

# 「ちゃつぽにやふたがない」：わらべうたとナーサリーライム 歴史と分析

## “Chatsubo-Chatsubo-niya futa ga nai”: History and Analysis of Warabeuta and Nursery Rhymes

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### ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the diversity of definitions and classification of nursery rhymes and warabeuta and provides an explanation of the current situation surrounding the play genre warabeuta in Japan. It traces the historical development and current decline of the genre and shares observations from several elementary schools in Tokyo.

この研究はナーサリーライムとわらべうたの定義と分類についての相違点を紹介し、また日本においてのわらべうたというジャンルの現在の状況について論じている。この論文は先行研究といくつかの公立小学校の観察をもとにわらべうたのジャンルの歴史的な発展と現在の人気低下を追跡している。

## Introduction

A 'nursery rhyme' is, at its simplest, a rhyme song for children composed in or for the nursery. Likewise, the Japanese *warabeuta* can be defined as songs sung to or by children. However, it is remarkable that the essential characteristics of this genre are not universally agreed upon. This paper introduces the diversity of definition and classification of nursery rhymes and *warabeuta* and the current situation of *warabeuta* in Japan. For this purpose, this paper traces the historical development of the genre and shares observations at several elementary schools in Tokyo. This permits us to view the shifting emphasis in characterization of this language phenomenon. Let us begin with a contemporary encyclopaedic description:

'Nursery rhymes are simple verses, often accompanied by a simple tune, used for the entertainment and education of small children. Most nursery rhymes have been handed down from one generation to another. Among the oldest are those related to telling time, counting, or learning the alphabets. The rhyme beginning "Thirty days hath September," for example, has its origins in a medieval French poem. The origins of many others, however, such as "Humpty-Dumpty" or "Ladybug, Ladybug, Fly Away Home," are open to conjecture; some theorists think that a number of seemingly naive nursery rhymes have concealed political or topical significance. Like popular songs or ballads, some nursery rhymes have an appeal due to their music as well as their words.' (Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopaedia 2005)

'Mother Goose: name traditionally associated with nursery rhymes in England and especially in the United States. The figure of Mother Goose

is often depicted on the cover or frontispiece of a collection of verse for children as an old woman riding a flying gander. The origin of the tradition is somewhat obscure, although it is usually traced to a book of children's stories by French writer Charles Perrault.' (Microsoft® Encarta Online Encyclopaedia 2005)

In Japanese, the term 'nursery rhymes' is usually translated as *warabeuta* and, here again, the interpretation of the meaning slightly differs between researchers.

According to a brief dictionary explanation *warabeuta* is: (The Comprehensive Dictionary of the Japanese Language, 2003)

1. Songs sung by children. Songs sung by children since early times.
2. Songs sung to children.

A comprehensive review of the literature available on this topic, in addition to the folklore collections (folk sayings include nursery rhymes), demonstrates that it is folklorists who have conducted the majority of research on children's language. This is unsurprising since nursery rhymes and mother goose songs were considered to be 'remains of the day', relics of past traditions, a dying phenomenon not strictly related to any other linguistic or social discipline.

### **1. Nursery rhymes, Mother Goose, warabeuta and the usage of terms in the literature on children's language**

Folklorists have tried to provide the precise designation for the various descriptions 'nursery rhymes', 'children's songs, *warabeuta*, 'Mother Goose' and lullabies. 'Nursery rhymes' are considered a summary or generic expression

for lullabies, singing games, nonsense, rhymes, counters, etc., when interpreted only as rhymes created by adults for the purpose of entertaining children (e.g. sung when the mother cradles her child); rhymes created by children should not be put into that category. Sometimes, 'nursery rhymes' are referred to as songs or chants, created by children themselves for the purpose of entertaining children. However, most classic nursery rhymes were composed for the purpose of adult entertainment and adults were the creators of these nursery rhymes. Adults passed on verses to their children and thus the well-known nursery rhymes today are 'adult-approved'.

## 1.2. History of doyo and warabeuta Japan

In Japan, songs and rhymes for children (especially in English) are mostly known as 'Mother Goose'. This is due to the fact that the Japanese poet Hakushu Kitahara chose the phrase 'Mother Goose' for the Japanese translation of a collection of English nursery rhymes (1921) in spite of the fact that a genuine word 'doyo' exists in Japanese language. 'Doyo' could be found originally in Japanese literature far back in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, in 'Nihon Shoki' – Chronicles of Japan, (720). It is not clear whether the term itself was used in that period, but later, under the influence of the European music and culture it became interchangeable with the term *warabeuta*. In 1820, *A Collection of Doyo* was published and the songs in it were divided into lullabies 'komoriuta', ball game songs 'mariuta', tag game songs 'onitamashi' and songs related to natural phenomena 'tensho'.

Lafcadio Hearn's *Japanese Miscellany* (1901) had a chapter dealing with traditional Japanese 'warabeuta', in which songs were divided into 6 categories. Later (1949), Kunio Yanagida published two volumes of *Classification of Children Language* where he had collected only songs, created by children for children.

Still, children's songs did not receive much attention in Japan until Hakushu Kitahara published his translation of nursery rhymes collection in which he chose a thematic classification for the verses. He reassessed the value of the nursery rhymes, rejected the opinion that they are 'unnatural songs with no artistic value', and pointed out the necessity of exposing children to this kind of rich folklore. That is why he collected *warabeuta* from all over Japan and after his death his apprentices published *A Collection of Japanese Traditional Children's Songs*. In the years 1979-1992, Asano and Machida, together with other folklorists and musical education specialists, issued 27 volumes of the 'Complete Collection of Japanese *Warabeuta*'. Their efforts incorporating international influences resulted in the hesitant introduction of *warabeuta* in music classes at school.

To summarize, many individual researchers in the past and recently various educational or mass media institutions have gathered, published and continue to compile nursery rhymes collections in attempt to preserve the culture and tradition and have. There are numerous collections of nursery rhymes or mother goose songs known today. No research is available on whether nursery rhymes exist in all countries in the world, i.e. whether they are a cultural universal. However, it is logical to assume that every nation has nursery rhymes more or less known to the young generation.

Other than the hitherto mentioned compilations, there appears to be a paucity of systematic studies on the rich and complex language play of Japanese school children and, as will be indicated in the next section, no consistency in the Japanese terminology when discussing children's songs and language.

## 1.3. In search of the best definition for the Japanese terms:

*Warabeuta, doyo, asobiuta (kuchiasobi)* ,

*komoriuta* and *minyo* can be found in dictionaries and contemporary research along with their respective explanation:

In a Japanese-English dictionary (2003), the word *warabeuta* is translated straightforwardly as 'a children's song'; *minyo* is a folk song, a (folk) ballad; *doyo* is a children's song, a nursery song. *Komoriuta* is a lullaby, a cradle song; however the word *asobiuta* (*kuchiasobiuta*) is not listed. The Comprehensive Dictionary of the Japanese Language (2003) gives the following brief explanation of the above terms:

### Komoriuta

Songs sung when dandling a baby/child or when putting it to sleep. Also: songs imitating such scenes (including the ones that are western classical style or accompanied by instruments). In our country (Japan) many nursemaids used to express their own feelings on the pretext of singing *komoriuta*.

### Minyo

Songs of the popular masses. Songs spread among the people, born from the everyday activity of the ordinary people, sung and passed down from generation to generation. They reflect the emotions in the peoples' life and localness/community specificity. In a broad sense, recently created songs which carry a local sense (so called 'new folk songs') also belong to the category of folk songs.

### Doyo

1. Songs, created and sung (hummed) by children, rhymes, created by children.
2. Songs for children, having words/lyrics appropriate for children's soul/heart/mind. Those doyo who were passed down by oral tradition among the people are called *warabeuta*.
3. From the middle of Taisho period until the beginning of Showa period Hakushu Kitahara

and his pupils criticized the choral songs, approved/introduced by the Japanese Ministry of Education and created new, which were later popularized among the children.

### Asobiuta

Songs, sung by children when playing games as, for example,

*Chatsubo, chatsubo, chatsubo niya futa ga nai Soko totte futa ni shiro!* (Chuwa Elementary school, 2006)

And (boys' version)

*Yakyu ken o suru nara  
Gaiya seki de osameyo  
Out! Safe! Yo yoi no yoi!*  
[*Janken*] (Chuwa elementary school, 2006)

### Kuchiasobi

1. Something said for some reason or other, humming
2. Joke. Idle talk.

The Dictionary of Synonyms in Japanese (1994) gives *doyo* as a synonym for *warabeuta*, with the difference that *warabeuta* are songs sung to children since early times, while many *doyo* are a relatively recent creation. Synonyms for *minyo* or *asobiuta* (*kuchiasobi*) cannot be found in this dictionary.

In her research on the rhythm of *warabeuta* and the physical response it evokes in children, Reiko Washio (1967) explains it as follows: *Warabeuta* is a song which children sing when they play games; *warabeuta* is a means for having fun. In most cases it is accompanied by physical movement, and this physical movement is, in fact, central to the play; the song injects interest to the play. *Warabeuta*

can be long, like a western classical style song or short; even the fragmental *janken* can be considered *warabeuta*). *Warabeuta* is thus generally regarded to be fragmented, underdeveloped and unspecialized, even primitive. Nevertheless, it is held to play an important educational role.

In the preface to her published collection of *warabeuta* Miyoko Sato (2004) explains that *warabeuta* is an important factor in the formation of the personality/character of the children and stimulates cooperativeness, creativity and language development in early years. Washio and Sato do not relate *warabeuta* to *doyo* or *minyo*; however Sato uses the word *asobiuta* in her study.

Meanwhile, the explanation of *warabeuta* according to Masaru Honjoya (1982) is not consistent with the above.

'*Warabeuta* is one kind of the folk song tradition or it is usually considered to be a children's folk song.' Honjoya uses the word *kuchiasobi* as a synonym for *warabeuta*.

Takeda (1997) argues that children's perception is very sharp; they notice much, draw and take in everything in their surrounding world. Children are always the main characters in the drama of their world and they try to involve things/animals/creatures/other children from the outside world. This is how a group is formed and where there is a group, there lies *warabeuta*.

Just as adults have their own folklore, created while working and accompanying work, children have their own folklore too; their own *warabeuta* created in their games and accompanying their plays. Takeda compares the Japanese *warabeuta* to the European Mother Goose songs, and claims that *warabeuta* are shorter than Mother Goose and do not necessarily tell a story or tale (Takeda, *ibid*). No matter what the audience is or how they would feel about the song, *warabeuta* are direct and most

of the words in it are children's words and language. The only exception is the *temariuta*, in which the skilful the player is, the longer the song goes and it can resemble a story-telling, however it is not created with the intention of telling a story. Takeda claims that *warabeuta* (*komoiruta* is the only exception) are created by group of children or in group games, and they are not altered or corrected in any way by adults. Takeda thinks that even the way *warabeuta* are handed down orally to the generations is different, thus having other formation and oral tradition.

According to Takeda, Kamifue in his *Japanese Warabeuta* (1972) claims that the research on *warabeuta* was mostly related to song lyrics, and there are few studies pursuing the question of *warabeuta* and its relation to games and what meaning they carry in children's everyday life.

### 1.3.1. Warabeuta and minyo (folklore) difference and similarities

'*Folklore*: general term for the verbal, spiritual, and material aspects of any culture that are transmitted orally, by observation, or by imitation. People sharing a culture may have in common an occupation, language, ethnicity, age, or geographical location. This body of traditional material is preserved and passed on from generation to generation, with constant variations shaped by memory, immediate need or purpose, and degree of individual talent. The word *folklore* was coined in 1846 by the English antiquary William John Thoms to replace the term popular antiquities'. (Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopaedia 2005)

#### Minyo

Honjoya cites the explanation from The Dictionary of Japanese Folk Songs (Yukichi Kodera, 1935)

‘What is *minyo*, where is the difference between *minyo* and other songs? It is said that *minyo* are songs of the past, moreover there are songs of the villages following tradition. *Minyo* has already developed to the necessary extent and there is no progress after that, while the other songs have made remarkable progress thanks to the mutual cooperation with other forms of art.’

This explanation of *minyo* matches the one given by Kunio Yanagida, with the difference that Kunio Yanagida adds that songs sung at festivals (*odoriuta*) and *warabeuta* are part of the folklore. Asano (1962) in his book *Japanese Folk Songs* gives the following five attributes of folk songs as necessary in order to classify a song as a folk song:

- It must be spontaneous
- It must be a song (passed down orally and having a folk motif)
- It must be collective (product of the mass, and not an individual creation)
- It must be simple and unsophisticated
- It must have local features

Is *warabeuta*, being a part of Japanese folklore a partial synonym for *minyo*?

Honjaya (1982) states that there are differences between *warabeuta* and *minyo*:

- Folk motif and oral tradition

*Warabeuta* are spread by word-of-mouth as well as folk songs, that is why it is not strange that certain paragraphs or words in it change with the time. The difference between *warabeuta* and a folk song is that in most cases folk songs can be found transformed into a totally different from the original version song, while *warabeuta*, (even after changes due to the fact that it is passed down orally from generation to generation) still keeps more or less its original ‘face’. As for the lyrics it can be said that *warabeuta* originate from older times than folk songs. Folk songs were performed mainly by those who can sing well, and *warabeuta* were sung by

anyone. Some folk songs could be interpreted as parody, while *warabeuta* are more like words that you want to tell yourself, a monologue that often has little or no sense.

- Localness

Localness is more typical for folk songs than for *warabeuta*. This is because folk songs usually praise or share something from a specific region, while *warabeuta* have a rather ‘universal’ character. Some of the *warabeuta*, (not to be mixed with *komoriuta*) are created by children for children, and as we know at early ages the world of a child does not spread beyond the child itself. Even if it spreads further, it only covers the child’s realization of his parents and has no relation to any feelings of belonging to a certain region or local area.

- Collectiveness

Folk songs are a product of mass popular tradition. As they are passed down orally, many parts are deleted, others are added, and as a whole the folk songs do not keep the individuality of their creator. *Warabeuta* on the other hand do not, from the very beginning, possess any individual features and do not express any personality. It is because *warabeuta* are neither created by a certain individual, nor by a limited group, but they are product of one whole country.

- Spontaneity

*Warabeuta* start spontaneously in the same manner as folk songs do. There is no author who creates the lyrics and music for both genres. The difference is that folk songs are created by adults and for adults, while some *warabeuta* are created by adults to be sung to children. Of course, children are the ones who have ‘cultivated’ *warabeuta*. If children do not like a song, it will gradually be forgotten or, in the best case, it will undergo change. ‘Analysing *warabeuta* we can trace the character

of the people in the past, how 'serious' adults have been taking games on one hand and on the other hand how childlike adults were.' (Kunio Yanagida, Record/Chronicle of Children's Culture, 1932, as cited in Honjaya, 1982).

- **Simplicity**

Folk songs are considered to be simple and unsophisticated. On the other hand *warabeuta* are considered to some extent primitive, even though they were created by adults. This primitiveness represents the originality of a nation or ethos.

With regard to *komoriuta*, Masaru Honjaya (1982) provides the following explanation:

*Komoriuta* are not only those songs which were sung by adults. It has been said that they are only sung to entertain or put children to sleep. Even though *komoriuta* were created by adults, they were addressed to children and after children remembered them and became familiar with the lyrics, they, in turn, started singing them to their friends or their own children. Lullabies are not created by children but serve as a 'textbook' for the children so we should not neglect them, as children reproduce these lullabies in their first attempts for song or chant creation. Honjaya sets the maximum age for children who will listen to *komoriuta* (the kind that is sung when putting children to sleep) at 4-5 years, but as for the rest of the *komoriuta* (the ones that are similar to Mother Goose songs) the limit is at about 10 years.

#### 1.4. History of Nursery rhymes and Mother Goose (England)

In comparison with *warabeuta*, when we talk about *nursery rhymes*, there is a unified usage of all terms. The term 'mother goose', can be found in a 1697 collection of eight fairy tales published by the famous Charles Perrault. (*Histoires ou contes du tempes passé, avec des Moralites: Contes de ma Mere l'Oye –Tales of My Mother the Goose*)

This writer used a phrase from the Loret's La Muse Historique (1650) which read '*Comme un conte de la Mere Oye – Like a Mother Goose story*'. In 1729, Charles Perrault's collection was translated in English, bearing the title *Histories or Tales of Past Times Told by Mother Goose* (Uno, 2000). Meanwhile, in London, Tommy Thumb published his *Pretty Song Book* Vol. II (1744), not using any of the above terms. This collection is considered to be the oldest collection of nursery rhymes existing. Nowadays, only the second volume of the book edited by Mary Cooper is available at a museum in England. Only the title of the first volume is known today and it was the *Song Book for All Little Masters and Misses* (Fujino, 2004). In 1765, John Newberry who was pursuing financial success published a chapbook with nursery rhymes, with the title *Mother Goose's Melody: or, Sonnets for the Cradle* and since then the two terms were used interchangeably in all English speaking countries.

The first scholastic English nursery rhymes collection was published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by J.O.Halliwell: *The Nursery Rhymes of England* (1842). This collection is considered to be the first collection of nursery rhymes having academic values (Uno, 2000). Halliwell gathered songs from different regions of England. His collection is also the first attempt to give some classification of the English nursery rhymes and that is why it was considered a comprehensive study at that time. And yet, Iona and Peter Opie have gathered the most complete collection of children lore and language games.

The Opies conducted the most far-reaching research on children's play language in England. Their studies included weekly observations and oral interviews in the playground of primary schools in search of traditional nursery rhymes and chants orally passed down by children, as well as children's songs not approved by adults. Other research in England has been conducted in order to present,

and of course, preserve songs in the oral tradition of the country. Some of the songs and chants that the Opies introduced in their books were collected by other individual teachers and researchers who cooperated with them. The data were gathered over 14 years and reflect children's slang, differences between games played by boys and girls as well as local varieties of games and songs. These data were later introduced in *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*; *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*; *Children's Games in Street and Playground*.

The research and publications conducted by the Opies have contributed, to a considerable extent, to studies of the genre. Critics describe the Opies as 'storytellers' (Warner, 2001) due to their amazing ability to organize all chants and songs into imaginary categories which scholars observe even today. The Opie team returned the credits of authorship to children and allowed them to speak for themselves in their remarkable collections.

In contrast to nursery rhymes, school verses/chants/rhymes were not intended for adult ears and, therefore, according to the Opies the adult influence is much less evident. It is not surprising, therefore, given a lack of interest or the complexity of adults collecting data that there appears to be less data on the language play of children.

The reason why the Opies worked on publishing a thorough collection of folklore created by children for children *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, (1959), was their concern that their study would not be complete if they limited their research to the nursery rhymes and mother goose songs, product of adults' imagination. *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* is 'the Bible' for every folklorist and children's language researcher. In this book, the Opies have provided a precise classification of the English children lore they collected at elementary schools all over England.

The Opies did not correct or censure any

of their data even though the language in the nursery rhymes often contradicts many pragmatic (empirical) conventions (e.g. 'pigs flying'). They preserved the 'sovereignty' of the children's world as depicted in the rhymes, a world hidden from the others, having its own linguistic rules and meanings, a world that cannot be measured by or put into the norms of adults.

## 2. Classification of warabeuta and nursery rhymes-an attempt for comparison

There are many attempts for classification of *warabeuta* and the following are the most well known:

Classification according to Lafcadio Hearn: (Japanese Miscellany, 1901) (as cited in Washio, 1967)

1. Songs about the weather and sky
2. Songs about animals
3. Miscellaneous plays
4. Narrative songs (tales, stories, etc.)
5. *Battle-door and ball songs* (songs sung when playing with a traditional ball, or for *hanetsuki*-game similar to badminton)
6. Lullabies

Classification according to Yoshihide Shida: (as cited in Washio, 1967)

1. Active songs (for games, etc)
  - 1.1. *Uta mari* (similar to *temari*)
  - 1.2. *Hane uta*
  - 1.3. Lullabies
  - 1.4. Other songs related to games and plays
2. Songs for still, static games
  - 2.1. Astronomical songs
  - 2.2. Songs about animals
  - 2.3. other songs for games

Classification according to Hakushu Kitahara  
(Collection of Traditional Japanese Children's  
Songs): (as cited in Washio, 1967)

1. Lullabies
2. Astronomical songs, songs about animals and plants
3. Songs for games and plays (1, 2, 3 part)
4. Songs related to seasonal work, events, etc.; other songs

Classification according to Yoshiaki Machida,  
Kenji Asano (Warabeuta—Japanese Traditional  
Children's Songs) (as cited in Washio, 1967)

1. *Yugiuta* Type 1 (*Temariuta*, *otedamauta*, *hanetsukiuta* and other games where children use some items like balls, etc. to play)
2. Lullabies (Songs sung by parents to their children to put them to sleep) or other kinds of songs (for entertaining children)
3. Songs about weather and astronomical phenomena (wind, rain, sunset, moon, snow and other natural phenomena)
4. Songs about animals and plants
5. Songs related to festivals throughout the year
6. *Yugiuta* Type 2 (Games with jump ropes, hide and seek and other group games)
7. *Hayashiuta* (songs accompanying some social phenomena/events or other miscellaneous songs)

Classification according to Keiichi Fujita  
(Introduction to Music Guidance) (as cited in  
Washio, 1967)

1. Songs for games in which chance is the main factor (*janken*, etc.)
2. Songs for games which involve body movement  
Games involving hands  
Games involving the movement of the whole body
3. Games in which order (formation) is

important

Theatrical/dramatic games

Games including exercising

4. Songs sung for amusing others

Classification according to Fumio Koizumi  
(Research on Warabeuta, 1969) (as cited in Washio,  
1967)

1. Recitation songs
2. Songs accompanying drawing activities
3. Jumping, kicking stones games
4. *Tedama*, *hanetsuki* games
5. Bouncing ball games
6. Jump rope games
7. *Janken*, *gu-choki-pak*
8. Hand games
9. Body games
10. Games having 'it'

Classification according to Masaru Honjoya  
(1982) :

1. *Komoriuta* (Lullabies)

There are two types: one is to put children to sleep and the other is to 'entertain' children playing with their hands, feet, etc.

2. *Kuchiasobiuta* (Humming) songs

The purpose of these is to make children sing along with the parents. They are sung throughout the year.

3. *Yugiteki kuchiasobi uta* (*Play/game songs*)

These are songs that are related to games about weather, animals, etc.

4. *Yugi uta* (*Game songs*)

They are sung with games only and follow set rules, specific for each game.

Classification according to Iona and Peter Opie:  
*The Lore and Language of School Children* (1959)  
(as cited in Maher, 2002)

1. Riddles
2. Singing Games

3. Nonsense
4. Counters
5. Tongue Twisters
6. Lullabies
7. Finger/Hand Plays
8. Topical Rhymes
9. Verse stories

As we notice, there are numerous classifications of *warabeuta*, and the similarities are quite many, and this compared to the research and collections on English nursery rhymes is quite an interesting fact. While every scholar who has done research on English nursery rhymes keeps and follows the 'canonical' classification of the Opies, in Japan there seems to be much difference in opinions.

### 3. Phonological features of *warabeuta* and nursery rhymes

#### 3.1. Japanese songs and chants, *warabeuta*

First Japanese chants and songs are known to have emerged through shamanism (spirit ritual conducted by mediums with supernatural powers) (Fujii, 2004). Songs required music so that the voice of the humans reaches out to the world of gods. Even if no music accompanied the chants in many cases they were still called 'songs' *uta*. The most popular forms of *uta* nowadays are *waka*. *Waka* were represented by its short form *tanka*, consisting of 5 lines, with 5-7-5-7-7 morae each, and *choka* was the form that repeated lines of 5 and 7 morae, when the last verses ended with two 7-morae lines. This is a feature common for all other Asian poetic forms (Fujii, 1999).

Another type of poetic forms (songs) were *ryuka*, *omoro* and *sentoka*. *Ryuka* was the Okinawan version of *tanka* and consisted of 4 strings, while each string had 8, 8, 8, 6 morae accordingly. Some of the *ryuka* were sung; other only chanted. *Omoro* were also sung in the

Okinawan region (Fujii, 1999).

The situation with *warabeuta* (Japanese children's songs) is slightly different. The rhythm characterizing children's songs is in most cases dual or quadruple, but there are exceptions too. The number of morae in each line is 4, 6, or 8 and thus the children's songs and chants are more similar to the Okinawan *ryuka*, than to the more 'universal' Japanese *tanka* or *choka*. Each children song or chant consists of 3 and up strings (Fujii, 1999).

After a comprehensive analysis on *warabeuta* and previous research on the Japanese children's songs, Washizu (1997) argues that the attempts to describe the rhythm of *warabeuta* using the measuring system of the western literature are not very appropriate. He claims that the rhythm of *warabeuta* is a stomping rhythm, compared to the rhythm of nursery rhymes which is a bouncing rhythm. Washizu follows the analysis done by Ohara (1975) (as cited in Washizu, 1997) according to which 425 *warabeuta* have 2/4 time, 82 have a mixed time and 5 have 3/4 time. There is not a single *warabeuta* in 6/8 time as it is typical for the nursery rhymes. Washizu argues that the existence of so many songs with a mixed time shows only one thing: that *warabeuta* can be measured in units of 1/4 time. Some of the songs described by Ohara have 4/4 time, however Washizu has considered them as *warabeuta* with 1/4 time, i.e. classified them as the ones with 2/4 or 4/4 time.

Another curious fact stated by Washizu is that *warabeuta*, even though many consider them as songs with a dotted rhythm (dotted eight or sixteenth notes), 262 songs from a total of 512 songs that were analysed did not have dotted rhythm. According to Washizu's theory *warabeuta* used in games with balls, the rhythm in them should be stomping, i.e. the rhythm should be dotted, however contrary to the expectations from 90 ball-game *warabeuta*, 53 did not have dotted rhythm. Washizu claims that another peculiar feature of

*warabeuta* is that compared to nursery rhymes, *warabeuta* may have walking as a part of the action while being sung, however there is never hopping or jumping, accompanying the Japanese traditional children's songs.

### 3.2. Nursery rhymes

It is well known that the rhythm in English is formed by the repetition of strong/weak stress patterns. In nursery rhymes, the strong-weak rhythm of trochaic meter is the most common pattern (Washizu, *ibid*), especially the strong-weak rhythm in quadruple time as well as the popular 6/8 time. The traditional nursery rhymes are accompanied by hopping or jumping and the rhythm pattern in these rhymes (mother goose) is the so-called sprung rhythm or bouncing rhythm. The MSN Encarta World English Dictionary (2005) gives the following definition for sprung rhythm:

*Sprung rhythm*: a system of prosody that always places the accent on the first syllable of any foot in an effort to evoke the rhythms of ordinary speech. The term and practice were originated by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.

## 4. Warabeuta and nursery rhymes— review on the folklorists' views

It is not only in Japan but also in other countries that commentary and research publication can be found on folklore, culture and its relation to education. Tolstoy, Kunio Yanagida, Ralf Linton or Margaret Mead are among the first to have conducted research on folklore and its anthropologic features. The focus of their work was mainly on the everyday way of life that children lead or its 'social' side. Few studies are known to have aimed at children's language used in games and songs. In the attempts to determine the different categories of folklore related to children, research is divided into the following three groups:

### 4.1. Categories:

#### Folklore by children

This category includes songs, rhymes, verses, games, charms, spells, nonsense rhymes, riddles, superstitions, exclusively created by and for children, as well as phrases used when celebrating events related to children (holidays for children) etc.

#### Folklore for children

This category includes folklore created by adults for children i.e. nursery rhymes, proverbs, fables, fairy tales, superstitions etc.

#### Folklore around children

This category includes songs, rhymes, verses, superstitions and stories, which are not meant for children, but are in some way related to holidays or events about children.

All these categories are part of the oral tradition that exists in any language.

### 4.2. The role of nonsense and fantasy in warabeuta and nursery rhymes

Why should we not neglect nonsense in children's verses? Some might think that the world of nonsense does not correspond to the witty riddles one can find in the children's language, but it has its important role in the children's life. Nonsense represents the opposite of every logic thing in the adults' world. Using nonsense, children can make all those who are almighty in their eyes feel powerless, mock the values in the world of grown-ups and create their own imaginative world thus challenge adults with the only effective arms they possess—nonsense.

Nonsense in children's rhymes can have two forms: phonological and semantic. The first refers to examples in which verses carry no specific meaning; they are put together only for pleasure from sound combinations. The second is about verses that have combined words, expressing different semantic fields. Examples for

phonological nonsense can be the various kinds of charms and spells. A flying Grandmother, simple human actions that cause natural phenomena, etc. are illustrations for the desire in children to deride adults' values. This and other nonsense are in fact an example of children's fantasy. We can say that fantasy helps children learn basic survival skills, how to adapt to uncomfortable situations, and how to fit in this world when they feel like outsiders.

Other verses, in which children talk about death or violence can be interpreted as a challenge towards the society of grown-ups. As the Opies say, 'nonsense can free the individual's mind because one can create their own rules unchallenged'. The same thing can be said about *warabeuta*. Children try to create their own world with their own rules, where *kamisama* (God) tells you which thing to choose and thanks to nonsense intertwined with fantasy, anything is possible.

## 5. Warabeuta and nursery rhymes—review on the educationalists' views

A brief overview of the educationalists' studies shows that there is much research conducted on children's language acquisition and children's language development.

### 5.1. Role-play and language acquisition

Quite a lot of the expressions that children use in their play are said to form through/originate from drama or other theatrical performances, or any activity that involves role-play. It is a sad fact that fewer and fewer children can be seen playing outside and in groups and that indoor activities, which often do not prompt any necessity to speak as there is no second child, have increased. These tendencies to some extent interfere with the natural language development in children through games and play. Slavson (1948) has argued that it is indisputable that group play activity can increase

the children's experience and thus stimulate the acquisition of language.

According to Murayama and Matsuyama (1998), children's games and play are closely related to the language they learn to use, as play time is the core of their life and it does not matter if the child plays alone, or takes part in a group. Language acquisition is said to be faster through games and entertaining activities than acquisition through formal instruction.

In the process of their growing up and understanding the world of adults, children learn to speak by other means; one of which is imitating the way the adults speak (imitating popular characters) and following examples of the surrounding world (oral tradition) .

### 5.2. Oral tradition

Another way of acquiring language in the early stages of development in children is through oral tradition. Educationalists agree that oral tradition (folklore) and language progress are interrelated. Common forms of oral tradition are children's songs, (both songs created for children by adults and songs created for children by children) as well as various folk-fairy tales, myths and legends.

*Warabeuta* are passed down from generation to generation orally and represent part of the folklore. One of the features of the *warabeuta* (if they are in the form of a song) is that they do not include semitones (especially 'fa' and 'si'). Another feature is the unification (integration) between the melody of the song and the intonation of the words. Furthermore *warabeuta* usually do not need accompaniment and are easy to remember and sing (both melody and words). They can be sung by one child as well as by a group of children. These features seem to enhance language acquisition, as they make the language learning an involuntary process.

### 5.3. Warabeuta, nursery rhymes and music

Children's songs and their musical aspects have also attracted the attention of many researchers. Educationalists researching children folklore from musical point of view believe that children's songs and chants should be accepted not only as a part of the culture heritage left from the past, but also as a base for musical development at early age. Children's songs are already introduced into the musical educational system in many countries, but researchers focus mainly on raising musical experience in traditional tunes in children. The experience of the 'play', 'game' and even 'language' part itself was more or less neglected. It is said that songs speed up the memorizing abilities in children. Also, songs are known to stimulate the ability to imitate in children, which is very important for them at younger point of life, when they learn everything they need for their future life from the adults around them.

According to a recent research by Bryant (1989) there are strong links between children's early knowledge of nursery rhymes and the developing of their phonological skills. The writers argue that 'Since such skills are known to be related to children's success in learning to read, this result suggests the hypothesis that acquaintance with nursery rhymes might also affect children's reading and spelling.' regardless of social background, I.Q. level or phonological skills children had at the beginning of the project.

### 5.4. Nursery rhymes and its introduction to the school curriculum

As already mentioned above, children's songs (together with some games) have been introduced into the school curriculum in several countries. One of the main reasons for the success of such curriculum is their simple scale. This is valid not only for a specific children's song, sung in

English, but also for children's songs in any language. (Here I have to mention that there are researchers who oppose the above statement. One of the examples given is that not every country or nationality has its own traditional children's songs – e.g. Afghanistan, thus introduction of educational system implementing children's songs is considered impossible) (Homma, 1998).

Still, the following educational systems remained in history:

- Kodaly system (Hungary)

Kodaly system is one of the most famous educational streams, known to have implemented traditional children's songs into the school curriculum. It started in Hungary, when children's songs were introduced in musical education in elementary schools. According to that system, the traditional Hungarian tunes were the first scales children experienced in their musical education. As the vocal features of the singing were considered to be the most important, then this system was thought to be good for enhancing the solfege education in early age (masterpieces by Kodaly and Bartok were widely used). In 1967 Kyoko Hani introduced this system in Japan.

- The system of Carl Orff (Germany)

He tried to introduce German traditional children's songs into the German school system. His attempts started before the Kodaly system, although at first children's songs were not the core of his teachings. Only after 1960's he began using children's songs as a teaching method, but there was not enough interest in what he was doing and insufficient research or attempts for implementing his system have been done since then.

- The system of Ernest Bloch (Switzerland)

It was largely introduced in the area of Sendai and had popularity as an innovative system for

teaching practice using children's songs. A few years later, though, children's songs lost their popularity amongst the educationalists in Japan.

### 5.5. Attempts to include *warabeuta* as teaching material (Japan)

In the 1970's The Ministry of Education in Japan started a movement to include traditional music (i.e. *warabeuta*) as a teaching material, although these materials were merely reference books and the attempts were not well supported at the beginning. In the era when the government was striving to internationalize the country, some non-governmental educational groups did not encourage the implementing of anything traditional into the textbooks, saying that being Japanese does not necessarily mean that traditional children's songs have to be taught at school. Other institutions admitted that the common understanding of *warabeuta* at the time is not sufficient. Meanwhile after analyzing children's songs and their relation to play and games, it has been decided to work on creating a curriculum including these games as a part of the classes (Homma, 1998) Thus the curriculum was focused not only on the musical side of *warabeuta*, but also on its value as a group entertaining activity assuring faster emotional and cognitive development in children.

## 6. *Warabeuta* and nursery rhymes—review on the psychologists' views

Vigotsky, Hartley, Piaget, Whitehead, etc. are among the most well known scholars in the field. There are also numerous publications on the interrelation between group play therapy and language development in handicapped children. Many of the views of the psychologists have been utilized by the educationalists in their research and practice.

### 6.1. Experience

Children learn to discover things themselves and to express themselves through play and games. Thus they create a 'miniature' world through which they find their selves and prepare for the 'real' world. Play and game provide experience, which children communicate with their peers or the adults around them. Play develops thinking and creativity in the child; and as rhymes and stories are a part of the play itself, they enhance language development and interest in original play with language.

### 6.2. Language acquisition

The meaning of the words they use in order to communicate evolves from the complexity of that experience. However, 'unusual' or contrary-to-norms phonetic or lexical combinations fascinate children, thus setting the starting point of language development and helping it exceed the mere form of imitation of adults' language. The language children use in their play is often a 'play with the language itself' as children like to follow any rhythm regardless of the language (nonsense is a good example) and create 'off-the-wall' word associations (formation of metaphor) (Vigotsky's mechanism of creativity) or stories with unexpected plot or ending. To a great extent, children are interested in the musical qualities of any language. These qualities are related to repetition of sound patterns and rhythm (as well as tones in tonal languages). These early forms of poetry are a major help to young speakers in their move to literacy. Thus, children are able to notice not only the initial letters in words, but also same or similar endings of words. Sound patterns and rhythm, themes and preoccupations in the nursery rhymes may differ depending on the language they are recited/sung in, but as Whitehead (1999) puts it they are 'like a very special kind of toy which children can take over and play with – sometimes to bounce and dance to, sometimes to muck about with

the language, and sometimes to explore ideas about what is forbidden, naughty, frightening or just plain puzzling.’

*Warabeuta* or children’s play songs have basic/simple vocabulary and 2 beat-rhythm, which is the same as the human heart beat. This is the reason why when children listen to *warabeuta* or other play songs they feel peace and relief; the songs make them feel reassured and at ease—the rhythm is ‘vernacular’ and familiar. Melody is not important—even children who cannot follow the tune yet enjoy the rhythm of the words in the song. (Washio, 1967; Yomiuri online, 2003)

Another children’s favourite is guessing the answer or what is coming next in a story/chant/song which may have prompted the formation of riddles. In this sense, one can assume that children language play (with all its forms) reflects the different stages of verbal development in children as well as builds a foundation for further language acquisition.

## 7. Current status of *warabeuta*, nursery rhymes and curriculum implementation

According to Washizu (1997), who has conducted observations in 1986 in a few elementary schools and kindergartens in London, English children seem to still sing and play using nursery rhymes, described and collected in the books compiled by the Opies. On the other hand, Opal Dunn (as cited in Washizu, 1997) claims that these days English children have little chance to learn traditional nursery rhymes at home or school.

The situation for *warabeuta* in Japan is not very favourable.

Even though many writers and educationalists’ efforts to preserve *warabeuta* can be noticed, the work in this direction is not sufficient. There are not few websites of kindergartens and nursery schools in Japan, advertising that *warabeuta* are included in their curriculum<sup>1</sup>. Kondo and Yagyu

(2001) have published a 4-volume edition of Japanese Nursery Rhymes Songs and in the preface to volume 1, they argue that *warabeuta* are very important in the early developmental phases of the child and Japan should follow the example of Hungarian and other countries having education through nursery rhymes (*warabeuta*). As an example for the current situation in elementary schools in Japan, I can give Keiyo Elementary School, where a limited number of *warabeuta* are been taught in the music classes for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders only. No *warabeuta* education is provided for 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> graders not only in the music classes, but also in the Japanese language classes in that school.<sup>2</sup>

Children seem to naturally lose interest in *warabeuta* in upper grades. Thus *warabeuta* give way to *manga* or TV, which therefore naturally has more influence on children’s language and culture in higher age groups.

It is very sad that even though in Japan there are complete collections of *warabeuta*, currently they are not ‘respected’ in the same way as other parts of the Japanese folklore<sup>3</sup>. It seems that *warabeuta* are almost forgotten. It is only the nostalgia about *warabeuta*, one has learned and played with in their childhood that warms our hearts. Children simply seem to ignore *warabeuta* as means of entertainment. However, since the last decade there has been a tendency for attempts for reviving the tradition of *warabeuta*. (Hani, Kondo, Yagyu are among the most fervent collectors of *warabeuta* and they have held many forums, lectures as well as published modern collections of *warabeuta* with explanation how to better teach one’s children in order to continue the unique Japanese tradition) (Kondo, 2001)

There are some educational institutions, in which Japanese traditions and culture are taught under the form of *warabeuta*. Here we can mention many kindergartens in Japan, which include *warabeuta*

in their curriculum claiming it is something very important for the children to start with – not only for their physical development, but also for language acquisition and rhythmical education.<sup>4</sup> However, this attempt to keep the traditions and folklore does not continue further in the long process of educational breeding of children. Once children are enrolled in elementary school, they receive a ‘shot’ of *warabeuta* only in their music classes. Of course the lyrics are simple and easy to remember and the melody is limited to 2 or 3 tones so *warabeuta* are considered appropriate to teach only to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders.<sup>5</sup> When it comes to older students (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> graders), *warabeuta* are considered to be out of age, too simple and easy, in some cases even banal and boring and they are not included in the music classes, let alone the Japanese language classes<sup>6</sup>.

Foreign language education in Japan is very popular. More specifically it is the *de facto* language taught in all public and private schools. It is also now being introduced into elementary schools as a matter of government policy. There are many nursery rhymes, which are deliberately used in the English language lessons as an essential part of the course<sup>7</sup>. It is a paradox how much attention teachers pay to English nursery rhymes, while they treat *warabeuta* with noticeable irony. Hirano (1986), claims that English Mother Goose rhymes are so familiar to Japanese people (from times even before the WWII), that nowadays we can even say that they represent part of the Japanese culture.

Teaching nursery rhymes at school became extremely popular after Carolyn Graham introduced the system of teaching through jazz chants (Washizu, 1997). Jazz chants have proved to be very effective for teaching/learning the rhythm of the language (in this case the stress-accent rhythm of English) At an elementary school in Sumida ward in the music classes 6<sup>th</sup> graders claim to have learned ‘Twinkle, twinkle little star’, however no

*warabeuta*.

Washizu (1997) has attempted to teach English using nursery rhymes at university level. He argues that a lecture using nursery rhymes as teaching material is very effective due to the following features of nursery rhymes:

1. Students can read whilst getting the ‘feel’ of the English rhythm.
2. Nursery rhymes are characterised by frequent repetition of words or even whole phrases. This enhances retention since nursery rhymes are easy to remember, the grammar in them is easy, and the vocabulary is not difficult.
3. Nursery rhymes are accompanied by many gestures or body actions.
4. Many nursery rhymes have a melody thus lending themselves to ease of singing.
5. The content of nursery rhymes is various guaranteeing that students will not lose interest when learning nursery rhymes, i.e. English.

It is not an exaggeration to say that there is a tendency to ignore Japanese folklore and tradition at certain age levels. This may derive from a desire to appear ‘cool’ and modern. Children are tending towards English nursery rhymes which, though part of English folklore, are not considered to be old-fashioned, simple or meaningless.

As we notice from the classification of the scholars who have conducted research on *warabeuta* a substantial part of *warabeuta* is related to games and plays. Nowadays, children have less time to play. This means that certain games and plays are ‘dying’ and, logically, the *warabeuta* sung with these games are dying too.

According to research conducted by Fujimoto (2001) in Hyogo Prefecture about traditional games/plays and whether children still play them (i.e. whether games are dying) as well as which games will continue to be played in the future, the results were as follows: (a) From all the traditional children’s games *okuramanjyu*, *danjitori*,

*kenkensumo*, *doma*, *wamawashi*, *riryān*, *kotorioni* are already considered extinct. (b) *Tantei gokko* (an outdoor game, played by both girls and boys) and *torampu* (card games) are becoming more popular than any other games but (c) children are still playing *jump rope*, *tag*, *hide and seek*, *origami*, *sugoroku*. In most cases these games do not involve *warabeuta* or *asobiuta* and even though it seems that this does not directly affect the situation and the growing unpopularity of *warabeuta*, the fact is that (d) the more limited the time children have for games the less time children have to entertain themselves singing *warabeuta* or *asobiuta*.

Apart from the educational world and the reality in the children's world, recently the word *warabeuta* has arisen in newspapers, forums, articles, publications<sup>8</sup>, etc. as a topic of social discussion<sup>9</sup>. It is often related to *kuchiasobiuta* or *teasobiuta*. We notice that in such discussions, *warabeuta* are recognized and well accepted in certain age levels, and totally 'neglected' in other, but we cannot deny recent attempts to revive *warabeuta* not only among children but also among senior Japanese citizens.

Honjōya (ibid) has tried to establish the age range in which children sing *warabeuta*. He has based his criteria for age parameters on geographic area<sup>10</sup>, historical period, types of *warabeuta* and existing publications on *warabeuta*. The problem with this attempt to establish age limits for *warabeuta* is that there is difference between the lifestyle of children before the war and the life children lead today. A thorough comparison is impossible. Can we consider *warabeuta* to be sung between children aged up to 15 years old? Previous research sets the age limit up to 7–8 years (as cited in Honjōya, 1982). But in the past, a higher age limit seemed to be impossible since children were helping with the chores or family business from early ages, or they were simply getting married at an early stage of their lives. Of course, age limit

cannot be the same for every kind of *warabeuta*, (certain *warabeuta* related to festivals or rituals are said to be sung by children up to 14–15 years), but as a whole Honjōya thinks it is appropriate to set the 'pure *warabeuta*' age limit at about 9 years or elementary school grade 4 for the present generation.

Nevertheless the common impression is that *warabeuta* is intrinsic only to children aged 9 or under. We should not forget that children aged 9 and up also have their own 'culture, traditions' and songs. *Warabeuta* they learned at an early age may have had an impact on their language acquisition, may have helped them develop their own songs for play and entertainment. Oddly, from children's point of view, those songs will not be considered meaningless, as they are created by the children themselves. Is it just because *warabeuta* represent the 'formal' part of the oral folklore (being approved by adults) they are considered old-fashioned and not interesting? Is it because they learned *warabeuta* at early age and now they are trying to overgrow something they relate to 'babies'? When we see that Japanese children aged 9 and up do not mind and are even willing to learn English nursery rhymes (considering them as something that grown-ups learn, something cool and modern) even though in the English speaking countries these songs are sung again by children aged 5–9? Or is it because they do not fully understand the meaning of the English nursery rhymes?

Washizu (ibid) argues that English nursery rhymes have more actions and gestures 'attached' to the song, and this is what may make them more interesting to children.

Can we talk about 'formal' and 'informal' *warabeuta* or children songs? Are there any attempts to preserve and maintain the 'informal' children songs? Where is the line between formal and informal songs/*warabeuta*? What deserves to

be published and recognized and what is doomed to stay between the walls of the classrooms?

One of the few things that have remained in our minds from the time when the playground was everybody's kingdom is *warabeuta* or *kuchiasobi*, the play language, which has served as the ground for subconscious language acquisition.

Nostalgia is a common feeling among grown-ups who reminisce about the songs and chants they learned in childhood. Our cultural memory is more likely to surface at late stages of our lives and it is expressed in reminiscence about what we considered interesting and amusing in our childhood.

What is the lasting power of *warabeuta* among grown-ups? To what extent do the *warabeuta* that people sang in their childhood stay in the memory?

Further questions arise. What role do English nursery rhymes play in the educational programs and are there any age limits for them? What makes a nursery rhyme meaningful and what makes it meaningless? What makes *kuchiasobi uta* meaningful and what makes it meaningless? Can new age limits be revised for the above-mentioned kinds of '*warabeuta*'?

There is need for further research on *warabeuta* and the feelings it evokes in children and adults, as well as an evaluation of the role of *warabeuta* in the new literacy teaching.

Games and play are the treasure of children. It is well known that from this heritage creativity, harmony and language is developed in children. Recently, children's sense of values in regard to life has undergone considerable change. The media report that social problems such as suicide, bullying and cruel murder of children (and by children) are increasing. Children seem to be increasingly busy, e.g. club activities, the system of cram schools. Even though according to the current law they are considered adults at the age of 20, children mature at an earlier age than before, thus leaving all the

games, plays and songs behind at an earlier age too. Is it that children are trying to show that they are not children any more and neglect any song or game that reminds them of the good times on the playground? It can be well speculated that given the history and traditional power of this play-genre in Japan, *warabeuta* (a part of non-serious literature) should be very popular among children. However, somehow *warabeuta* seem to lose ground to *manga* when it comes to the upper grades of elementary school children. This phenomenon is threatening the existence of *warabeuta* as they are considered silly, meaningless and primitive. Conversely, it may be argued that all nursery rhymes have the capacity to act as a bridge through which generations may pass on to children themes and values and attitudes to life of former generations. The passage of time is a tale of forgetting: *Warabeuta* may be a passing dream of a Japan as it used to be and a love for the place where children played.

*Warabeuta OUT Warabeuta SAFE yo yoi no yoi!*

## Notes

1. Oi Kindergarten, Suginoko Kindergarten Gifu Prefecture; Fujimiyano naka kindergarten
2. The homeroom teachers in charge of 6<sup>th</sup> graders with whom we discuss the contents of each English language class
3. According to two teachers at Keiyo Elementary School
4. Oi Kindergarten, Suginoko Kindergarten Gifu Prefecture; Fujimiyano naka kindergarten
5. Shinagawa Ward, Keiyo Elementary School, Homeroom teachers
6. Shinagawa Ward, Keiyo Elementary School, Homeroom teachers
7. London Bridges Falling Down; Ring around the Roses, etc. (Gakken Gakuin, Homepal Shogakukan Cram Schools)
8. 羽仁協子, 『保育園と幼稚園の音楽』 明治図書 'Return *warabeuta* to us children'; Non-academic society interested in preserving *warabeuta* 『わらべうた保育研究会』 [www.warabeuta.jp](http://www.warabeuta.jp) The purpose of the club is to popularize *warabeuta* in kindergartens, nursery schools, libraries, etc.;
9. Onjo Hall was launched by the city of Nara

in October 1994 as a hall of warabeuta (traditional children's songs), with the aim of enhancing the lives of both individual townspeople and the city itself through the medium of song.

10. In big towns age limit can be up to 15, while in small villages age limit can be down to 7-8 years.

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