

English CMC and Non-Standard English Use

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Abstract

English use or perceived English use in locales that don't use English as a first language is often critiqued with expectations informed by prescribed English standards. This paper will analyze computer mediated communication (CMC) in regard to responses and comments motivated by an example of perceived non-standard English use within Japan.

Introduction

In October 2013, Fukushima Industries Corp., a commercial freezer refrigerator maintenance and sales company based in Osaka, Japan, released a new mascot with its name written in roman script, 'Fukuppy'. The mascot received widespread international coverage due to the nuclear incident around the same time at a location that coincidentally had the same name as the company. However, little international coverage was given to the real pronunciation of the mascot (foo-koo-pee), or the background to the meaning of the mascot, a combination of Fukushima and happy. Reporting focused on the perceived misuse of English and there was little mention of the fact that the mascot's name was written in romaji (roman script for Japanese words) or that its meaning and pronunciation were both embedded in Japanese and meant for a Japanese audience. Due to the backlash the mascot received the company eventually apologised and withdrew the new mascot.

This incident highlights the problems that can arise when perceived non-standard English use surfaces. Indeed, reception can be polarizing and convey both explicit and implicit attitudes towards the 'misuse' and the users themselves (Iorio, 2016). To investigate such an occurrence, this paper looks at computer mediated

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communication (CMC) that appeared under a thread on a news story related to the Fukuppy incident.

Literature Review

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC)

CMC research initially investigated what made the language used online unique to that environment, but has since extended into socially situated discourse use and its users (Herring, 2003). Thus, this has led to analyses focusing on the practices of different ages, genders, and region of users, and the differences in practices between synchronous and asynchronous communication (Androutsopoulos, 2006). Furthermore, as different languages became more readily available for communication in online discourse, studies into code switching, language choice, and self-presentation of users, along with the negotiation of identity evolved (Herring & Danet, 2003).

Studies into CMC have also focused on the traits of different genders, and participants who choose to stay anonymous or not. Pierson (2014) found that male commenters outnumbered female commenters after an eight-month long analysis of online comments related to New York Times newspaper articles. The study further found that the identifiable female commenters were more likely to employ polite strategies when commenting. Furthermore, Herring and Stoerger (2013) reported that identifiable male commenters were less likely to employ polite strategies when commenting and act more assertive and dominant in certain areas of CMC, such as computer chat.

Chang (2014) posited that politeness can also be affected by how close an online community is offline, where arguing and being directly confrontational or critical may be unacceptable if users also know each other offline. This was also reported by Angouri and Tseliga (2010) as significant in their investigation into the impoliteness of two groups of talk participants.

More recent studies have also investigated the proliferation of emojis, emoticons, and stickers in CMC (Tang & Hew, 2019). However, the nature of comments in CMC related to perceived deviant English use in Japan has yet to be deeply explored. Furthermore, the site chosen for this study is one identified by Dorostkar and Preisinger (2012), as an under researched area, that of discussion boards of online news sites.

'Imported' English Use in Japan

English and elements of English are used in Japan in a variety of ways that are not norm dependent and assist in expressing new ideals and identities (Honna,

2008). They have been imported into Japan for everyday use, not as a means for international communication, but as a means for intranational communication.

Honna (1995) explains that even when expressed in roman script (i.e. romaji), this is not in fact ‘English’, but English Japanese. He supports this by saying that often the semantic meaning is only truly understood by Japanese speakers, as it is expressing Japanese ideas and concepts and therefore should not be seen or judged in comparison to any prescribed standard English variety.

English elements are also used in word play that is aimed and created for Japanese audiences. For example, a marketing promotion by Japan Railway used the slogan, *JR Ski Ski*. This plays on the English word ski, also an imported verb into Japanese, and the fact that in Japanese *suki* mean ‘like’ (Honna, 1995, p.51). Of course, much like the ornamental value Japanese and Chinese characters have in many western countries, English can also fulfill this role in Japan, potentially symbolizing coolness, or rebelliousness (Seargeant, 2005, p.316). However, it is important to acknowledge the complex history and reasons for the variety of importations and uses, and not dismiss them merely as a result of globalization or an inability to use the language correctly.

Method

Comments from a thread related to a news story¹⁾ on japantoday.com about the Fukuppy case were analysed using a Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2004) approach. In total there were 50 comments on the related discussion board, with a total of 46 participants. The comments were read to gauge emergent thematic meanings and possible comments irrelevant to the study.

In total 44 of the comments were maintained for analysis while 6 were discarded. Two comments were discarded as they only commented on the mascot and not language use, another two were discarded as the comments did not relate to the article and issue under investigation, and the final two were discarded as no clear meaning was discernible in regard to the use of the word Fukuppy. The coding process was repeated again to uncover themes relating to reactions to the perceived non-standard English use.

Results and Discussion

The themes that emerged in regard to the online discussion board can be seen in Table 1.

1) <https://japantoday.com/category/national/fukuppy-firm-rethinking-mascot-after-internet-derision>

Table 1 Thematic Data Analysis—CMDA

Fukuppy as an example of...	
1. English misuse with no negative comments	14
2. English misuse with negative ramifications	8
3. English misuse due to globalization and/or the Internet	3
4. wider English inability/ or deviant use in Japan	7
5. wider cultural problems	6
6. Japanese and/or local language use	6

As can be seen in table 1, only 6 commenters assessed Fukuppy as an example of local language practice, whilst in general all the other commenters, totalling 38, belong to a group that assessed Fukuppy as an example of English misuse. However, distinct and differing themes emerged in relation to this view.

Fukuppy as *English misuse with no negative comments* (see Table 1) mostly manifested in comments that played on the perceived profanity found in the reading of Fukuppy. However, no meaning, whether negative or positive, could be drawn from the comments (see extract 1).

Extract 1

I vote for a change to Fukupeeps!

Japantoday.com, Oct. 16, 2013

Fukuppy as English misuse with negative ramifications (see Table 1) made it clear that Fukuppy was a misuse of English and reflected badly upon either the person who selected it (see extract 2), or for the company in general. Comments informing this theme made it explicit that standard English use should be adhered to when using any of its elements.

Extract 2

That name is so wrong. Who green lighted it?

Japantoday.com, Oct. 16, 2013.

Fukuppy as English misuse due to globalization and/ or the Internet (see Table 1) comments expressed that due to globalization more care is needed when using English and English elements (see extract 3), implying standard English use is expected under such circumstances.

Extract 3

What with the internet there is no ‘only for Japan’ or anywhere else for that matter.

Japantoday.com, Oct. 16, 2013

Fukuppy as an example of wider English inability/ or deviant use in Japan (see

Table 1) viewed Fukuppy as another example of strange or incompetent English use by Japanese users. Most commenters named examples of other cases they had experienced (see extract 4). By voicing their bemusement at such occurrences, they implicitly denied the chance that these could be examples of local Japanese language use with alternative meanings or intentions, rather than mistaken English use.

Extract 4

There is a ‘Cake Shop Fanny’ here in Sendai, which always makes me smile. There is a clothes shop called ‘Sperm’ too.

Japantoday.com, Oct. 16, 2013

Fukuppy as an example of wider cultural problems (see Table 1) commenters were the most explicit in their belief that not adhering to standard usage negates the legitimacy of any English use or use of its elements. These commenters not only viewed Fukuppy as an example of deficient English use, but also as a wider reflection on the community as a whole (see extract 5).

Extract 5

...Who was the fool that have (sic) it the go-ahead in the first place? Obviously, just another narrow-minded Japanese executive that forgets Japanese is not the only language in the world.

Japantoday.com, Oct. 16, 2013

Fukuppy as Japanese and/ or local language use (see Table 1) commenters expressed knowledge of local language practices in Japan and expressed their belief that Fukuppy was not an example of mistaken English (see extract 6).

Extract 6

Easy there, folks, it’s pronounced Foo-Koo-PEE. Oh...dear

Japantoday.com, Oct. 16, 2013

As can be seen from the above, Fukuppy was perceived as English misuse by a majority of the commenters. However, as the findings show, some commenters were more informative, trying to explain an alternative view on the issue being discussed. However, they were in the minority.

Conclusion

During this analysis of CMC focused on the perceived misuse of English, most commenters expressed that Fukuppy was a deviant use of English, rather than a legitimate use of language resources at the disposal of local users. Views that expressed Fukuppy as an example of non-standard English varied in their strength about how inappropriate they thought it was and what that meant to not only the company but the wider community.

On the other hand, there were a small number of commenters that expressed support for the notion that Fukuppy was an example of local language practice, thus displaying the possibility that imported uses of English and its elements exists.

This example analysed an occurrence from 2013 in order to address the locale under focus. In the future further research with more current examples and a larger number of comments would assist in seeing if attitudes have shifted. Alternative locations would also be beneficial in advancing this area of knowledge, that of non-standard language use and CMC reactions.

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