

***The Influence of the Social Networks and Messengers on the Youth Language of  
the Japanese***

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**Abstract**

During a research trip to the University of Tsukuba (Japan), a survey of Japanese students was conducted on the impact of social networks and instant messengers on the language of modern Japanese youth. 45 students of 1-3 courses (18-20 years old), studying in different groups at different faculties of the University of Tsukuba, took part in the survey. Respondents were asked to answer several questions concerning the impact of social networks and instant messengers on their communication style, and, if possible, comment on their response. The questions were as following: 1) What social networks and messengers do you use? 2) How the usage of social networks and instant messengers affected your communication style (choose answer): a) I use many shortened words b) I use many new words c) I use a lot of borrowed words d) I speak a foreign language 3) Did you find it more difficult or easier to communicate in real life? Based on the survey, the following conclusions can be drawn: 1) Communication by mobile applications and social networks plays an important role in the lives of modern Japanese. 2) The goals with which different applications are used differ slightly (everyday communication, professional communication, education, etc.) 3) Communication through social networks and instant messengers leaves its imprint on the communication style, making use of abbreviations, new, borrowed words, etc. 4) In some cases, the frequent use of mobile technologies leads to a deterioration in communication, but some respondents noted that, on the contrary, everyday communication improved.

Keywords: ICT, Japanese youth language, students' survey, communication

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## **Introduction**

Information technology is firmly established in our lives. Many people are registered users of various social networks, the use of instant messengers and other information and communication technologies has become an everyday habit. Naturally, the constant use of Internet communications cannot but influence the development of any language. There is a so-called network slang, when the norms of communication are changing, and so does the spelling of usual words, etc. At one of the Internet portals devoted to the development of the youth language in Japan, the importance of the correct use of words and expressions of the youth language is emphasized: "If you use the words you liked thoughtlessly, not knowing their exact meaning in the communication via SNS, your partner will not think much of you. It would be better to check the meaning in order not to be mistaken" (Wakamono, 2018). It seems that it would not be an exaggeration to say that the study of the influence of ICT on various areas of life, including everyday communication, is very relevant and of great interest.

The most active users of these technologies are young people, many of whom no longer think of life without the use of various gadgets. Naturally, the style of their communication is also influenced by the network slang. Many people use abbreviations (for example, "LOL" instead of "Laughing out loud"), borrowing from other languages, new words, etc.

It seems that this statement is true for many languages. Many researchers have noted that recently the Japanese language has undergone significant changes. The vocabulary of Japanese is significantly increasing, often by borrowing words from other languages (there is even a special term "Katakana language" (カタカナ言葉, katakana kotoba)); a large number of new popular words that on the one hand gain popularity and on the other hand are being forgotten rapidly, appears. However, some of the words become a part of modern Japanese. Such changes are vividly illustrated by the example of "wakamono kotoba" (若者言葉) - the language of Japanese youth.

Within the project "Linguistic Evolution in the Context of ICT Development," implemented at the Department of Japanese Studies at St. Petersburg State University, a research work on the impact of ICT on the language of modern Japanese youth was undertaken. In particular, in 2016, during a business trip to the University of Tsukuba (Japan), a survey of Japanese students concerning specific examples of the impact of social networks and instant messengers on communication not only in the network, but also in everyday life was performed.

The following article is to present the results of the research.

## **Methodology**

The survey was attended by 45 students of 1-3 years of study (18-20 years old), studying in different groups at different faculties of the University of Tsukuba. Initially, it was supposed to look at the difference between the responses of male and female respondents, but in the end the difference was insignificant, so it was not reflected in this study.

Respondents were asked to answer several questions regarding the impact of social networks and instant messengers on their communication style, and, if possible, comment on their answer.

### **The role of the youth language in Japan**

The language of Japanese youth is a type of subsystem within the official language, however, obeying the rules and regulations of the standard Japanese language. The main differences of expressions are not so much in the grammatical as in the lexical layer.

Constant changes are inherent in youth language, as young people traditionally strive to differ from previous generations in everything, but now, thanks to the development of technology, these changes have become even faster, and the use of social networks and blogs in which one can instantly share information with a large number of people, promotes the rapid spread of new words and neat expressions.

It is young people who are the first to react to the slightest changes in society, be it the emergence of new technologies or social, economic and political changes etc (Borisova, 2015). At the same time, new words do not always become part of the “official” vocabulary. Many of them start to be considered to be out of fashion even among the representatives of the generation that created them, not to mention the next generations (Inoue, 1994).

At the same time, the older generations not only often consider the expressions of the youth language to be “inelegant” and “inappropriate”, but often simply do not understand young Japanese, even if they use common words, as their meaning often changes. It is unlikely that a representative of the older generation will immediately understand what the person’s problem is if someone says that such and such person is ツイ廃 (tsuihai) (from ツイタ一廃人, tsuita: haijin that means a dependency on Twitter). On the other hand, the remark that some place is “hot” (アツい) can also be misunderstood if the listener does not know that in this context the word “hot” takes on the meaning “fashionable”, “best”.

Some of the Japanese youths, especially teenage girls, tending to be different from all categories and kinds of the people of Japan, even designed their own way of writing, so called “gyaru moji” – “girl writing”. Based on hiragana and katakana, this writing style seems a kind of abracadabra to the person, who sees the letters for the first time (Miller, 2004).

The spread of foreign borrowings should also be noted. In particular, the English language, which has become the language of Internet communication, is actively used not only by the younger generation, but also on television and in the press. The borrowing process has intensified so much that the dictionaries do not have time to record all changes in the language. The use (conscious use together with the unconscious, based on the present fashion) of the borrowed vocabulary by more “advanced” youth also builds a wall between generations (Pellikh, 2008: 5).

It is curious that, before the widespread use of ICT as it is now, the language of young people in Japan differed significantly from region to region. However, now

representatives of almost any region, in general, understand the inhabitants of other areas. It can be assumed that this is due to the daily use of ICT, since the possibility of instant information exchange contributes to the rapid and widespread dissemination of the means of transmitting this information, such as lexical units, grammar constructions etc., among certain groups of population (Baler, 2015). New media, especially online communities, offer multilingual domains for youths. They can participate in online social environment, that is not provided by schools, and use it as a measure of communication and socialization (Shankar, 2011: 9)

Youth communicative environment is characterized by the use of all the lexico-stylistic registers, while at the same time tending to the “lower” vocabulary. Thus, considering youth slang, one can trace all the characteristics of the youth communicative environment itself together with the oral communicative environment as a whole (Pellikh, 2008).

### **The results of the survey**

Students were asked to choose which social network or which messenger they use most often for communication and comment on why (several answers could be given).

The most of respondents (26 people) said that they used the LINE messenger, as it was the most popular in Japan. It was also mentioned, that LINE had the most registered users and therefore no other applications were needed.

20 respondents noted regular use of the Facebook network, and very interesting comments were given. In addition to the usual comments about connecting with friends who are far away (3 respondents) and searching for useful information (4 respondents), 4 people said that they used Facebook to communicate with those they trust. 2 people said that through this social network they could express themselves, and 2 comments were about using Facebook for formal or business correspondence. Based on these comments, it can be concluded that social networks in which it is necessary to register and create a page where personal data, hobbies, etc. are marked, make their users think over more carefully not only the manner of communication, but also somehow control the range of contacts , unlike the aforementioned Line, where it is difficult to consider the true identity of a person because of short messages.

In general, speaking about the use of social networks in Japan, an interesting paradox can be noted: with all the abundance of advanced technologies, including IT, in everyday life, the Japanese are quite wary of social networks, where it is needed to enter personal data during registration. According to statistics, the largest number of Japanese use the Japanese platform for communication LINE (more than 36 million users). Twitter is used by 30 million users. The MIXI network is also popular (approximately 25 million users). Despite such a large audience, the network users manage to preserve their desired privacy, since MIXI pages are not displayed, for example, in Google global search, and one must receive an invitation from an already registered user to make the registration. Moreover, anyone intended to register must be 18 years old older. FaceBook goes by a significant margin (16 million users).

Skype was the third most popular, with 15 people using it. Most of them mentioned using this type of communication to communicate with friends who were abroad (8 people), as well as for video lessons (3 people), since it was possible to see the partner during a call.

The remaining results in this survey are as follows:

MSN - 11 people (communication with foreigners and those who do not use LINE)

SMS - 7 people (it is possible to contact a person offline, fast connection)

Twitter (5) as an opportunity to quick exchanging of opinions and getting feedback from friends.

WhatsApp - 2 people (communication with foreigners, the possibility of group communication)

FaceTime - 1 person (free for iPhone users)

Viber - 0

A large number of answers, one way or another connected with communicating with foreign friends can be noticed. Undoubtedly, this is the influence of the university environment: the University of Tsukuba is famous for its large number of connections with foreign universities, and a lot of exchange students from different countries of the world study in Tsukuba.

The following questions were related to the direct influence of instant messengers and social networks on everyday communication. The respondents were also asked to give some examples for each question.

19 respondents noted that they began to use abbreviations often.

The following examples were given:

- り よ (ryo) (from 了解, ryokai – understandable)

- お け ／ オ ケ (ok) (from オッケ -, okke:) OK . It is interesting to note that the Japanese use an abbreviation of OK, which is an abbreviation itself, which many people do not realize, considering “OK” to be a full lexical unit.

- あ ざ お ／ あ ざ (azao, adza) (from ありがとうございます, arigato: gozaimasu - thanks a lot)

Abbreviations of English:

- FB ／ DM (FaceBook ／ Direct mail)

- ASAP (as soon as possible)

- plz (please)

15 respondents answered that they began to use new (newly-formed) words:

- 草 (LOL)

- ブ ラ ッ ク バ イ ト (burakkubaito) Part-time job in violation of labor law

- ア ポ (apo) (Appointment)

- コ ミ ュ 章 (komusho:): (ミ ミ ュ ニ ケ 一 シ ョ ヨ (komyunike:shon shou:gai) - communicative disorder)

- ツ イ 廃 (tsuihai ()) (イ イ タ 人 人 人, (tsuita: haijin) - dependence on Twitter network)

One of the answers, that were given often, was "often use emoji."

This answer can not be called an untypical one. The word "Emoji" itself is of Japanese origin and literally means "picture" and "sign" (絵 文字). The use of these sketchy faces, depicting various emotions to give greater expressiveness, has spread around the world, but it is in Japan that one can find messages consisting practically of emoji only. The fact is that for the Japanese the visual component of the text is very important, which is due to the use of characters. This explains the use of a character meaning grass (草) to denote laughter (in the West, the abbreviation LOL is used for this) (the first example in the previous block). The first sound of the word "laugh" (warau) (笑 う) - W, repeated several times, resembles the grass on the lawn (www) with its outlines, that was replaced by the character.

10 people mentioned using borrowed words:

- コンセンサス (consensasu) - agreement
- グラフ (gurafu) - graph
- アプリ - (apuri :) - application
- ホット (hotto) - hot
- フォロー (foro :) - follow

The use of a foreign language was noted by 10 respondents. Interesting and even funny comments were received:

- Often used in messengers when communicating with foreign friends
- I kind of use it often, but I cannot give examples
- I switch to English when I can not express a thought in Japanese

And finally, in the last part of the survey, students were asked to evaluate how, in general, the active use of various applications for communication affected their lives. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents left this question unanswered or answered that no influence had been exerted, the following answers were received:

Everyday communication has decreased (5)

- There are those who communicate only through applications
- Even while eating, everyone is looking into their phones.
- Even during a conversation, people are often chatting by the telephone

It became more difficult to communicate (4)

- I find it easier to communicate via SNS

Everyday communication has increased (3)

## Notes

It should be mentioned that at the beginning of the research it was a matter of concern that the examples given above could be so numerous that it would be impossible to systematize them. However, almost all of the respondents gave the same examples, which indicates the distribution of certain words and expressions in a particular environment (in this case, among university students). This is illustrated by the fact that many words cited as examples can relate not only to communication at everyday life, but also to learning activities.

It is worth noting that the proposed questions did not cause any criticism, objections or remarks of surprise among respondents. Consequently, young Japanese people know and accept these methods of word formation, which, as many researchers note, are traditional for the Japanese language.

## **Conclusions**

Thus, based on the survey, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Communication through mobile applications and social networks plays an important role in the lives of modern Japanese
- The goals with which different applications are used vary slightly (daily communication, professional communication, education, etc.)
- Communication through social networks and instant messengers leaves its mark on the communication style, forcing to use abbreviations, new, borrowed words, etc.
- At the same time, in some cases, the frequent use of mobile technologies leads to a restrictions in communication, but some respondents noted that, on the contrary, everyday communication has improved.
- The environment (university, company etc.) can also be noted as one of the factors of influence on the communication style.

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