

Celebrating Shared Memories: Relevance, Multimodality and the World of Yokai

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Abstract

Yokai Watch first appeared as a comic series in 2012 and later launched as a Nintendo DS game in 2013 by Level 5. It was designed as a cross-media product and indeed, it now has a comic series, game soft, anime, film and other merchandise products. Since its first appearance, its popularity has grown steadily, but it was in August 2014 when it took over Japan due to the first TV anime series being broadcast. It became a social phenomenon and one could not walk around Japan without seeing characters from the show. *Yokai Watch* is popular not just amongst children, but also with adults. *Yokai Watch* can be described as an instance of crossover literature, with much anecdotal evidence to show its quality to attract adult viewers. However, there has been no cognitive ‘how’ underpinning the mechanism that established such popularity. This study is an attempt to address such an explanatory gap for its popularity across different generations, with a particular focus on its use of multimodal intertextuality and how it enabled the media producers to manipulate adults into the world of yokai, using Relevance theory as a framework.

Keywords: Relevance, Multimodality, Echoic Use, Ad hoc concepts, Lexical blending, Attitude

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1. Introduction

1.1 Popularity of Yokai Watch

Yokai Watch is a recently-released cross-media product in Japan. It was first launched as a Nintendo DS game in 2013, and later as a TV anime series that started in January of 2014. Unlike previous titles that have cross-media products, Yokai Watch was designed to be cross-media, comprising a Nintendo DS game, a TV anime series, manga, feature length films and of course a huge number of merchandise products across different genres. Yokai are mythical creatures in Japan, not dissimilar to goblins in the West. They are based on humans and things that have come to the end of their life but cannot let go. Stories of Yokai Watch centre on the life of Keita, a year 5 primary pupil who experiences a series of mythical events due to his encounter with Whisper, who is a Yokai-Butler. Yokai Watch is a so-called ‘gag anime’ in which a different yokai appears every week to create havoc, which Keita resolves with the help from his yokai friends. Once a yokai is overcome by Keita, they become his ‘friend’, giving him a medal, which he uses when he encounters his next enemy. The key characteristic of Keita is being ‘ordinary’ - in the series, he is described as being ordinary in many senses, excelling at nothing particular, although he is not disadvantaged in any area either. It is often mentioned in the series that Keita is not satisfied being so ordinary.

Not dissimilar to Pokemon, it has captured the attention of the nation and has become a social phenomenon - in the last few years, it has become almost impossible to walk in Japanese cities without seeing characters from Yokai Watch at shops, on billboards, or at restaurants’ promotional events. The songs have become particularly popular and are constantly on TV.

Its popularity has been described in many ways, such as by the catchy nature of its story, characters and songs, funny names, the fact that the theme is deeply rooted in common issues many children have, such as academic performance at school, being late for school, peer pressure, and so on.¹ And of course, it has the element of collection (children can collect medals), which always leads to obsessive behaviours.

What makes Yokai Watch stand out compared to other popular cross-media products in Japan is its cross-generation popularity. Unlike other products, including Pokemon, Yokai Watch is popular not just amongst children, but also amongst adults, as demonstrated in anecdotal evidence below:

“It uses phrases that were popular when we were kids [...] It has the flavour of our era (Showa)”²

“Free and fun story, not for children”

“Keeping you on your toes”³

“Homage to popular items from the past”

¹ Chizuyo Uehara, “You can use it when telling children off!? Three reasons why Yokai Watch appeals to parents”. Happymama 2014a. Available at: <http://ure.pia.co.jp/articles/-/23573> [accessed on 28.10.2016].

² Tokudane (TV Programme), 4th Nov, 2014.

³ Chosuke Kinshi. “It’s not just parody! Yokai Watch’s appeal comes from ‘gag’ gag. Entertaining both adults and anime-otaku”. *Da Vinch News*, 2014. Available at: <http://ddnavi.com/news/212306/a/> [accessed on 28.10.2016].

“Giving you excuses for silly mistakes”⁴

“Familiarity from the past, with parody targeting parents’ generation”

“Safe setting, as it is based on friendship rather than battle”⁵

While such anecdotal evidence provides a glimpse of the series’ popularity, it does not explain how it established its popularity, and how it appeals both children and adults. This paper is an attempt to unpack the cognitive mechanism for creating such popularities amongst people from all walks of life.

1.2 From a Description to an Explanation

There are a number of other cultural artefacts that appeal both adults and children. Anne of Green Gables is one of the most obvious examples. As such, popularity for adults of items designed for children has often been discussed in the field of Literary Studies. Beckett, for example, defines children's literature that appeals to both children and adults as ‘crossover’ literature.⁶ Another example of media that is popular for both adults and children would be *The Simpsons*. And indeed, the popularity of *The Simpsons* is discussed in terms of parody and intertextuality⁷. In both *Simpsons* and *Yokai Watch* there are a huge number of cultural references made, which one might claim to be a reason for their popularity.

However, describing intertextuality alone does not *explain* the popularity of *Yokai Watch* across generations. Intertextuality is not prerequisite for comprehension. One can understand the programme even when one does not understand the cultural reference made. That is, if intertextuality was the key for cross-generation popularity, we would need separate accounts for different generations.

Such popularity would indicate that there must be some ‘benefit’ or ‘reward’ to watching the programme. As Sperber and Wilson explain, our cognition is designed to pay attention to whatever provides you with some cognitive reward⁸. Being so popular indicates that a huge number of viewers enjoy such cognitive rewards. The aim of this paper is to provide the cognitive ‘why’ underpinning the interpretation mechanism that accounts for such popularity.

The current study therefore is an attempt to address the explanatory gap that accounts for the cognitive mechanism for cross-genre appeal, and to account for the media design that

⁴ Wataru Eidai, “There are three reasons why it attracts adults! Yokai Watch’s Secret for attracting adults”. R25. Available at: http://r25.yahoo.co.jp/fushigi/wxr_detail/?id=20141217-00039673-r25 [accessed on 28.10.2016].

⁵ Chizuyo Uehara, “[Yokai Watch]: is the cause of huge popularity children’s concerns? Reason why “Yokai Watch” attracts children?”. *Happymama* 2014b. Available at: <http://ure.pia.co.jp/articles/-/23564> [accessed on 28.10.2016].

⁶ Sandra Beckett, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁷ Jonathan Gray, *Watching with the Simpsons: Television, Parody and Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2006). *Intertextuality* itself has been discussed in many fields including literary studies, media studies and linguistics. See, for example, Kristeva 1980, Hutcheon 1985, Fairclough 2002 to name but a few, for a fuller discussion on intertextuality.

⁸ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986/1995).

takes the full advantage of human cognition. In section 2, we will introduce key concepts from Relevance Theory that would provide a theoretical framework for the current study, followed by Section 3, where a range of examples are analysed. In Section 4, the relevance theoretic analysis will be developed further to include non-verbal elements of *Yokai Watch*.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction to Relevance theory

Relevance theory provides a theoretical framework that enables us to account for the cognitive mechanisms that underlie human communication. Relevance theory is centred around two principles. First, the Cognitive Principle of Relevance explains our cognitive tendency:

Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.⁹

That is, human beings tend to pay attention to whatever might be worth their attention. The second, Communicative Principle of Relevance, explains how communication takes place against this cognitive tendency:

Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.¹⁰

For example, when someone tries to claim an audience's attention, the very act of claiming the attention itself suggests that the information being offering is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort as well as being one that is compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences (ibid). This is called Presumption of Optimal Relevance. Relevance is defined as a balance between cost (processing effort) and rewards (cognitive effects). Wilson and Sperber explain the relevance of an input to an individual:

- a. Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.
- b. Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.¹¹

Another way of defining relevance is interaction with our cognitive environment. Sperber and Wilson (1987) explain that information is relevant to you if *it interacts in a certain way with your existing assumptions about the world*.¹² That is, information is

⁹ Ibid., 260.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, "Relevance theory". *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 14 (2002): 252-253.

¹² Dan Sperber, and Deirdre Wilson, "Précis of Relevance". *Behavioral & Brain Sciences* 10.4 (1987): 697-710.

relevant (i) when it contradicts with existing assumptions and eliminates them, (ii) when it strengthens existing assumptions or (iii) when it creates new assumptions.

2.2. Lexical adjustment and ad hoc concepts

Relevance theory clearly defines the role of coding and inference in communication. According to Sperber and Wilson,¹³ when the speaker produces an utterance, the hearer follows the most cost-effective interpretation path (the relevance theoretic comprehension procedure: “follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: test interpretive hypotheses in order of accessibility, and stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied”).¹⁴ That is, an utterance provides linguistically encoded evidence to the inference.

An utterance is a form of evidence which is linguistically encoded. When an utterance is produced, the hearer performs inferences on what is delivered by the grammar to recover a conceptual representation. The conceptual representation then enters into the inference as an input for utterance interpretation.

One of the advantages of working within the relevance theoretic framework is its acknowledgement that utterance interpretation involves both linguistic decoding and inference.¹⁵ Furthermore, inference does not only operate at the level of utterance interpretation. Relevance theory also acknowledges the role of interference at the level of identifying components of the linguistic content of the utterance. That is, inference is at operation even at the level of recovery of concepts encoded by each lexical item. This enables us to explain how the hearer recovers a particular concept from a linguistic item out of possible interpretations. The hearer, guided by relevance, uses the linguistically decoded meaning as a first step to reach the intended concept.

In Relevance theory, it is considered that words encode “mentally-represented concepts, elements of a conceptual representation system or ‘language of thought’, which constitute their linguistic meanings and determine what might be called their linguistically-specified denotations”.¹⁶ That is, mentally represented concepts function as an address to recover the intended concept, leading the hearer to the information necessary for interpretation. Carston explains that “[t]his conceptual address (or file name) gives access to a repository of mentally represented information about the concept’s denotation, some of which is general and some of which, such as stereotypes, applies only to particular subsets of the denotation”.¹⁷

However, it does not mean a word and a concept necessarily correspond with each other. In most cases, the intended (or communicated) concept is different from the encoded concept, and the hearer must perform inference (or adjust the encoded concept) in order to recover what is intended in a particular concept. For example, what can be communicated by the use of an adjective ‘happy’ can vary depending on contexts.

- a. Alfie is a happy child.

¹³ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition*.

¹⁴ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Relevance theory”, 262.

¹⁵ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: communication and cognition*.

¹⁶ Deirdre Wilson, “Relevance theory and lexical pragmatics”, 344. (See also, *Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995; Wilson and Sperber, 2002; or Carston, 2002*).

¹⁷ Robyn Carston, “Lexical pragmatics, ad hoc concepts and metaphor: from a relevance theory perspective”. *Italian Journal of Linguistics* 22/1 (2010): 9.

- b. [Volunteers are needed for some tedious tasks and no one speaks up. John says with a flat tone]

I'm happy to do that

- c. I'm happy that I've won a million euros in the lottery.

In all three examples, what is communicated by 'happy' has a different degree of happiness. In the first example, 'happy' refers to the child's general state while 'happy' in (b) would score probably at a lower level of happiness. In contrast, 'happy' in (c) would be more like being ecstatic. It is the hearer's responsibility to determine what the intended meaning of 'happy' is, depending on the contextual assumptions. This shows how we have to adjust the lexical items in order to communicate what our conceptual system offers. As Carston argues, encoded elements can never fully communicate what we intend to.¹⁸ This is called linguistic underdeterminacy. Carston and other scholars have since shown different processes required for lexical adjustment, including broadening and narrowing¹⁹. As Wilson says, these processes have been analysed separately as distinct processes. However, the point is not that there are two distinct processes²⁰. The point is that in order to recover the intended concept, the hearer must perform inference on the encoded concept. The encoded concept provides a blueprint for the inference. The hearer develops this blueprint in order to recover a new concept that achieves optimal relevance. In relevance theory, this type of concept is called *ad hoc* concept. An *ad hoc* concept is constructed as a one-off in a particular concept, used to represent an entity that is not encoded but accessible in our conceptual system²¹.

The speaker uses a particular linguistic item so that the hearer can recover the intended concept. That is, the word is a tool to activate a particular concept in the hearer's mind. The actual process of interpreting a particular encoded concept is guided by expectation of relevance. That is, the expectation of relevance will guide the hearer to a construct an *ad hoc* concept that would satisfy the search for an optimal relevance.

Let us see how it actually works. Example (3) illustrates this point:

- (3) [Peter, who is an excellent pianist, arrives]

Mary: Oh, here comes Mozart.

In order to understand Mary's utterance, the hearer needs to perform inference on Mary's utterance to recover the intended interpretation that is relevant as a response to the situation (that Peter arrived). If the intended interpretation is literal, then the utterance would not achieve relevance: Mozart is dead and thus this cannot be true. The information that Mozart arrived would not change anything in the hearer's cognitive environment and hence no cognitive effects. However, in this case, her utterance "here comes Mozart" will certainly yield some interpretation that achieves an optimal relevance, when interpreted in a particular context that contains some existing assumptions about Peter's piano skills or about Mozart. In this context, following the path of least effort, the hearer would understand 'Mozart' in Mary's utterance not literal MOZART*, but something like 'exceptional pianist' or 'the

¹⁸ Robyn Carston, *Thoughts and utterances: the pragmatics of explicit communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

¹⁹ See, for example, Carston, 2002, 2010; Wilson, 2004; Wilson and Carston, 2006, 2007; Sperber and Wilson, 2006

²⁰ Deirdre Wilson, "Relevance theory and lexical pragmatics", 343–360.

²¹ Robyn Carston, "Lexical pragmatics", 153–180.

pianist who specialises in playing pieces composed by Mozart'. That is, the intended concept is recovered as a result of inference in context based on existing assumptions.

3. Yokai Watch and Relevance

In Section 1, we have seen how popular this programme is. In the remainder of this paper, we will focus on (1) funny names of characters and (2) its familiar storylines and the accessible nature of stories for both children and adults, given as reasons for its popularity.

3.1 Ad hoc concept and blending

Earlier, it was mentioned that one of the reasons for Yokai Watch's popularity is its naming of characters. And indeed, its yokai names are pretty unique and often are combination of existing characters or items from other products. For example, *Murikabe* ㇿり壁 is a character that always refuses to do whatever is being said to him. This name is a combination of *Nurikabe*, a traditional yokai that is a wall phantom, which also appears in another popular yokai anime that takes a more traditional approach than yokai watch. *Muri* in Japanese means 'impossible'. *Ittan gomen* 一旦ごめん is a yokai that apologises all the time without meaning it and hence causes irritation. It is another yokai name that is a blend of a traditional yokai name (*ittanmomen*) and the phrase of apology (*gomen*). *Ittan* plays a significant role here, as in its original yokai name, *ittan* refers to the length of the cotton while in yokai watch, *ittan* means 'once' or 'for now', adding to the meaningless nature of its apology. Similarly, *kuchidake onna* ㇿだけ女 is a female yokai in Yokai Watch that makes a grand statement but never actually does anything. It is a blend of the original, traditional yokai *Kuchisake Onna* (ㇿ裂け女), and the phrase *kuchidake* (ㇿだけ). *Kuchisake Onna* is a slit-mouth woman who attacks people in twilight. *Kuchidake* (mouth-only) is a word with negative connotation often used to criticise those who make grand statements but never act on them.

In Yokai Watch, most yokai names are cases of linguistic blending. Blending is said to involve "the coinage of a new lexeme by fusing parts of at least two other source words of which either one is shortened in the fusion and/ or where there is some form of phonemic or graphemic overlap of the source words".²² As Gries explains, lexical blending has been discussed mostly in the context of word formation, typology of blends, and process of blending.

While accounts of blending in terms of word formation or structure would enable us to explain how these names are formulated, it still does not explain how the viewers interpret them and why they might find these names funny. What we need instead is a theory that accounts for interpretation process and its effects. The relevance theoretic notion of *ad hoc concept* will enable us to answer this very question. Earlier, we saw how relevance theory acknowledges the role of inference at a lexical level. We also saw how the notion of *ad hoc concept* accounts for the recovery of a particular concept in a specific context. Let us now see how this relevance theoretic notion of ad hoc concepts would account for some aspects of popularity of Yokai Watch.

²² Stefan Th Gries, "Shouldn't it be breakfunch? A quantitative analysis of the structure of blends". *Linguistics* 42/3 (2004): 639.

Relevance theory predicts that each part of blended lexicon can act as an address for a particular concept in a specific context. In cases of yokai names, elements from different linguistic items are blended to create a new lexeme. Each element of the new lexeme would trigger a recovery of a certain concept, enabling the viewers to recover one blended concept. That is, by combining two linguistic items, the speaker can create a hybrid of two conceptual representations to form an *ad hoc concept*. However, the real question is, what makes these combinations funny, and how do viewers interpret them? Jackson (personal communication) explains how blending often involves satirical humour. Humour can be seen as a subset of *affective* meaning. Not only does lexical blending create an ad hoc concept based on a hybrid representation that consists of more than one conceptual representations, it also creates an intensified effect, by allowing for an access to a wider range of contextual assumptions which would not have been possible if accessed independently of each other²³. The very fact that these were combined in the first place would allow the viewers to search for the link that had been hidden until now. Access to a wider range of assumptions will yield extra cognitive effects. As we can see in cases of blending such as *Brexit*, *gwestimate*, *bridezilla*, or even *Brangelina*, some contextual assumptions that are made accessible by blending might trigger the access to certain societal assumptions, which would in turn create extra satirical effects. Not only does the viewer recover the hybrid of Bride and Godzilla for example, they will have had access to combined assumptions which the viewer would not have entertained before, such that *brides would do whatever to achieve their dream wedding* or that *brides destroy whoever comes in their way*.

Recall *murikabe*. We have seen that this name is a combination of *muri* (impossible) and the yokai name taken from traditional yokai *nurikabe* (which also appears in another traditional yokai anime). In recent years, the word *muri* is used more and more prevalently amongst younger generations when they want to refuse something, with a more dismissive attitude than it was used in the past. *Nurikabe* is traditionally a yokai that uses his body (a wall) to interfere with people coming and going. In the original yokai anime, it is also described as a nice yokai, loyal to his yokai friends and who has often used his own body to protect them. The blending of these linguistic items contributes to the recovery of the hybrid concept of a yokai character that not only obstructs with his body, but is also dismissive when refusing to allow for entry. Such a hybrid would allow the viewers to access assumptions such as how this new yokai would refuse anything unless you are in his inner circle, he would be dismissive, and he would be physically too strong to overcome. Viewers would also access contextual assumptions about dismissive attitudes of younger generations towards those who are not in their inner circle. This would trigger satirical humour. Similarly, *Ittangomen* (一旦ごめん) is a blend of *Ittanmomen*, which is a cotton phantom of a certain length (*ittan*), and *gomen*, which is a phrase for apology in Japanese. In addition, *ittan* can also be interpreted as ‘once’ or ‘for now’. In this case, the ad-hoc, hybrid concept would allow viewers to access assumptions related to the original yokai *ittanmomen*, as well as assumptions about those overused *gomen* or the connotation of *ittan* i.e. satirical attitudes towards those who apologise quickly without meaning it, and then repeat the same mistake again and again.

3. 2 Relevance, blending and multimodality

²³ For a fuller discussion on a hybrid representation and affect, see Diane Blakemore, “Apposition and Affective Communication”. *Language and Literature* 17/1 (2008): 37-57.

So far, we have seen how some characteristics of yokai names can be explained in terms of the relevance theoretic notion of ad hoc concepts. Not only does it explain how viewers would interpret yokai names, it also enables us to account for the additional effects of satirical humour. However, there is a crucial shortcoming in this account. That is, it does not take into consideration visual elements of yokai characters. As anime series, it is unsurprising that characters are represented with a particular appearance. When interpreting the name, or, when recovering an ad hoc concept of the yokai, it would be impossible not to be influenced by yokais's visual elements. That is, we need an account that goes beyond linguistic elements but also include non-verbal, visual elements in pragmatic inference.

Relevance theory also acknowledges that human communication involves both verbal and non-verbal elements. Wharton, in his series of work on non-verbal communication, demonstrates how human communication involves continuum of showing and saying. At the *saying* end of the continuum, the speaker communicates by providing more indirect and coded evidence for what he/she wants to communicate while at the *showing* end of the continuum, the communicator provides more direct and less coded evidence for what he/she wants to communicate.²⁴ For example, the speaker can produce the utterance 'it will rain soon' in order to communicate his prediction while he can also point at a growing dark cloud in the sky. The utterance 'it will rain soon' is the indirect (i.e. coded) evidence and hence a case of *saying* while his pointing at the cloud in the sky is the direct evidence for his prediction and hence a case of *showing*.

The non-propositional (or non-coded) nature of communicated assumptions can bring about a *stronger* change in the hearer's cognitive environment via increased manifestness of weaker assumptions, as it enables the hearer to access a wider range of assumptions. That is, the use of non-verbal stimuli would allow for a recovery of a wider range of weak assumptions that would communicate 'impressions' rather than one strong assumption. According to Sperber and Wilson, "an impression is a change in the manifestness of an array of propositions which all bear on our understanding the same phenomenon, answering the same question, or deciding on the same issue".²⁵ The use of non-verbal stimuli could therefore strengthen the nature of what is being communicated. In other words, communication of non-propositional effects in multimodal contents gradually revise the cognitive environment and prepare the suitable environment for the author's intention to be recovered.

The advantage of this relevance theoretic view on communication is that we could account for ALL communicative stimuli, whether it is verbal or non-verbal, under one theoretical framework. Under the theoretical architecture of Relevance theory, we could explain how multimodal stimuli, both verbal and non-verbal, influence the viewers' interpretation process without the need for separating the two. In other words, this account would enable us to explain the role of both verbal and non-verbal elements in yokai characters when the viewer interprets them. In 3.1, we saw what effects the lexical blending of *murikabe* has on the viewers. Consider, in addition, how the character is presented. The character is presented as a wall, just same as the traditional yokai *nurikabe*. However, unlike *nurikabe*, *murikabe* has two hands in front of its chest with palms out, in very much the same way as people put their hand out to demonstrate a refusal. In addition, his lips are firmly closed. Such visual characteristics *shows* the nature of this characteristics (strong refusals), in addition to its name that *says* them. *Ittangomen* also has a similar combination of its

²⁴ See, for example, Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, Wilson and Wharton 2006, Wharton 2001, 2003, 2009.

²⁵ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Beyond speaker's meaning". *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* XV/44 (2015): 117-149.

traditional visual (being a long cotton cloths) as well as newly added cynical facial expression with hand gesture often used in Japan for apologies/excuse. Again, the ad hoc concept the viewers would recover from this representation is a combination of *saying* meaning by the lexical blend as we saw in 3.1, and the *showing* meaning communicated via the use of imagery.

As these cases demonstrate, intertextuality, or reference to other cultural items found in character representation in *Yokai Watch* is *multimodal*. It involves multiple modes including visual AND verbal elements, leading to the communication of *showing* elements and *saying* elements at the same time. Such propositional and non-propositional effects in multimodal contents revise the cognitive environment from multiple angles and prepare the suitable environment for interpretation. It would be reasonable to say that this is the reason why yokai-characters leave such strong impressions on the viewers.

3.3 Beyond verbal communication - multimodal ‘echo’ and Yokai Watch

So far, we have seen how Yokai Watch characters are presented in a manner that would lead the viewer to construct ad-hoc concepts based not only on verbal information but also visual information. That is, Yokai Watch characters exhibit a fully multimodal nature. This account would provide an explanation for some aspects of its general popularity. What it does not account for, instead, is the other aspect of yokai watch: the popularity amongst different generations. As we saw in Section 1, many people explain how Yokai Watch is familiar to their own experience. In this section, we will present a possible account of how familiarity would link to popularity.

Often, yokai watch characters and storylines have reference to cultural items that would trigger melancholic feeling for adult viewers of certain generations. Let’s take the example of *gurerurin* (グレリン). This yokai has the lexically blended name that consists of a verb that was popular in the 80s ‘gureru’ (to go off rails) and Gremlin (a popular character from the 80s Hollywood film). In terms of visuals, this yokai wears a pompadour hairstyle, and is often squatting down. One of the social phenomena seen in the 80s was social outlaws especially amongst high-school students. There were a number of smash hits films on this theme, a number of boy bands dressed in the style of outlaws, and outlaws were seen something of hero, as well as troubles. So, how do we explain this in terms of relevance theory?

In 3.2, we saw how communication of weak assumptions or non-propositional effects in multimodal contents gradually revises the cognitive environment and prepare the suitable environment for the communicator’s intention to be recovered. In Relevance Theory, communication of non-propositional effects such as impressions and attitudes are called expressive meaning.²⁶ The speaker can express a range of attitudes to a range of phenomena but when the expressed attitude is to an attributed utterance or thought, it is considered *echoic*. Echoic use is defined as a subset of ‘interpretive’ use of language, where the speaker (generally tacitly) expresses one of a range of attitudes to a (generally tacitly) attributed utterance or thought.²⁷ In particular, the notion of *echoic use* has been applied to the analyses of verbal irony, where the speaker communicates a dissociative attitude. However, echoic use does not have to be linked to dissociative attitude. In case of Yokai Watch, unlike the standard verbal irony, communicated attitudes might not always be dissociative. It might be

²⁶ Ibid., 117-149.

²⁷ Deirdre Wilson, “The pragmatics of verbal irony: Echo or pretence?”. *Lingua* 116 (2006): 1722-1743.

something of melancholy, or fondness. It could even be satirical, or the mixture of fondness and embarrassment. In addition, the notion of echo could also be expanded to *showing* aspect of communication rather than strictly verbal and *saying*. That is, by presenting a character with particular visual elements could enable the producer to echo what is associated with the visual elements; the regent hairstyle and squatting to the group of troublesome youngsters for example. In such a case, the TV producer is echoing ‘memory’ shared amongst members of a certain generation to communicate attitudes towards the particular memory. It could be satirical and humorous, or it could be simply of fondness. It is for individual viewers to decide. From the visuals of *gurerurin*, the viewers would recover a range of weak assumptions from this particular era of high school outlaws and their own experience from that time. Another example of this is *jinmenken* (人面犬). *Jinmenken* is an urban myth from the end of 80s to early 90s: a dog with a human face, that (was said to have) appeared in Japanese cities. It has a face of a middle aged man, who storms off with a snide parting comment when confronted by humans. Although it was an urban myth and hence no one knows exactly what it looks like, *Yokai Watch* completes the myth by representing this dog giving him a face of a middle aged man, with a tendency to whinge about hard life, as you would expect from a middle aged salaryman in Japan, being treated as a freak by younger people. The use of multimodal stimuli echo assumptions from the past, communicating a range of attitudes towards attributed thoughts on middle aged men, this particular urban myth, and the ‘memory’ of adult viewers from this generation. In this particular case, it is not just the character representation that is used as echoic. It is the whole discourse concerning this particular character including storylines that as a whole work as extended multimodal stimuli that trigger the communication of impressions.

This does not mean that viewers need to have such ‘shared’ memories to enjoy this programme. Having an access to certain cultural assumptions might create extra effects, but even for viewers unfamiliar with certain subtexts, the programme still achieves optimal relevance in their own cognitive environment. Let’s take the case of *Jibanyan* (ジバニャン), one of the main yokai characters. This character is in the shape of a cat that died as a result of a traffic accident. In Japanese myths, some spirits remain at the location where they died, as they cannot let go of the time when they were alive. Such spirits are called *Jibakurei* (地縛霊). *Nyan* is an onomatopoeia for the noise cats make. So, at the lexical level, the character name is a lexical blend of *jibakurei* and *nyan*. In terms of its visuals, it has big round eyes, being ‘cute’ as expected from a cat. In the episode that explains how *jibanyan* became a yokai, it shows how he, as a cat, threw himself in front of a lorry in order to show his love to his owner, who was showing a very cold attitude towards him in front of her friends. Throwing himself into the traffic, *jibanyan* shouts “I am not going to die.” There are two possible ways in which this scene could achieve an optimal relevance. First, for viewers familiar with a popular 90s drama series, *The 101st Proposal*, this is an echoic use of multimodal stimuli which triggers the viewers to access their existing assumptions about the drama series, with feelings and impressions regarding the drama series. In the *101st Proposal*, a tired, middle-aged man falls in love with a talented cello player who keeps turning down his advances. However, at the very last scene, he stands in front of oncoming traffic (a lorry) and shouts ‘I will not die’. He survives and this episode softens her attitudes towards the protagonist, leading to a happy-ever-after finale. Even for viewers unfamiliar with this subtext, the cat shouting ‘I am not going to die’, would lead the viewers not to anticipate the cat’s death. Rather, in this context of upbeat children’s animation, viewers would anticipate the cat surviving the traffic and living happily ever after.

Yokai Watch betrays viewers' expectation: the moment *jibanyan* shouts "I am not going to die", the lorry hits him and he dies. This contradicts an existing assumption that *it is likely that one would survive in such circumstances*, which viewers would have, based on their experience through similar scenes in films and TV dramas. This contradiction leads viewers to eliminate this existing assumption that heroes often survive precarious situations in films and TV dramas. This gap between the existing assumption, or the viewers' expectation and what actually happens, triggers extra effects, such as shock or laughter (as it is indeed presented in a humorous/ slapstick comedy) manner and *jibanyan* revives as a yokai straightaway.

Another example of this sort would be *Kin-san Gin-san* (金さん銀さん) from the feature length film version of *Yokai Watch*. *Kin-san* and *Gin-san* were twin sisters who appeared in the Japanese media in the 90s. They first became a household name at the age of 100, when they were given an award by their local mayor. They then appeared in many types of media, from appearing on TV commercials to releasing a CD. At that time, they were considered to be really nice, innocent and even 'cute' as grandmothers. The use of this particular yokai name with the visuals of elderly twin sisters is an echoic use of multimodal stimuli which would trigger recovery of an array of assumptions about these particular twin sisters from the 90s. Even if viewers do not have immediate access to such assumptions, characters based on two old ladies would normally lead them to access assumptions about nice, gentle grandmothers with a homely feeling. Like the case of *jibanyan*, *Yokai Watch* betrays viewers' expectations and it is soon revealed that the characters *Kin-san* and *Gin-san* are in fact villains. Viewers with existing assumptions would be able to recover further effects as they have access to contradictory assumptions. However, even the viewers without such existing assumptions will still be able to recover enough effects to be relevant, as they would be able to base their expectations on general assumptions on elderly ladies.

4. Conclusion

This paper is an attempt to account for social phenomenon from the perspective of Relevance theory, a cognitively grounded theory of communication. Using a popular series *Yokai Watch*, it has demonstrated how social aspects of media discourse could be explained, using underlying theoretical notions. We have seen how *Yokai Watch* takes advantage of lexical and multimodal blending, leading the viewers to recover ad hoc concepts that would allow viewers to access 'shared' memory within the generation, as well as contributing to an optimal relevance even for those viewers who do not have such existing assumptions. That is, multimodal intertextuality found in *Yokai Watch* is a way to allow for access to a range of weak assumptions, where the set of weak assumptions create this vague entity that consists of the character and associated assumptions. Characters are ad hoc concepts that communicate meta-representation of fuzzy subsets of these assumptions. In that way, it contributes to relevance by raising manifestness of related *mutually manifest* (shared) assumptions, where viewers access existing assumptions that help recover additional expressive meanings. In contrast, for viewers unfamiliar with sub-text, the programme would still achieve relevance in their own cognitive environment.

The popularity of *Yokai Watch* is achieved through various ways that contribute to relevance. This brief examination shows how the creators take advantage of a full range of tools available to them to create this programme, indicating the calculated nature of popularity. Of course, there are other elements within this programme that would contribute to its immense popularity. These await further investigation.

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