

Ateji Meaning on *Manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'* 「魔女の怪画集」

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Abstract

*This study examines the meaning of ateji in the manga *Majo no Kaigashuu* by Hachi. Japanese writing often highlights the dynamic and arbitrary nature of language, as seen in kanji readings (furigana) that deviate from standard usage, known as ateji. Due to this arbitrary nature, the intended meaning of ateji can sometimes be obscured, even though its purpose is often to enhance word meanings. This research seeks to clarify the meanings of ateji in the text to capture the author's intent and minimize misinterpretation. A qualitative descriptive method is employed to analyze data by types and relationships, using Shirose's (2012) categorization of ateji and Sutedi's (2019) framework for semantic relationships and shifts. The findings reveal 26 instances of ateji, grouped into seven categories. These instances suggest that ateji serves to convey layered meaning, emphasize certain words, and specify subjects. The semantic relationships include synonymy, hyponymy-hypernymy, and homonymy. Additionally, this study found alternative ateji readings where meanings remained consistent, despite different kanji interpretations.*

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INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a tool for conveying concepts, ideas, thoughts, desires, and intentions. According to Kridalaksana (2008), language is an arbitrary system of vocal symbols used by social groups for communication, cooperation, and self-expression. It functions as a cultural, ethnic, and national identity marker shaped by its speakers. Chaer (2014) further notes that language possesses characteristics such as system, sign, sound, meaning, arbitrariness, convention, uniqueness, universality, productivity, variation, dynamism, speaker identity, and social interaction.

Linguistics, the study of language, includes a branch focused on the meaning of linguistic units, known as semantics or *imiron* (意味論) in Japanese. Semantics encompasses more than phonological or semantic similarities and differences. Chaer (2014) explains that it also includes lexical, grammatical, contextual, affective, associative, and connotative meanings, as well as semantic relationships.

According to (Sutedi, 2019) semantic includes:

1) Synonym

Synonym is a relation between words with an almost similar meaning. Synonyms in Japanese can be identified through linguistic intuition, cross-lingual translation, semantic similarity, and the co-occurrence of words to reinforce meaning.

2) Antonym

Antonym is a relation between words that have opposite, contrast, or contradictory meaning.

3) polysemy

polysemy is a word that have several meanings. Polysemy words can have multiple meanings, yet these meanings are often related and connected to an underlying core meaning.

4) Homonym

Homonyms is referring to words that are identical in spelling but possess distinct meanings, as illustrated by the Indonesian word 'bisa' which can signify both 'ability' and 'snake poison'.

5) Hypernym dan hyponym

Hyponyms are subordinate terms that fall under a more general superordinate term, known as a hypernym. A hypernym encompasses the meanings of its hyponyms.

(Chaer, 2014) argues that contextual meaning is the meaning of a lexeme or word within a specific context. Context is defined as the situation arising from language interaction, consisting of three components: setting, activity, and relationship. (Parera, 2004) elaborates that there are three elements in language interaction:

1) Setting

Setting is a component that encompass situation, time, and place where the interaction happens.

2) Activity

Activity is a component that involve all act that happens during the conversation/interaction. Non-verbal interaction such as impression, feeling, response, and perception of the speaker also count as activity.

3) Relationship

Relationship is a component includes the relationship between the speaker and the speech. The relationships include, among others, gender, age, status (such as role, and others), familial relationships, and official relationships (such as education, military, boss and subordinate, and others).

(Sutedi, 2019) implies in Japanese, *kanji* It is a letter in the form of a symbol that carries meaning. *Kanji* has two reading methods, *onyomi* and *kunyomi*. In a text *kanji* is often written together with small kana characters placed above or beside it as a reading guide, known as *furigana*. *Furigana* in *kanji* generally follows either the *onyomi* or *kunyomi* pronunciation. However, there are times when *furigana* or the reading of *kanji* does not follow the usual reading rules, such as *onyomi* or *kunyomi*. This exception is known as *ateji*.

(Lewis, 2010) states that *ateji* allows writers to play with different meanings of commonly used *kanji* by pairing them with words of different meanings. Then (Lewis, 2010) added that *ateji* is a combination of two words into one that act as a

reading guidance that only used in Japanese language. Meanwhile (Shirose, 2012) argues that *ateji* is a reading method that is written without following the original sound, reading, or meaning of the *kanji*. In terms of words, the *kanji* used does not align with its origin, meaning, or pronunciation. This form of writing and reading is called *ateji*. Furthermore, (Shirose, 2012) identifies seven categories of *ateji*, which are as follows:

- 1) *Ateji* yang menunjukkan cara baca dalam percakapan sehari-hari/口語の読み示す
this *ateji* variations are based on the sounds of words that frequently appear in everyday conversation. This *ateji* used in written sounds of dialect, acronym, and slang.
- 2) *Ateji* yang menunjukkan cara baca pada bahasa asing/外来語の読み示す
The *furigana* in this type of *ateji* generally consists of foreign language terms that are paired with *kanji* that have the same meaning. In some cases, it is possible that it is use in vice versa, foreign language written with a *furigana* in Japanese.
- 3) *Ateji* yang menunjukkan cara baca akronim dalam bahasa asing/英語の略表記の読みを示す
Ateji that used with foreign languages (English) acronyms that have the same meaning. This type of *ateji* is generally used to give a trendy or modern impression to the writing.
- 4) *Ateji* yang menunjukkan istilah atau ungkapan olahraga /スポーツ用語
This *ateji* is used to indicate terms and expressions related to sports that are less common. It intended for the general audiences to get the general idea of the word.
- 5) *Ateji* sebagai pronomina/代名詞
this *ateji* is characterized by the substitution of pronoun sounds in a dialogue. The pronouns in the dialogue can be replaced with place names, people's names, or other pronouns. The use of this *ateji* aims to refer to a more specific thing or subject in the conversation.
- 6) *Ateji* sebagai pengganti ungkapan/言い換え表現
In this *ateji*, the *furigana* and *kanji* present in the dialogue have no relationship in meaning

at all. One prominent feature of this *ateji* is that it is highly dependent on the context of the sentence. It intended to convey in depth meaning in the dialog.

- 7) *Ateji* yang menunjukkan ungkapan hasil ciptaan/作品固有の表現

This *ateji* is use in street names and person's name. Additionally, it can also be used for names of objects, characters, or places to create something interesting, unique, and distinctive in a work. Furthermore, the use of this *ateji* also indicates that the word represents a fantasy created by the writers/*mangaka*.

One notable example of the creative use of *ateji* can be found in *manga*. Authors employ *ateji* in innovative ways to enrich the semantic depth of dialogue, enabling readers to discern additional layers of meaning through the interplay of words within the conversation. Referring to the characteristics of language as stated by (Chaer, 2014), it can be assumed that the use of *ateji*, especially in *manga*, strongly highlights the unique, arbitrary, and variable nature of language. In order to convey unique narrative concepts and complex meanings to readers, a careful selection of diction the work a distinctive point. The use of *ateji* in Japanese language showcases the arbitrary nature of language, allowing authors to manipulate the linguistic system to convey deeper meanings, concepts, and distinctive stylistic features.

The current study draws on previous research, building upon the work of Oktoviani and Felicia (2014), this study examines the use of *ateji* in 'The Law of Ueki' volumes 1-16. Utilizing a qualitative approach informed by Uchiyama's *furigana* theory and Shirose Ayako's *ateji* theory, the study reveals five categories of *ateji* employed in the *manga*.

Meanwhile, (Chow, 2021) research highlights *ateji* as a unique feature of the Japanese language, posing significant challenges for translation. Despite its significance, the exploration of *ateji* in translation studies remains limited. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in social semiotic multimodal analysis, Chow categorizes *ateji* and finds that some translations of *ateji* result in incomplete or partial

meanings due to a lack of adequate resources to convey the complex nuances inherent in these linguistic expressions.

Building upon Lewis' theory (Puteri, 2018) qualitative descriptive study, using *ateji* in the lyrics of "Diabolik Lovers: More Blood" as its data source, identified 44 *ateji*, which were categorized into four groups based on Lewis' theory. Among these 44 data points, four *ateji* were found to have borrowed sounds from other words.

Prior studies have consistently shown that *ateji* is a distinctive characteristic of the Japanese written language. The flexibility of *ateji*, which allows for the borrowing of sounds, poses unique translation difficulties. However, the specific types of *ateji* within sentences and the interplay between kanji and *furigana* in these constructions have yet to be extensively explored in academic research.

Based on the reasons, this study analyses *ateji* using the *manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'* as its data source. The primary objective is to examine the types of *ateji* and their semantic relationships within the *manga*, thereby assisting readers in comprehending the narrative and intended meanings of the *mangaka*, ultimately reducing misinterpretations. Accordingly, the research questions are: What types of *ateji* are employed in the *manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'*? and how are the meanings of *ateji* related within the *manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'*? Research on *ateji* is crucial as it delves into a unique feature of the Japanese language that intertwines linguistic rules, contextual nuances, and the subjective experiences of speakers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study draws on *ateji* found in volumes 1-5 of the *manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'* by Hachi. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, as descriptive research systematically observes and documents facts and characteristics of a subject. Data analyzed in this study were selected from the *manga's* dialogue, focusing on words written with *ateji*. Shirose's (2012) theory of *ateji* was applied to categorize different types of *ateji*, while

Sutedi's (2019) framework was used to examine semantic relationships and meaning shifts.

The analysis followed four stages: data collection from the *manga*, data reduction, analysis based on meaning, type, and semantic relationships, and conclusion drawing. Findings indicate that *ateji* are used to represent foreign words, onomatopoeic sounds, and abstract concepts. Analyzing the nuances of *ateji* enhances readers' appreciation for the richness and complexity of Japanese language expression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The *manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'* created by Hachi is a fantasy-themed comic that tells the story of an orphan named Aisha, who can create a 'miracle' by making a magical painting that incorporates her blood into the artwork. Initially, she created the painting to help the people around her. However, the painting, which originally had a noble purpose, gradually became corrupted by human greed. The painting transformed into a wild, terrifying, and bloodthirsty artwork that endangers and harms humans. Consequently, the painting was nicknamed 「魔女の絵画」 or 'the Witch's Painting'. The *manga 'Majo no Kaigashuu'* focuses on the adventures of Loki, one of Aisha's paintings, who travels to fulfill Aisha's last wish to destroy all the paintings she has ever created.

The results and findings of this study will be presented in the following discussion.

Tabel 1. Types of ateji

Types of <i>ateji</i>	Total data	<i>Ateji</i>
<i>Ateji</i> that indicates pronunciation in conversation	1	わり 悪イ
<i>Ateji</i> that represents foreign language pronunciation	5	ヒーロー 英雄 ジャンキー 中毒者 リトルレディ お嬢さん にい 大哥 ブラックマーケット 闇市場
<i>Ateji</i> that indicates the pronouciation of acronyms in foreign languages	1	ナンバー N o . 05
<i>Ateji</i> that represents sports terms or expressions	-	-
<i>Ateji</i> as pronouns	5	こいつ 怪画 ぼくたち 4課 おれたち 庶民 お前 怪画
<i>Ateji</i> as substitutes for expressions	11	ラカガキ 友達 しごと 強盗 のろい 怪画 おまえたち 人間 ス 盗った おなかま 同業者 ワザワイ 道具 アイシャ 魔女 あいぼう 怪画 バケモノ 怪画 スバイ 裏切者
<i>Ateji</i> that represents creative expressions	3	かいが 怪画 セクリットメセナ 聖武術財団 オーバーワーク 限界突破

Based on the analysis results, the most frequently found type in the data sources is *ateji* sebagai pengganti ungkapan, totaling 11 data points.

the *ateji* yang menunjukkan cara baca dalam percakapan in manga *Majo no Kaigashuu* comes from the same word but features a language variation known as *danseigo* or the language variation of men. This demonstrated by

the use of the word 「わり,悪イ」 in the sentence 「...とわり,悪イトウエン水が切れた」. This is marked by the elision of sounds uttered by male characters. The use of *ateji* in dialogue can serve as a marker of closeness between characters in this manga, particularly among peers, younger siblings, and older siblings.

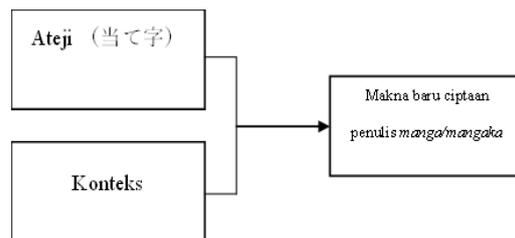
Ateji yang menunjukkan cara baca pada bahasa asing is used to convey a character's background or ethnicity through the expressions or words used. However, to understand this, it is essential to first know the context and storyline. This aligns with the characters of language, which is to serve as an identity of an individual or group. The ethnicity or background referred to is indicated by the *ateji* 「こい,大哥」 written using *hanzi* and *kana* as the reading. Both words have the same meaning, which helps readers understand the dialogue. This aligns with (Shirose, 2012), who states that the meaning of a word with synonyms can make the meaning clearer and more specific.

Ateji yang menunjukkan ungkapan hasil ciptaan requires contextual understanding to understand the intended meaning. In some cases, the meaning of the *ateji* is written in the dialogue before or after the *ateji*. This is intended to help readers understand the terms or expressions intended by the *mangaka*. An example of explaining the meaning of *ateji* in dialogue is shown through the term 「セク, 聖武術財団」 which is read as 'seikurido mesena.' This represents a combination of two languages, specifically the English word 'Sacred' which corresponds to the reading of 「聖」 that has the same meaning. 'mécénat' (hereafter written as *Mecenat*), which comes from French and means 'patronage or protection', corresponds to the readings of 「美術」 and 「財団」. The meaning intended by the *mangaka* through the *ateji* is explained in the dialogue as following,



Picture 1. *Ateji* explanation

If translated, the meaning of the *ateji* intended by the *mangaka* is explained in the dialogue: 'Sacred Mecenat is an organization established to protect all that is beautiful, such as culture, ideas, language, environment, and life, without charging a single penny'. With this explanation after the use of *ateji*, readers can easily comprehend the concept and meaning of the *ateji* in the sentence.



Bagan 1. new meaning of *ateji*

Ateji yang menunjukkan ungkapan hasil ciptaan emphasizes the arbitrary nature of language, marked by a variety of *kanji* and *furigana* arrangements as diverse readings that refer to the context. However, based on the data analysis, it was found that *ateji yang menunjukkan ungkapan hasil ciptaan* has a semantic relationship,

namely synonyms or homonyms, as seen in the *ateji* 「かいが³, 怪画」 which has a similar sound to 「絵画」. While both terms mean ‘painting,’ the *ateji* 「かいが³, 怪画」 specifically refers to the Witch’s Painting in this manga. In other words, the combination of similar meanings/synonyms and context produces a new meaning, and this meaning is purely created based on the imagination and creativity of the manga writer or mangaka. This can be visualized through the following chart,

In the *manga* ‘*Majo no Kaigashuu*’, there are other readings for the *ateji* (hereafter written as ‘*ateji yang diatejikan*’, it is due to the absence of a precise term has not yet been found), that is when a words in a dialog count as *ateji*, then on another dialog those same *ateji* read different and additionally the meanings differ depending on the context of its use. However, the core meaning refers to the same thing. The term is found in the *ateji* 「怪画」 or ‘the Witch’s Painting’ that categorised as *ateji yang menunjukkan hasil ciptaan*. The *Ateji* read as 「かいが³」 in the *manga* have a total of six different way of reading 「のろい」、 「お前」、 「あいぼう」、 「バケモノ」.

Ateji yang diatejikan that is currently categorized into two types of *ateji*: *ateji sebagai pronomina* and *ateji sebagai pengganti ungkapan* It was found that there was no semantic relationship between the *kanji* and *kana*. Thus, it can be concluded that the *ateji* in the source prioritize the arbitrary and connotative nature of language, enabling the *mangaka* to create new meanings and associations through innovative combinations of *kanji* and *kana*. This aligns with (Lewis, 2010), who states that there is depth and dynamism in the language used in *manga*, particularly in the use of *ateji*, which involves the combination of two words (*kanji* and *kana*) through a glossary. The flexible nature of *ateji* allows the *mangaka* to creatively employ them to subtly add depth to word meanings in dialogue, thereby enhancing the storytelling, characterization, and world-building aspects of the narrative.

Based on the analyses of *ateji* yang diatejikan, *mangaka* employs more than one *ateji* to depict the term 「怪画」 or ‘the Witch’s Painting’ which serves as the focal point of the narrative in the *manga* ‘*Majo no Kaigashuu*’. The reason for this is that the story features a diversity of the paintings, each with its own specific traits that are influenced by the context and the characters’ perspectives. To represent this variety, six different *ateji* are used within the word 「怪画」. These six *ateji* are used to depict a specific character’s perspective towards the central object of the story.

There’s no data in the source pointing the *ateji yang menunjukkan istilah olahraga*. The reason for this is that these *ateji* are employed within the context of sports-themed comics."

Semantic: Meaning Relation

Tabel 1. semantic

Semantic	Total data
Synonym	9
Hypernym-hyponym	2
Homonym	1
No relation found	13
Same words	2

Since there is a lot of data showing that *kanji* meanings and readings don't always match, we can conclude that *ateji* rely on the arbitrary nature of language and can be used to express more complex ideas. But, words using *ateji* are usually easier to understand when you know the context. This is demonstrated through the *ateji* 「ワザワイ, 道具」. *Kanji* 「道具」 represents the condition of the painting, which is associated with a tool that is continuously used until it can no longer function and requires energy or fuel to continue operating. In this *manga*, it is known that the fuel or energy of the painting is blood.

Therefore, when it is read without the *furigana*, the phrase referring to the ‘source of energy’ for the painting would read as 「血を燃料にした道具」, which can be translated as ‘a tool that uses blood as fuel.’. The reading of 「ワザワイ」 indicates that the tool brings disaster (because of ‘overwork’) to humans, who become

the victims affected by the thirst for blood of the painting. The use of kanji aids in conveying a deeper meaning when viewed in context.

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of 26 *ateji* instances in the manga *Majo no Kaigashuu*, it can be concluded that *ateji* functions as a medium to convey nuanced and complex meanings by leveraging contextual cues and the relationships between kanji and *furigana*. This is evident in the diverse language use, unconventional kanji combinations not found in Japanese dictionaries, and instances of "ateji yang diatejikan," as previously discussed.

The types of *ateji* identified include: expressions (11 instances), foreign language pronunciation (5), creative expressions (3), conversational pronunciation (1), and acronym pronunciation in foreign languages (1). Semantic relationships found in *Majo no Kaigashuu* include synonymy (9), hypernym-hyponym (3), and identical word usage (2), while 13 instances showed no semantic shift or relationship.

This study identifies *ateji yang diatejikan* in the term 「怪画」, suggesting the need for further analysis. The research contributes to linguistic understanding of *ateji* in manga, particularly regarding types, contextual meanings, and semantic relationships. It serves as a potential resource for researchers in Japanese linguistics or semantics, offering insights into *ateji* usage across manga, novels, songs, and subtitles.

While this study focuses on types and semantic relations of *ateji*, future research could approach *ateji* from other linguistic perspectives, such as pragmatics, particularly speech acts, which may influence *ateji* meanings in dialogue-heavy media like manga. Additionally, a broader data set beyond a single manga title is recommended for studying *ateji yang diatejikan*, enabling deeper analysis across various media such as novels, subtitles, and song lyrics.

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