

# Institute for Japanese Studies Lecture Series

## "Yakuwarigo (Role Language)" in Japanese Popular Culture: The Hidden Multimodality in Japanese Characters

**50**  
1969–2019  
EAST ASIAN  
STUDIES  
CENTER

Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2:30-3:40 pm  
Pomerene Hall 150 (1760 Neil Ave)



### Yuki Matsuda

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As Seeley (2000) quotes, the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century who went to Japan once said that the Japanese writing system must be “the invention of the Devil.” It has three separate character systems. In contemporary texts, it also uses romaji (Roman alphabet) in juxtaposition with these three different character systems. In this talk, we will explore how the Japanese kept the multiple character systems because they are useful semiotic resources to generate “multiple voices” in the sense of Russian philosopher and literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin. To explore how these scripts can create such voices, we will look back on the historical development of the Japanese writing system and consider how contemporary media utilize the Japanese characters as a useful semiotic resource, along with intonation, dialectal expressions, and grammatical forms, to signify major character types in manga (comics) and video games.

Dr. Yuki Matsuda is Associate Professor of Japanese in the Department of World Languages and Literatures at the University of Memphis. Her research interests include Japanese linguistics, social semiotics, discourse analysis of Japanese popular culture and media texts, and Japanese language pedagogy.



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