the listener. In order for the Japanese statement *kikoemasen* ['I can't hear you'] in this example to be read as a request to "speak louder," the listener needs to fill in the logical blanks in between. In this example, the speaker dares to express to the listener a situation in which he or she "cannot hear." The listener interprets this statement as revealing that the situation is unfavorable for the speaker. The listener then infers that the speaker is suggesting that the undesirable situation should be resolved, and considers how to resolve it. As a result, the listener realizes that it can be resolved by "speaking louder" and interprets this as a request to speak louder. If only certain information is provided but the intention of the utterance is not clarified, a framework for interpreting it is needed (cf. Nishijima, 2010: 57).

4.5. Interpretation of "information-first" stickers

Let us now consider the interpretation of car stickers. The intention of the sticker is based on the assumption that the driver is thereby trying to communicate some intention to the following driver. If the intention is clear, there is no problem, but

if it is unclear, the following vehicle's driver will attempt to interpret the intention based on the information on the sticker. From the perspective that the original role of a sticker is to convey some information or intent in a straightforward manner to following drivers, such unclear wording deviates from the original role of the sticker, i.e., the "style." How, for example, could the intention of an *akachan-ga nottemasu* ['baby is on board'] sticker be interpreted?⁸⁾ When several of the author's colleagues were asked how they would interpret this sticker, many said they were trying to convey the intention of "driving slowly." However, how can one explain the interpretation that stating that the driver is carrying a baby on board means that he or she is going to run slowly? Even if a baby is carried, it is compulsory to restrain the body in a baby seat or a car seat. If this is the case, then carrying a baby is not a reason to drive slowly.⁹⁾ Nevertheless, people who see this sticker often take the interpretation that the driver is declaring that he or she is driving slowly. Why is this? Here, we would like to illustrate the validity of this interpretation by contrasting it with German society.

As already mentioned, there are basically no car stickers like the ones seen above in Germany. There is no such thing as a *shoshinsha maaku* ['beginner mark'] sticker.¹⁰⁾ Furthermore, as far as the author knows, there are no stickers that say, for example, *akachan-ga nottemasu* ['baby is on board'] or *seimitsukikai unpanchuu* ['I am just transporting precision machinery'], or even *hooteisokudo-o mamotteimasu* ['I am observing the legal speed limit']. No matter what kind of person is driving, whether a novice, elderly or otherwise, whether a baby or pregnant woman is in the car, or whether precision machinery or industrial waste is being transported, all drivers are expected to follow the relevant traffic rules on public roads, whatever the circumstances. Therefore, there is no need to put up a sticker to appeal for something. In other words, it is all about performing driving duties in accordance with the code of conduct of common traffic rules, nothing more and nothing less. Concerning behavior by the rules, it is easy to understand if we consider, for example, a football match. If a novice player is playing, he himself/she herself will not demand any consideration from the players around him/her, nor will the players

around him/her show any consideration for him/her. Driving on public roads is similar: Once on a public road, everyone drives in compliance with the same traffic rules. This should be the “norm.” As long as you follow the rules, there is no point in putting up a sticker as a source of information other than that.

However, in Japanese society, as in Germany, people should be expected to drive in accordance with traffic rules on public roads, but there are drivers who put stickers on their cars. It can be assumed that they are trying to communicate something by putting the sticker on. Normally, there would be no need to state that they are carrying a baby, but they dare to put such a sticker on that may suggest that they are “driving slowly.” What kind of interpretative framework can be assumed for such an interpretation to be valid?

This can be explained by considering the driving practices of Japanese drivers on public roads. Although compliance with the law is required on Japanese public roads, the law seems to take precedence over the judgment of the traffic situation at the scene.¹¹⁾ For example, suppose you are driving on a national road with a 40 km/h speed limit. Rarely do drivers drive there at the designated speed limit. Most of the time, the vehicle is traveling at around 50 km/h, approximately 10 km/h faster. It can even be said that driving without observing the designated speed is the norm. This is paradoxically suggested by the presence of stickers saying *hooteisokudo-o mamotteimasu* [‘I am observing the legal speed limit’]. The reason why they dare to declare that they drive at the specified speed can be assumed to be because it is common for them not to do so. There are even *anzenunten sengensha* [‘safe driving declaration vehicle’] stickers. This too seems to be an expression that assumes that the vehicle is not complying with traffic laws, such as not observing the legal speed limit, and in that sense is driving in an unsafe manner. It is also possible that by putting up such stickers, the transport companies are trying to improve their image. Here is another example, as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8 Obeying traffic laws sign

The sticker on the left in Figure 8 reads *hokooshahogo-notame u-sasetsuji oodanhodoo temae-de saijokoo ichijiteishi shimasu* [‘for pedestrian protection, I slow down and pause before the pedestrian crossing when turning right and left’]. This is posted by one transport company and says that the driver of this car is obeying traffic laws. It can be said to be aimed at improving the company’s image through compliance.¹²⁾

When considered in this way, it can be interpreted as an attempt to use the sticker to suggest driving slowly and against the flow of vehicles by presenting various reasons for involvement, and to get drivers around them to understand such driving. The idea of the “demand for consideration of the person concerned” represented by the *shoshinsha maaku* [‘beginner mark’] can be discerned in this.

5. Conclusions

Comparisons with German society, where all traffic rules are to be observed on public roads, show that many Japanese drivers do not always observe speed limits, etc., and act according to their subjective interpretation of the speed limits and obligations set by law, depending on the situation. It is possible that they are coping with such practices by applying various stickers to their behavior. A typical example of this can be seen in the demand for consideration of the person concerned, as seen in the *shoshinsha maaku* [‘beginner mark’]. Japanese communication practices and conventions on public roads are reflected in sticker behavior. It is also suggested that the expressive behavior with stickers may reflect the expressive structure of Japanese discourse, which is classified as a language of “reader/listener-responsibility” according to Hinds (1987) (answers to RQ 1 – 3). It was also inferred that behind the stickers with content not directly related to the operation of the car, there is a driver’s self-promotional psychology, including a sense of fun and a statement of solidarity with others (the car) (answer to RQ 4).

The stickers analyzed in this study are not exhaustive, as they were recorded as they happened to be seen while driving. A systematic collection method needs to

be devised and material collected accordingly to validate this study's results. In addition, comparisons have only been made for Germany, so comparisons with the situation in other countries will be an issue for future research. Furthermore, to clarify the intention, function, and role of the sticker, it is necessary to investigate the sticker from two perspectives: the information sender (driver) who applies the sticker and the information receiver (subsequent driver) who sees it. Specifically, if it is a sticker on a transport vehicle or a sales vehicle, the company's management, etc., the intention of the information provider who instructs the sticker to be affixed is also relevant. Research from this perspective is also required.

Furthermore, sticker readers are not limited to drivers of following vehicles. For example, stickers may be seen on vehicles parked in supermarkets or other shops. Therefore, the reader may not necessarily be the driver of a following vehicle, but rather a third party such as a passer-by. In such cases, the interpretation of sticker information may differ. This point should also be investigated.


Car stickers may be related to the badges *kenshuuchuu* ['I am just in training'] and *arubaito* ['I work part-time'] that shopkeepers wear on their chests at supermarket checkouts, for example (cf. Nishijima, 2022b). This is because they have in common the desire for "consideration" (generosity) from customers, which could also be said to constitute the Japanese linguistic landscape. This comparison will be the subject of a future study.

Notes

- 1) The starting point for this paper is the manuscript of an oral presentation entitled "gengoikeikan-toshiteno kuruma-no sutekkaa: doraibaa-wa nani-o tsutaeyoo-to shiteirunoka [Car stickers as linguistic landscape: What are drivers trying to communicate?]" at the 18th Annual Conference of the International Association of Urban Language Studies held at Nanjing University, China, and online, on 28. August 2021. This paper is a revised English version of Nishijima (2022a), written based on the manuscript of that presentation, with a further analysis of the "playfulness" function of car stickers by Nishijima (2022c). This series of studies was partly supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP17K02719.
- 2) In 2014, the Tourism Agency of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism published *The Guidelines for Improving and Strengthening Multilingual Support for the*

Realisation of a Tourism Nation (<https://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001029742.pdf>), and various departments are working on the concrete implementation of the Guidelines.

Cf. <https://www.sangyo-rodo.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/tourism/signs/>

- 3) The so-called *shoshinsha maaku*, or *shoshin utensha hyooshiki* [‘novice driver sign’] refers to the yellow and green sign as shown in the following image: . This is the typical attached mark that is often seen, but there are three other signs (marks): the sign for elderly drivers, the sign for the hearing impaired and the sign for the physically impaired.
Cf. <https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/kotsu/mark/mark.html>
- 4) Some are written in English. However, sometimes unnatural expressions can be found in English.
- 5) The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT) and the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) require the labelling of vehicles with *sokudoyokuseisoochi tsuki* [speed suppression device equipped] and *sangyoohaikibutsu unpansha* [industrial waste transporting vehicle], respectively (see MLIT and MOE websites).
- 6) *Ken'nai zaijuu* [‘I am living in the prefecture’] has been affixed against the backdrop of the new corona disaster since 2020. For example, if the vehicle being driven has a number plate from Tokyo or Osaka, where a large number of new corona cases have occurred, this alone may cause the vehicle to be avoided for fear of possible infection. This is thought to be a measure to avoid such treatment.
- 7) This is an interesting sticker concerning the case of “solidarity with others (cars).” Indeed, *suiyoo doodeshoo* [‘how about Wednesday’] is the name of a TV-program and can be interpreted as expressing solidarity with other drivers who watch the same program. With regard to “fun” or “playfulness,” for example, the sticker *jijii-ga untenchuu* [‘old man is just driving’] is an example of playfulness, as it expresses self-mockery about oneself. Incidentally, one of the reviewers of Nishijima (2022a) commented that there is a sticker showing *WAL*, which is a corruption of *JAL* (short for *Japan Airlines*) and can be pronounced as “waru” in Japanese, thus evoking 悪 *waru* [‘evil’ or ‘bad guy’].
- 8) It is often said that the original purpose of the signs in the USA was as a notice for first responders so that they would not miss the baby in the wrecked car in the event of an accident. However, the following article shows that this is not always the case: “Baby on board - where did it all start?” (<https://onl.tw/cUWmXXG>)
- 9) In Japan, the Road Traffic Law was amended in 2000 (Article 71-3 (3)), making the use of child restraints compulsory (see National Police Agency website). Prior to that, in some cases the baby could have been held in the car without being restrained in the seat. In such circumstances, it is not hard to understand the association with “driving slowly” for the baby’s safety.
- 10) While Germany does not have this, France has a sticker with the letter “A,” which is the

equivalent of the Japanese beginner's mark. It is interesting to note that in Japan the image is that of a young leaf in yellow and green, while in France it is a letter. According to the reviewers of Nishijima (2022a), in the UK and Australia there are stickers with the letters "L" and "P," which correspond to the beginner's mark.

- 11) This is typically seen in the relationship between pedestrians near a pedestrian crossing without traffic lights and vehicles attempting to pass through that crossing. In Germany, when a pedestrian passes in front of a pedestrian crossing and stops, almost 100% of the time the car will stop even if it has to brake suddenly, because this is required by law. However, what about the same situation in Japan? Pedestrians and drivers give each other "unnecessary consideration," which has nothing to do with the law. This is despite the fact that they are required by law to stop. Pedestrians would be "inconvenienced" by blocking the flow of traffic if they stopped in front of a pedestrian crossing. They think that if they wait a little longer, the flow of traffic may be cut off and they can cross at that time. Drivers are drivers and if they stop themselves here, pedestrians will try to hurry across, bowing their heads apologetically. This would hasten the other party and might be seen as a "nuisance." This mutual consideration results in both parties acting in good faith, such that they do not try to cross or stop, even though the law requires them to do so.
- 12) <https://bestcarweb.jp/feature/column/155022?prd=2>

References

- Hinds, J. (1987). Reader Versus Writer Responsibility: A New Typology. In U. Connor & R. B. Kaplan (Eds.), *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text* (pp. 141–152). MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Inoue, F. (2000). *Nihongo-no nedan* [The price of Japanese]. Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten.
- Inoue, F. (2011). *Keizaigengogaku ronkoo—genjo/hooogen/keigo-no neuchi* [Economic linguistics theory: the price of language, dialect and honorifics]. Tokyo: Meiji Shoin.
- Kurabayashi, H. (2020). Nihon-no kookyoo sain-no sutairu [Style of public signs in Japan]. *Studies in Stylistics*, 66, 71–78.
- Landry, R. & R. Y. Bourhis (1997). Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1), 23–49.
- Nishijima, Y. (2010). Perspectives in Routine Formulas: A Contrastive Analysis of Japanese and German. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 19(2), 55–63.
<http://doi.org/10.24517/00061321>
- Nishijima, Y. (2018). A Contrastive Analysis of Functionally Equivalent Routine Formulas in Japanese and German: Towards a More Reliable Comparison of Linguistic Expressions [in Japanese]. *The Japanese Journal of Language in Society*, 21(1), 175–190.
https://doi.org/10.19024/jajls.21.1_175

- Nishijima, Y. (2020). *Irassyaimase* as an Unreplyable Utterance in Japanese: Analysis of Ostensible Hospitality. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 29(2), 84–98.
<http://doi.org/10.24517/00061959>
- Nishijima, Y. (2022a). Gengo keikan-toshiteno kuruma sutekkaa-no sutairu [A stylistic analysis of stickers on cars as linguistic landscapes]. *Studies in Stylistics*, 68, 1 –16.
<http://doi.org/10.24517/00065781>
- Nishijima, Y. (2022b). What is Expected of the Clerks by Wearing “In-Training” Tags?: An Analysis of Roles of the Tags. Paper read at the 27th International Conference of the International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies held on 30. June 2022, online.
- Nishijima, Y. (2022c). Car-Stickers on Rear Windows: An Analysis from a Point of View of Linguistic Landscape. Paper read at the 3rd International Conference on Sociolinguistics held on 24. August 2022 in Prague, Czech Republic and online.
- Shoji, H., Coulmas, F., & Backhaus, P. (2009). *Nihon-no gengokeikan* [Linguistic landscapes of Japan]. Tokyo: Sangensha.

URLs of the government offices cited in this paper

MLIT: Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism website (End of transitional period for the fitting of speed suppression devices).

https://www.mlit.go.jp/kisha/kisha06/09/090901_.html (last viewed on 11. November 2022).

MOE: Ministry of the Environment website (Obligation to have labels and written documents on industrial waste collection and transport vehicles).

<https://www.env.go.jp/recycle/waste/pamph/index.html> (last viewed on 11. November 2022).

NPA: National Police Agency website (Child seats to protect children).

<https://www.npa.go.jp/bureau/traffic/anzen/childseat.html> (last viewed on 11. November 2022)

TMPD: Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department

<https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/kotsu/mark/mark.html> (last viewed on 11. November 2022)