

Character Language and Character Traits in the RPG Game *Persona 5: The Phantom X*

Yingyi Zhang*

Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin 300204, China

*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Taking the RPG mobile game *Persona 5: The Phantom X* (hereinafter referred to as *P5X*) as the research object, this paper analyzes the language use characteristics of five main characters based on Satoshi Kinsui's concept of "role language" and its indicators. The purpose of this paper is to make up for the current lack of research on role language in the game field and provide a reference for Japanese language teaching and game localization translation.

Keywords: *Persona 5: The Phantom X*; Character dialogue; Character traits

Online publication: March 18, 2026

1. Concept and indicators of role language

Satoshi Kinsui defined role language as: when hearing a specific linguistic expression (vocabulary, grammar, wording, intonation, etc.), one can associate it with a specific character image (characteristics such as age, gender, occupation, class, era, appearance, personality); or when prompted with a specific character image, one can associate it with the linguistic expression that the character seems to use. In Japanese role language research, first-person pronouns and sentence-final expressions are two important indicators^[1]. In addition, catchphrases, interjections, dialects, laughter, etc., also constitute important elements of role language.

2. Research background and purpose

In *Virtual Japanese: The Mystery of Role Language* (2003), Kinsui systematically elaborated on the concept of role language and pointed out its special significance in virtual spaces. He believed that role language is not a direct reflection of real language use, but an "artificial language" processed through exaggeration and typification, mainly serving the rapid identification of character images.

Since then, role language research has gradually expanded to multiple fields such as translation, education, and language history. Although there have been relevant research results, the research objects are mostly

concentrated on earlier literary works, animations, and comics, and attention to video games, especially mobile games, is still relatively insufficient^[2]. Therefore, this paper takes the main plot text of the RPG game *Persona 5: The Phantom X (P5X)* as the research material, analyzing the language use characteristics of the main characters and their corresponding relationships with character images.

3. Role language and character traits in the RPG game *Persona 5: The Phantom X*

The story of *P5X* revolves around a high school student living in Tokyo (the character played by the player). The protagonist awakens the ability of “Persona” in an accident. During the day, he lives an ordinary campus life; at night, he leads his partners as the leader of a phantom thief team to infiltrate the “Palace” formed by human distorted desires, steal treasures, reform their hearts, and thus resist social injustice. The story continues the core theme of the series: “justice against distorted desires”^[3]. The members of the protagonist team have distinct images and personalities. All of them awakened their Personas due to psychological pressure or distorted desires, and continuously grew through joint battles.

3.1. Motoha Arai

“Want to have a little of my side dish?” / “By the way, wasn’t Shun eating cup noodles here before?” / “It started raining.” / “Huh? So do you think so too?” / “Ah, yeah, same class as me...” / “For real? Then I can’t forgive you even more!” / “I was lucky to be picked up by Senpai Riko!”

Motoha Arai is an extremely popular high school girl. She has a straightforward, cheerful, and lively personality, and is good at various sports, making her an all-around sports character popular among her classmates. In the game, she is a dynamic character with strong “output ability” in battles. In her role language, in terms of the use of first-person pronouns, she almost consistently uses 「あたし」 as her self-reference^[4]. This expression has obvious feminine characteristics and a high degree of intimacy, which not only reflects her age characteristics as a high school girl but also shortens the psychological distance between the character and the player at the narrative level, making the character image more approachable; in terms of sentence-final expressions, she switches between 「Desu・masu」 form and plain form. She mostly uses the honorific form (Desu・masu form) when facing teachers or seniors, while tending to use plain form when communicating with peers and close friends. This switch is not only a change in politeness level but also reflects her conscious cognition of social roles and interpersonal relationships; the frequent appearance of sentence-final particles such as “～ right?” and “～ Yeah.” plays an important interactive function of seeking recognition, expressing empathy, and attracting attention, making her utterances always have distinct dialogicity and affability^[5]; at the same time, she extensively uses interjections such as “Eh?” and “Ah” as well as catchphrases such as “serious” and “lucky”, highlighting her quick response and direct emotional expression, making the conversation rhythm more brisk and strengthening the sense of youth of the character. Combining these language characteristics, it can be seen that her image of a “cheerful and lively high school girl” is obviously highlighted through role language.

3.2. Kumi Katayama

“So, I can’t just walk away here!” / “Give me your smartphone too.” / “You’re okay with that?” / “What self-satisfaction! You’re the ones taking advantage of her.” / “Alright, that’s it for today. Everyone, be careful on your way back.” / “What? But there are classes and homeroom as well.” / “Haa? What does that mean?”

Kumi Katayama is a math teacher at the school and the head teacher of the protagonist's class. She has a serious and straightforward personality, values students' emotions and situations, and hopes to be a reliable adult. Facing the pressure of the "education improvement system" and colleagues, she still adheres to her educational philosophy and safeguards students' interests^[6]. In contrast, she was once the leader of a delinquent girl group, "Sparkling Legs", during her student days, and this contrast makes her character image hierarchical. In her role language, the first-person pronoun is basically stable as "I", reflecting her public identity as a teacher and self-restraint. When addressing others, she makes detailed distinctions between expressions such as "you", 「君」, and "everyone" to reflect her stance and psychological distance^[7]. Occasionally, "you" appears when she is emotionally agitated, showing a connection with her past personality; in terms of sentence-final expressions, the "is · are" form dominates, which is closely related to teachers' speech acts such as instruction, advice, and reproach. Forms such as " ~ Do it." further reflect her sense of responsibility and disciplinary stance; the frequent appearance of interjections such as "Haa?" and "What?" directly expresses her surprise, confusion, and anger in conflict situations, and also reveals that she is not an abstract ideal teacher but a real person who constantly makes choices in contradictions^[8]. Kumi Katayama's role language has both "the normativeness of a teacher" and "traces of her past as a delinquent girl", thus constructing a dual role structure with both normativeness and emotional tension at the language level.

3.3. Riko Tanemura

"I am Tanemura Riko." / "I've seen you around school a few times, but this is the first time we've actually talked." / "Shut up, you!" / "That was his old employee number." / "Well, it's true that the disciplinary committee has been called more often lately, hasn't it?" / "Oh, so you were a regular customer, were you?" / "Well, you should be fine."

Riko Tanemura is a third-year high school student, serving as the discipline committee chairperson and the daughter of a large enterprise president. She is known for her dignified etiquette and excellent academic performance, and is a model top student in the minds of teachers and students, with the social impression of both a "young lady" and a "winner in life." However, she has long catered to others' expectations and suppressed her true feelings, gradually developing a sense of self-alienation, and inwardly desiring to rediscover her true self^[9]. In terms of role language, she almost always uses "I" as her first-person pronoun, reflecting stability, normativeness, and self-control, which is also consistent with her identities as a "top student" and "committee chairperson." In addressing others, "you" is mostly used to maintain distance and politeness, while switching to "You" when emotional, with obvious pragmatic differences; the sentence-final form is mainly 「desu · masu」 form, accompanied by typical feminine language and young lady's tone such as "~dawa" and "~kashira", which not only conveys taste and education but also has a certain degree of instructiveness and authority; in addition, she often uses interjections such as "eh", "ah", and "meh" to delicately present surprise, thinking transitions, and acceptance attitudes, adding warmth and hesitation to the "perfect top student" image. It is worth noting that before and after awakening, the proportion of affability and assertiveness in her sentence-final expressions changes, showing that the changes in her values and self-cognition are reflected at the language level^[10].

3.4. Shun Kano

"Huh? What are you talking about, you?" / "Isn't that right? You guys were the ones who brought up the lighter..." / "Hey! Cut it out!" / "No way, so why is Akashi there?!" / "Thanks, I'm still practicing too." / "Get a grip."

Shun Kano is a high school boy who appears serious and taciturn on the surface, seemingly unapproachable, but is actually loyal and gentle at heart. His parents divorced when he was young, and he was once taken in by a ramen shop owner who taught him cooking skills, so he aspires to become a chef. In his role language, he is used to using expressions with obvious masculine characteristics, even slightly rude ones, such as “I”, “You”, and “you bastard”; in addition, there are a large number of interjections and catchphrases. For example, interjections such as “Hey” and “No no” have strong emotional colors, directly expressing dissatisfaction, anxiety, and impatience. Catchphrases such as “Thank you” further highlight his straightforward, informal, and highly colloquial speaking style ^[11]. These expressions further strengthen his image of being straightforward, inarticulate but sincere in emotions; in terms of sentence-final expressions, expressions with obvious masculine characteristics, such as “Yeah, that’s right.” appear frequently. At the same time, Shun Kano uses imperative forms relatively frequently, especially when stopping improper behaviors of his classmates, often directly intervening with prohibitive expressions ending with “na” ^[12]. This linguistic form not only reflects his straightforward personality but also reflects his value orientation of taking the initiative to take responsibility and maintain order in key situations. This imperative form not only shows a simple, strong attitude but also reflects his straightforward and quick-acting personality in tense situations, and also implies his positivity in partnerships. He is not a “leader role” in the true sense, but shows a strong sense of responsibility and action ability at critical moments. These language characteristics together shape his image of a “seemingly clumsy but loyal and righteous” boy.

3.5. Kei Akashi

“Yes, it’s an unfamiliar term, so let me briefly explain it for you.” / “This is the proposal I submitted, right?” / “Ah, you’re the young lady of Umetane, aren’t you?” / “Alright, it’s probably all nonsense, right?” / “Haa... it’s just like education in the Showa era.” / “Yes yes yes~ that’s enough~”

Kei Akashi used to be a TV program planner and later turned into a corporate consultant, known for his tough business reform methods, adopting oppressive and even destructive attacks on opponents ^[13]. In the game, he enters the school in the name of “education reform”, and pushes Kumi Katayama into a predicament by manipulating public opinion and institutional discourse, making him a typical villain character. In terms of first-person pronouns, he switches between “I” and 「僕」 (boku): “I” is used in formal occasions to highlight authority and distance ^[14]. 「僕」 (boku) appears in past professional situations, showing a more approachable self-positioning; the sentence-final expression is mainly 「desu・masu」 form, forming a calm and formal “bureaucratic discourse”; at the same time, “Yes” and “ne” are used frequently. Although the appearance is gentle, most of them have assertion and request for agreement, with discourse control functions; interjections such as “eh”, “a”, “Well”, and “Yeah yeah” often have contemptuous or sarcastic colors, reflecting his arrogance and desire for dominance ^[15]. Overall, his role language shows obvious dominance. Language not only constructs his social image as an “elite consultant” but also strengthens his negative personality as a villain character.

4. Conclusion

Role language plays an important role in the construction of character images. Role language is not only a collection of character language forms but also a comprehensive reflection of characters’ social attributes, psychological states, and values, serving as a “bridge between language and character images” in fictional works. With the expansion of the work’s influence and the passage of time, some role languages may even break away

from the original narrative context, develop into catchphrases or fixed discourse patterns, and in turn affect contemporary vocabulary and language use, thus entering a broader social communication level and gradually forming shared linguistic resources.

Taking the main characters of the RPG game P5X as the research object, this paper analyzes the role language characteristics of characters such as Motoha Arai, Riko Tanemura, Shun Kano, Kumi Katayama, and examines the role of elements such as first-person pronouns, sentence-final expressions, interjections, and catchphrases in character portrayal. The research results show that there is a relatively stable corresponding relationship between the language forms of different characters and their gender, identity, social role, and personality traits. For example, the honorific form and normative expressions associated with identities such as top students and discipline committee chairpersons, the masculine and colloquial expressions corresponding to rough boy images, and the dominant discourse and strategic polite forms embodied by villain characters all show the significant function of role language in character portrayal. On the other hand, this study also reveals that role language is not a static symbol but a dynamic system that fluctuates slightly with the development of the plot and changes in characters' psychology. Some characters have differences in sentence-final forms, frequency of honorific use, and forms of address before and after awakening, reflecting the projection of stance changes and self-cognition transformation at the language level. This indicates that role language is not only used to establish character images but also to show character growth and internal transformation. Future research will further explore the functions of role language from perspectives such as Japanese language education, cross-cultural communication, and game localization translation.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Satoshi K, 2003, *Virtual Japanese: The Mystery of Role Language* (Vācharu Nihongo: Yakuwari-go no nazo). Iwanami Shoten.
- [2] Satoshi K, 2007, *The Horizon of Role Language Research* (Yakuwari-go kenkyū no chihei). Kuroshio Shuppan.
- [3] Satoshi K, 2011, *The Development of Role Language Research* (Yakuwari-go kenkyū no tenkai). Kuroshio Shuppan.
- [4] Satoshi K, 2011, *The Prospects of Role Language Research* (Yakuwari-go kenkyū no tenbō). Nihongogaku Kōen (Japanese Studies Lectures).
- [5] Satoshi K, 2011, *Role Language and Japanese Language Education* (Yakuwari-go to Nihongo kyōiku). *Nihongo Kyōiku* (Japanese Language Education), 2011(150): 34.
- [6] Kurosaki S, 2011, *The Dialectal Nature and Period of Appearance of the First-Person Pronoun washi from the Perspective of Role Language* (Yakuwari-go kara kangaeru jishōshi “washi” no hōgensei to shutsugen jiki). *Seigakuin Daigaku Ronsō* (Seigakuin University Journal), 23(2): 1–14.
- [7] Shukuri Y, 2012, *A Survey of Awareness Regarding Character Types and Role Language—Focusing on the “We” Type* (Kyarakutā no taipu to yakuwari-go ni kansuru ishiki chōsa hōkoku—“Watashitachi” taipu ni chūmoku shite). *Gengo Kagaku Ronshū* (Journal of Language Science), 2012(16): 85–96.
- [8] Tanikawa Y, 2018, *The Potential of Digital RPGs as Materials for Learning Speech Acts—Through a Review of Previous Research in Related Fields* (Goyō gakushū-zai to shite no dejitaru RPG no kanōsei—Kanren kakubunya

- no senkō kenkyū no rebū o tōshite). *Shindai Kokugo Kyōiku* (Shinshu University Japanese Language Education), 2018(28): 37–48.
- [9] Nishida T, 2009, Around “Attribute Expressions”: Focusing on Differences Between tsundere Expressions and Role Language (“Zokusei hyōgen” o megutte tsundere hyōgen to yakuwari-go to no sōiten o chūshin ni). *Kōnan Joshi Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō: Bungaku: Bunka-hen* (Kōnan Women’s University Research Bulletin: Literature and Culture), 2009(46): 1–11.
- [10] Nishida T, 2012, Linguistic Expressions of “Boku Girls”—Points of Contact Between Commonly Used “Attribute Expressions” and Role Language (“Boku shōjo” no gengo hyōgen—Jōyōsei no aru “zokusei hyōgen” to yakuwari-go to no sesshiten). *Kōnan Joshi Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō: Bungaku Bunka-hen* (Kōnan Women’s University Research Bulletin: Literature and Culture), 2012(48): 13–22.
- [11] Cheng Q, 2018, The Function of Role Language in Character Portrayal (Jiaose yu dui renwu xingxiang suzao de zuoyong), thesis, Chongqing Normal University.
- [12] Feng X, 2020, Role Language Expressions in Japanese Textbooks (Riyu jiaokeshu zhong de jiaose yu biaoda), thesis, Shanghai International Studies University.
- [13] Qi L, 2008, A Study of Differences in First-Person Pronouns Between Chinese and Japanese Through Literary Works (Tongguo wenxue zuopin kan Zhong-Ri zichenci de chayi), thesis, Liaoning Normal University.
- [14] Shi S, 2024, The Application of Role Language in Games (Youxi zhong jiaose yu de yingyong), thesis, Shanghai International Studies University.
- [15] Zheng C, 2022, A Practical Report on the Chinese-to-Japanese Translation of the Manga Martial Arts of the Madman of the Tang Dynasty (Manhua Wudao kuang zhi shi Han-Yi-Ri shijian baogao zhongxin), thesis, Sichuan International Studies University.

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.