

Script Choice and its Indexical Meanings: The Usage of Instant Messaging among Japanese Students in a U.S. City

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Introduction

Everyday interactions are recognized as ideal sites for investigating fundamental social structures and cultural systems in diverse disciplines including sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and sociology. Many of the studies about everyday interaction have primarily focused on spoken, face-to-face conversations because they are considered fundamental conditions for an interaction (e.g. Goffman 1962, 1974). However, as new technologies increasingly mediate everyday interactions (e.g. Schegloff 1968), new “tooled ways” (Keating 2005: 528) of talking and the potential meanings of these new patterns should be taken into consideration in ethnographic studies.

In this paper I examine conversations conducted through Instant Messaging (IM), a form of real-time conversation through networked computers. Although IM conversations are conducted in real-time and conform to the basic rules of everyday conversations, they are not, strictly speaking, either spoken or face-to-face interactions in Goffman’s sense of the term because speakers do not necessarily reside in the same physical space, and because IM conversations are conducted, primarily by typing, in virtual space. This process of typing, in turn, differentiates IM conversations from other technologically mediated, real-time interaction (e.g. spoken telephone conversations¹).

Typing is a unique computer activity whereby multiple perspectives of “writing” are simultaneously embodied in the process of creating texts (e.g. typing in the Roman alphabet to create Japanese characters). While innovative usages of linguistic items appearing on computer screen have been reported (e.g., Su 2003, Nishimura 2003, Herring 1999), little attention has been drawn to the actual process of creating these texts in typing. Therefore, in this paper, I demonstrate how software features and affordances of written forms mutually depend on each other in conversing through IM. More precisely, by situating IM as a new means of conducting everyday interactions, I examine the ways in which Japanese native speakers living in a U.S. city manipulate script choices in their Japanese IM conversations. Analyzing chat logs collected from Instant Messaging programs and follow-up interviews with the speakers who produced those chat logs, I discuss how they choose linguistic items (i.e., negotiating their script choices), and how those choices not only reflect certain beliefs about appropriate use of scripts, but also index their temporally defined experience along different indexical scales that measure their local bicultural identities.

The ways in which people negotiate and manage their multiple identities through languages are canonical concerns among studies on language and cultural contact phenomena is to discuss the (e.g. De Fina, Schifffrin, and Bamberg 2005). In such contact situations, even a basic concept such as “name” is understood differently depending on cultural contexts reflecting diverse value systems. Chiang (2005: 5), for instance, discusses the historical name changes of a university in Singapore, and addresses the commonalities and differences underlying Western and Chinese ideologies of “name” and the act of “naming.” The shared assumption is that a name and its referent are in a non-arbitrary relation particularly in the performance of naming. In other words, practices of naming constitute and are constitutive of the social context. The difference, then, is that the relationship between the linguistic form of a name and its referent is differently elaborated in Chinese ideologies compared to Western ones. Nonaka (forthcoming) describes a syntactic pattern of signing personal names in Japanese Sign Language (JSL), which is considered to be an example of language contact between JSL and Japanese. She claims that naming practices in JSL may

not be accurately understood by using the dichotomous categories, such as “arbitrary” and “descriptive” name signs, developed by analyzing American Sign Language practices. In this paper, I focus on English-origin names that appeared in Japanese IM conversations because the graphic manifestation of familiar names in another language indexes “visualized” cultural identities that might not be salient in speech.

As ethnographically informed accounts for these diverse linguistic practices have drawn attention to insufficient properties of traditional analytical categories notably developed in Western academic discourse about language and culture (e.g. Ide and Kataoka 2002, Kita and Ide 2007), anthropologists have been investigating new potentials in interactions via newly developing communication technologies such as the webcam, the Internet, and other emerging media (e.g. Keating and Mirus 2003, Keating 2005). Interactions where people are exposed to new communication tools are ideal sites for understanding how new (or ignored) aspects of sociality emerge by adapting “old” linguistic practices to a “new” environment.

Ethnographic Background

The data used in this study are twofold. Initially, I recorded a set of chat logs using an Instant Messaging program that is popular among Japanese international students. I collected the chat logs, 20 to 30 minutes of conversation per person from 8 Japanese international students who use the Instant Messaging program on a regular basis. Then I conducted semi-structured retrospective interviews in which interviewees received printouts of the logs. In these interviews, the interviewees provided information about the following: (1) what they thought of instant messaging as a communication tool, and (2) how they manipulated different scripts. In this paper I focus on the data collected from four participants: Chiemi, Tae, Ayaka, and Satoshi. All of whom are graduate students pursuing Ph.D. degrees in Austin, Texas, where they have lived for at least four years. Austin has become a technology center in the U.S. because the city and several local non-profit organizations have made great efforts to bring about easy access to the Internet. As a consequence, the participants have access to free high-speed Internet at school, and free Wi-Fi connections all

around the campus, at local coffee shops and in restaurants. This unlimited access to the Internet facilitates the use of real-time communication software without worrying about the time-limits.

Instant Messaging (IM)

Instant Messaging (IM) is a form of real-time communication through networked computers in various social settings including at business meetings, in informal conversations at offices, and in classrooms (e.g. Jones 2004). Beginning in the 1970s, various IM software programs such as ICQ, AOL Instant Messenger, Yahoo, MSN, and Excite emerged. Early IM application software supported only text message exchanges, but recent applications incorporate voice and video features. These features of Instant Messaging bring about communication opportunities among people with different backgrounds such as between deaf and hearing people and among people remotely connected via networked computers. For the participants in this project, IM is becoming a useful communication tool in addition to other communication means such as telephone and email. In Example 1 and 2, Ayaka and Tae describe when, why, how, and with whom they use an IM.

(1) IM to “Just Say Hi”

Ayaka 遠い人にはもちろん電話高いから。just say hi みたいなときに使う

Tae そうそうそう。目的があればメールでいいけど、チャット²だったら「やっほー」というかんじ。

Ayaka そうそうそうそう！

Tae チャットは電話するまでもないけど、というときに使う。相手による。あやかちゃんとはチャットじゃないとだめなときあるから。電話がつながんないから。

((English Translation))

Ayaka Of course it is expensive to call people long distance. (I use IMs) when I want to “just say hi”.

Tae That’s right. If I have something (to talk about), email is fine, but with IMs, it’s like saying “hi.”

Ayaka That’s right!

Tae I use IMs when I don’t have to necessarily make a call. It

depends who (I talk to). With Ayaka, sometimes it has to be IMs because the phone doesn't work.

As Tae's and Ayaka's comments suggest, IMs can be alternatives to phone calls, and can provide opportunities for them to exchange brief greetings both within and outside the city. In their terms, IMs are to "just say hi." IM programs are definitely more economical than making a long distance call, especially international calls, because IMs are usually downloadable for free.

In addition to the IM functions mentioned in Example 1, the participants address the issue of politeness in IM environments, transforming certain pragmatic rules from face-to-face interactions into the IM environment. The following is an example from Tae's comments about "responsibility" for replying to IM messages.

(2) Responsibility

Tae ... Emailだとそれこそいつでも返事できるけど、チャットだとオンラインにいるのがばれればだから、「退席中」になってればまだあれだけど、「いるだろおまえ」みたいな。だから返信するほうとしてはもうちょっと responsibility があるでしょ。あ、返事しなくちゃ、って。なんとなく。

((English Translation))

Tae ... you can reply to email messages whenever it's convenient for you, but with IMs, because it is so obvious that you are there online, except when (your status bar says) "away." It's like, "I know you are there." That's why you have a bit more responsibility (than emails) so that you are like, "I've got to respond to this."

Like Tae, all of the participants in this project reported feeling this sense of "responsibility," implying an intersection between IM environments and face-to-face interactions. The responsibility for responding to IM messages draws a parallel to the importance of "mutual-monitoring" among participants in face-to-face interaction (e.g. Goffman 1963). In face-to-face interactions, the co-presence of at least two participants is required because in order to complete a conversational action, a first pair part of interaction

has to be responded to by the production of a second pair part (e.g. greeting exchanges, question-answer sequences). The “paired” nature of face-to-face conversation as well appears to be recognized in IM mediated conversations where the status bar shows participants’ current online statuses, such as “online” or “away,” and facilitates different “mutual monitoring” possibilities. Tae thinks that because it is obvious that she “is there” online and therefore capable of responding to IM messages, she must reply no matter where or how busy she is.

Writing and Typing in Japanese

Before analyzing the IM chat logs, I will describe how Japanese texts are constructed in virtual space. The modern Japanese writing system consists of four scripts: *kanji*, *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *romaji*. *Kanji*, or Sino-Japanese characters, is a set of characters borrowed into Japanese from Chinese around the fifth century (Smith 1996). *Hiragana* and *katakana* are syllabary scripts derived from *kanji* in the ninth century. *Hiragana* and *katakana* both consist of fifty syllables and each individual *kana* represents the sound of a syllable. *Hiragana* refers to the curved script that is widely used to write words, verb inflexions, and *furigana*, an aid for reading *kanji*. *Katakana* is the squared script that is mainly used for expressing foreign words, loanwords, and emphasis (Seeley 1991, Coulmas 2003). *Romaji* refers to a subset of letters of the Roman alphabet that is used to phonetically transliterate Japanese words. *Romaji* was originally invented around 1548 to help foreign learners of the language who could not read Japanese.

Written Japanese sentences usually contain a mixture of *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji* as the following example demonstrates. In Example 3, the underlined part of the sentence indicates *katakana*; italics represent *hiragana*, and *kanji* appears in bold-faced fonts.

(3) A mixture of scripts³

<u>アメリカ</u>	は	日本	の	東	の	方	に	ある
America-wa		Nihon-no		Higashi-no		hou ni		aru
America-TOP		Japan-LOC		East-LOC		to		COP
America is to the east of Japan								

When writing in Japanese, script choice depends on various factors including established conventions, readability, and stylistic preferences (Nishimura 2003). This complexity of script choice comes into play in interesting ways when words are typed.

As Figure 1 shows, the layout of the Roman alphabet on a Japanese keyboard follows the QWERTY system⁴ that is widely used for English-language computers and typewriter keyboards. Each key on the Japanese keyboard represents two distinctive characters: a letter of the Roman alphabet and a Japanese *kana* syllable. The arrow in Figure 1, for instance, points to the key “Q”, which corresponds to “た” (*ta*).



Figure 1: A Japanese keyboard

The co-presence of a Japanese *kana* syllable and a Roman alphabetic letter on a single key indicates that there are two entry modes involved in producing Japanese texts: the *kana* entry mode and the *romaji* entry mode.

In the *kana* entry mode, pressing the “た” key, indicated by the arrow in Figure 1, directly represents the *hiragana* syllable, “た” on the screen, whereas in the *romaji* entry mode, “た” (pronounced ‘*ta*’) is automatically produced by pressing two Roman alphabet keys: ‘T’ and then ‘A’. In this paper I focus on the *romaji* entry mode because all the participants depended on it when they typed Japanese texts on computer. As mentioned, when working in the *romaji* entry mode, Roman letter entries are automatically converted into *hiragana*. Typing in this mode, if the target word should be represented in *hiragana*, then, entries are immediately accepted simply by pressing the “enter” key. If, however, the target word should be depicted

in *kanji*, the initial Roman letter entries must be converted into *kanji* characters by pressing the “space” key. When the target word should be expressed in *katakana*, the conversion can be made either by pressing the “space” key or the “F7” key.

This process is outlined in the next example which shows six steps that are required to produce the Japanese word, “テニス” (pronounced ‘*tenisu*’) which is normally expressed in *katakana* because it is a loan word from the English “tennis.”

- (4) Six steps of producing “テニス” (‘tennis’) in *romaji* mode
 (i) *Tenisu* → (ii) てにす → (iii) [Space key] or [F7] → (iv) テニス →
 (v) [Enter key] → (vi) テニス

In Japanese, the loan word for “tennis” consists of three *katakana* syllables, “テ” (*te*), “ニ” (*ni*), and “ス” (*su*). Because the *romaji* entry mode is used in this example, the keyboard entries must be entered “t”, “e”, “n”, “i”, “s” and “u” (i). The letters are automatically created in *hiragana* (ii) as they are entered. Then by clicking the “space” key or “F7” key (iii), the entries are converted into their appropriate form of script (iv). Finally, the “enter” key is clicked (v) to accept the word, at which time, the underline disappears and “テニス” (vi) is produced.

In order to type a sentence which usually includes the various scripts, recent software programs allow users to convert at any stage of input by pressing the “space” bar. With this technology, users do not have to manually click the “space” bar at the end of every morpheme. Instead, the programs are designed to guess the correct divisions of words as well as the correct scripts in which those words should be represented. If the correct word boundaries and script representations are not automatically selected, the arrow keys (↑, ↓, →, and ←) may be used to shift the word boundaries and select the right spelling from the list of candidate words (see Figure 2).

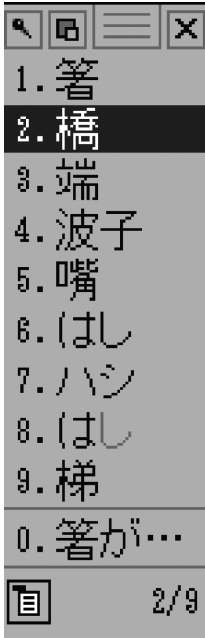


Figure 2: The list of candidate words that are pronounced “*hashi*”

Although *romaji* is designed to transliterate Japanese texts using the Roman alphabet, the *romaji* entry mode in word processing software converts Roman alphabet entries into Japanese texts which usually involve three scripts, *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*. In the next example, I describe how this particular software feature facilitates innovative linguistic practices across language and script boundaries.

Derived from an IM conversation between Chiemi and Satoshi, Example 5 illustrates how a minor mistake in typing triggers creative wordplay in the course of IM conversation.

(5) *San(k)yu-* (‘thank you’): An instance of wordplay

Speaker	Japanese transcript (Chat log)	Roman transcript	English translation
1 Satoshi	ぼくは OK だよ。	Boku wa OK da yo ⁵	It’s fine with me.
2 Chiemi	産油ー！	San (k) yu-! ((Chiemi missed typing ‘k’))	<i>San(k)yu-</i> ! “Thank you” ((産油 literally means “Producing oil”))
3	さんきゅー	Sankyu-	Thank you.
4 Satoshi	うっ。	Uttu.	Oops. ((emotional reaction.))
5 Chiemi	変換するとでるよ、やってみ。	Henkan suru to deru yo, yattemi.	If you convert it, you will get it. Try it.
6 Satoshi	日本仕込みのギャグで sky?	Nihon jikomi no gyagu de sky?	Is this a joke (you) learned in Japan?

7	Chiemi	((... indicates ignorance. It means that Chiemi did not find Satoshi's utterance funny.))
8	Satoshi	産休	Sankyuu	Maternal leave
9		三級	Sankyuu	Level three
10		三球	Sankyuu	Three balls
11	Chiemi	それはさんきゅう、 でしょう	Sore ha sankyuu, desyou	That is "sankyuu", isn't it?
12		さんきゅー にする とサンキュー	Sankyu- ni suruto sankyu-	(If you type) "san- kyu-", (you get) "thank you" (in katakana).

The segment starts when Satoshi confirms that he can help Chiemi with her assignment (line 1). Chiemi's response in line 2, “産油ー !”, pronounced “*sanyu*” which means ‘producing oil,’ appears to be an error as she corrects herself in line 3 by expressing “さんきゅー,” pronounced “*sankyu-*” which means ‘thank you.’ This sequence suggests that in line 2 Chiemi fails to type “*sankyu-*” but instead types “*sanyu-*,” leaving out the “k.” This mistyped “*sanyu-*” results in the *kanji* word, “産油ー” (“*sanyu*”). Chiemi's correction

in line 3, however, is still incomplete because “さんきゅー” is in *hiragana* rather than in *katakana* which is the correct script for representing a loan word such as the English “thank you.”⁶

In line 4, Satoshi's short response indicates that he is amused at Chiemi's *kanji* entry because he says in line 5 “Is this a joke you learned in Japan?”⁷ Then, building on Chiemi's error in line 2, Satoshi initiates wordplay by inserting *kanji* characters in lines 8, 9, and 10. These characters are three choices from a list of candidate words that are automatically generated by the conversion software.

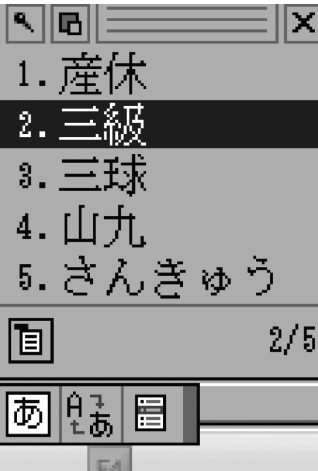


Figure 3: The candidate list of words pronouncing “*sankyuu*”

In line 11 Chiemi recognizes that Satoshi's Roman alphabet entries must have been typed "*sankyuu*" instead of "*sankyu-*" because the candidate *kanji* words in Figure 3 are automatically generated only by entering "s," "a," "n," "k," "y," "u," and "." This example involves a subtle but important difference in representing a long vowel in the Romanization system called the *Kunreishiki* system.⁸ In the *Kunreishiki* system, a long vowel is indicated either by doubling the letter of the vowel (e.g. "aa") or by placing a dash after the letter of the vowel (e.g. "a-.") It seems that the computer's conversion software only recognizes one way of representing a long vowel: placing a dash after the letter of the vowel. Thus, in order to correctly represent "サンキュー" ('thank you') in *katakana* script, the *romaji* entries must be made "s," "a," "n," "k," "y," "u," and "-."

Adapting to the typographical requirements of the conversion software, in line 12 Chiemi finally demonstrates the correct *romaji* entry for expressing "サンキュー" ('thank you') in *katakana* script. Chiemi and Satoshi's wordplay sequence is outlined below in Table 1.

Table 1: Chiemi and Satoshi's varieties of "thank you"

	Target word	<i>Romaji</i> entries	Actions in Word processing	Outcomes
Chiemi	"Thank you" in Japanese	<i>sanyu-!</i>	<input type="text" value="Space key"/>	産油一! ("oil producing", line 2)
		<i>sankyu-</i>	<input type="text" value="Enter key"/>	さんきゅー ("thank you", line 3)
		<i>Sankyuu</i>	<input type="text" value="Enter key"/>	さんきゅう ("thank you", line 11)
		<i>sankyu-</i>	<input type="text" value="Space key"/>	サンキュー ("thank you", line 12)
Satoshi		<i>Sankyuu</i>	<input type="text" value="Space key"/>	産休 ("maternal leave", line 8)
		<i>Sankyuu</i>	<input type="text" value="Space key"/>	三級 ("Level 3", line 9)
		<i>Sankyuu</i>	<input type="text" value="Space key"/>	三球 ("three balls", line 10)

The wordplay in the preceding example derives from manipulation of the expected indexical relationship between language and its appropriate script. An accidental human error in typing could not be converted into the correct script but instead was changed into an unexpected choice of script. This unexpected change resulted from a subtle discrepancy between expected and actual *romaji* input.

In spoken conversations, speakers distinguish homonyms mainly by intonation and contextual information, but in this case of Instant Messaging conversation, participants creatively associated phonological features of one language with various scripts in another language. Homonymic verbal play is ethnographically recognized as a form of performance (e.g. Bauman and Sherzer 1989 [1974].) Similarly the homonymic “scriptplay” observed here appears to be a relatively new form of performance in IM discourses.

Theoretical Background: An Anthropologically Informed Look at Linguistic Practices

In order to explicate the relationship between affordances of written forms and software features in bilingual conversations, I will draw from two broad research domains: language contact phenomena and technological influences on communicative practices. Focusing on toponymic “naming” practices in Japanese IM conversations, I will elaborate how texts are creatively manipulated not only between syllabaries but between language boundaries.

Language Contact Phenomena

Notions such as code-switching, code-mixing, and borrowing are canonical concerns for investigating new language practices particularly in bilingual and/or multilingual communities. By closely analyzing morphological features and syntactical environments, linguists discuss how words are “borrowed” in a receiving language as well as how or whether “codes” are switched at the moment when the alien words appear (e.g., Poplack 1980, Gumperz 1982, Myers-Scotton 1993, Nishimura 1995). While revealing how syntactic and morphological constraints help facilitate different categorizations of lexical items, a common critique of these analytical ap-

proaches is that the data largely depend on spoken data.

Acknowledging this limitation, a few studies of non-Western linguistic practices have begun to pay more attention to written forms. Angermeyer (2005), for instance, introduces different types of Russian-English written forms by analyzing advertisements printed and distributed in Russian immigrant communities in New York City. This type of “printed” code-switching is termed *diagraphia* (e.g. Zima 1974, Grivelet 2001) and refers to two types of written form co-existing in one language such as Latin and Cyrillic scripts for Serbo-Croatian, Devanagari and Arabic for Hindi-Urdu and Pinyin and Chinese characters for Chinese (DeFrancis 1984, Grivelet 2001: 3). Just as *diglossia* distinguishes “high” and “low” varieties in spoken language, *diagraphia* differentiates prestigious and less prestigious written representations of language. For example, in Chinese the use of Pinyin⁹ is considered a “low” variety while Chinese characters are a “high” variety. In the case of Japanese, the use of *romaji* is considered a “low” or less valued variety because it is only used to initiate teaching Japanese as a second language. However, the traditional sociolinguistic division into “high” and “low” (Ferguson 1959) does not accurately capture word processing activities. This is because different scripts are simultaneously used as *romaji* entries are concurrently converted into *hiragana* on the computer screen.

Banu and Sussex (2001) describe “graphological code-switching” phenomena by analyzing established English-origin proper names in Bangladesh texts. They claim that English-origin proper names and the use of the Roman alphabetic scripts are used to establish a business context and that the offshore use of these scripts from influential cultures contributes to a high-status connotation. Smith and Schmidt (1996) provide quantitative analyses of the ways in which Japanese writers creatively and deliberately use multiple scripts depending on genre, audience age, and stylistic effect. For example, comics and science fiction novels, which are stereotypically considered to be young, modern, and pop, tend to use more *katakana* and less *hiragana* than romance novels which are stereotypically linked to softness and femininity. These studies of social indexicality with regard to the co-existence of multiple scripts suggest that scripts, which are unquestionably not relevant in spoken data, play a significant role in marking social

attributes of interactions and interactants (e.g. Jaffe 2000).

While many code-switching studies focus on the perspective of speakers who are at the rim of two (or more than two) languages and cultures, studies of *katakana* practices tend to be approached from a perspective within the Japanese community in Japan. The influx of *katakana* words has been a social concern (e.g. Hoffer 1980, Nozumi 1998) and analytical categories have been challenged as words are introduced to Japanese. Words expressed in *katakana* are often categorized according to native speakers' acceptability. For example, in order to investigate the process of speakers' cognition of loanwords, Tamaoka and Miyaoka (2003) propose three types of loanword categories: the adopted, the newly adopted, and the unadopted. The major resources to determine these classifications are dictionaries. If a loanword that has been written in some text in *katakana* appears in a standard Japanese dictionary, it is considered to be an adopted loanword whereas if it only appears in specialized Japanese loanword dictionaries, it is categorized as newly adopted, whereas if it never appears in any dictionary, it is called unadopted. Such classification is based on the degree of conventionalization of loanwords, and thus their familiarity to speakers.

Although studies of code-switching and borrowing suggest that language contact phenomena are an ideal site for revealing the intersection of linguistic practices and their indexical social meanings, the categorical debate for analytical purposes faces some limitations. Angermeyer (2005) claims that this may be because code-switching occurs in informal settings and writing is generally considered more formal and standardized than speech forms. Taking into account that networked communication tools have become part of our social lives, particularly for the participants in this study, and that these media require texts, written forms are no longer associated only with formal settings.

The emerging literature on texts still depends on concepts and analytical units developed by analyzing spoken data (e.g. *digraphia* in analogy of *diglossia*). A limitation is that studies of language contact assume that words should belong to a given language. The models Tamaoka and Miyaoka (2003) proposed, for example, recognize that words can fall along a continuum of Japaneseness and non-Japaneseness, but while gradience is rec-

ognized, as opposed to a simplistic binary categorization, their approach still assumes that a word *is* or *is not* adopted into Japanese, and such a determination is made based on presence in or absence from dictionaries.

Instead of assuming that words must be categorized as strictly Japanese or English, I argue that words can, at the same time, be both Japanese *and* English holding a bivalent status (e.g. Woolard 1999), and that boundaries of words can even be ambiguous depending on speakers' social identities and local contexts. Particularly for the participants described in this paper, the issue of language contact is salient because they are part of both English and Japanese speaking communities in different contexts. In addition, properties of IM involve a unique conversational space where ideologies of cultural identity that might not be salient in speech are made "visible" through the choice of written forms. Under such circumstances, the speakers' attitudes toward "alien" words are not consistent across contexts, but are negotiable, constructed collaboratively among speakers, across modalities (i.e. spoken or written discourse), and even across script boundaries.

Linguistic Anthropological Insights into the Influence of Technology on Communication

Through analyses of culturally patterned forms of talk, it is possible to address anthropological questions such as how language is used to organize society and how language itself comes to be an important resource in social activities such as attributing status and membership categories. For analytical purposes, the notions of indexicality and linguistic ideology, for instance, are significant (e.g. Ochs 1992, Woolard 1998, Irvine and Gal 2000).

In anthropological researches, studying the mediation of invented tools and their communicative functions have always been of great interest (e.g. Tomasello 1999, Wertsch 1991). As communication technologies develop, possibilities for new social relationships and communication patterns emerge. For instance, Keating and Mirus (2003) analyze the interactions among Deaf individuals who are introduced to a web camera as a new communication tool. The results show that the signers creatively transform 3D sign space into a 2D environment on the screen by figuring out how to best

construct mutually coherent communication. Analyses of such interactional processes of converting conventional practices help us to understand the dynamics of sociality and behavior in the culture.

Additionally recent studies on computer mediated communications (CMC) (e.g., Herring 2001) have focused on how people interacting via computers creatively use a number of resources in their repertoire and how CMC is different from preexisting mediums such as spoken and written languages. On the one hand, communication on the Internet is considered to be a hybrid medium that shares certain features with both spoken and written languages (Baron 1998). On the other hand, properties of digitized conversations transmitted by the network are quite similar to those in face-to-face conversations. Nishimura (2003) examines the linguistic behaviors of young Japanese bulletin board system (BBS) users and claims that they creatively employ orthography in order to express themselves as if they were in face-to-face conversation. Su (2003) focuses on multilingual internet users in Taiwan and analyzes their creative uses of writing systems in association with the sounds of other languages. She argues that the mixture of multiple languages is used to indicate speakers' social relations as well as the mutual relationship between the nature of written and spoken forms of language, and that the speakers' linguistic ideologies indexed by the unique uses of written forms should be situated within the larger social context. While these preceding studies frequently focus on texts to characterize new media, I will address the significance of graphic manifestations of toponyms to show how speakers' script choice makes indexical meanings "visualized" in the course of IM interactions.

Representations of Place Names

In the following examples, I describe different representations of place names using different scripts. Then referring to the participants' metalinguistic accounts of their script choice, I discuss how the chosen forms work to construct specific ideas and relationships among present and past communities to which the participants belong and have belonged.

The next example, derived from IM conversation logs between Tae and Satoshi, includes the names of the cities and state where they have lived.

(6) Tae and Satoshi, talking about summer vacation

- | | | | |
|---|---------|--|--|
| 1 | Tae | 夏に <u>Wolfram</u> でのインター
ンは <u>そもそも</u> | The internship I had during
the summer in <u>Wolfram</u> was.. |
| 2 | Satoshi | あれ? 前の彼とは別れたの
も知らなかった | Really? I didn't know you
broke up with your boyfriend |
| 3 | Tae | ずっと付き合ってたアメリ
カ人の彼とのことがあって
行くてわけだったし、こ
の夏婚約する予定だったの
... | ... because of my American
boyfriend I was dating for a
long time. We were going to
be engaged this summer. |
| 4 | Satoshi | そうでしょ | I bet. |
| 5 | Tae | 夏休みに <u>イリノイ</u> に行く直
前になってこのベトナム人
の彼と出会ってしまって | I met a Vietnamese guy just
before I left for <u>Illinois</u> . |
| 6 | Satoshi | <u>Austin</u> で? | In <u>Austin</u> ? |

There are three place names mentioned above, which are underlined in the transcript: “Wolfram”, in line 1, “Illinois” in line 5 and “Austin” in line 6. “Wolfram” and “Austin” are typed in English.¹⁰ Then in line 5 when Tae says “before I left for Illinois,” she types “イリノイ” (‘Illinois’) in *katakana*. In line 6, Satoshi writes “Austin” in English.¹¹

As illustrated in the next example derived from an interview about the preceding conversation, Tae and Satoshi appear to recognize that their script preferences for representing “Austin” have changed over the course of time.

(7) Satoshi, Austin

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Satoshi | Austin はもう英語にしてるね。 |
| Chiho | へえ。おもしろいね。なんで? |
| Satoshi | なんでかなあ。もちろんカタカナで書けるけれど。なんか
でだろう。オースティンはもう Austin なんじゃない? カ
タカナでかくオースティンと英語でかくオースティンと... |
| Chiho | 違うのね? |

((English Translation))

- | | |
|---------|------------------------------------|
| Satoshi | I already write Austin in English. |
| Chiho | That's interesting. Why? |

Satoshi Why? Well, of course I could write it in *katakana*. But for some reason Austin (in *katakana*) has become Austin (in English), I guess. Austin in *katakana* and in English is

Chiho Different

Satoshi's statement implies that while he might have originally preferred using *katakana*, a preference for writing "Austin" in Roman alphabetic script came about over the course of time. In other words after moving from Japan and becoming an Austin resident, he came to more strongly associate the referent Austin with the Roman alphabetic script rather than *katakana*.

In contrast to Satoshi who came to Austin directly from Japan, Tae spent four years in Wolfram, Illinois before she moved to Austin. Interestingly, she explained to me that because there were fewer Japanese people in Wolfram compared to Austin, she considered the Japanese community in Austin to be a window for her to "feel Japaneseness." Contrary to Satoshi's preferred choice of the Roman alphabetic script when typing "Austin", Tae said she would use the *katakana* form, following the lead of the Japanese people she met when she first arrived in Austin. On the other hand, she typed *Wolfram* in the Roman alphabet because, in her terms, she "was not sure how to spell it in *katakana*," and at other times she did not think the keyboard software would recognize the foreign name and automatically convert it into its appropriate *katakana* form. The indexical relationship between the participants' script preferences and their past and present communities of residences is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 4 depicts that the participants' preferences for scripts stem from their encounters with the Japanese communities in geographically different contexts. Movement from *katakana* to Roman alphabetic script or from Roman alphabetic to *katakana* script indexes different aspects of an ideology about the Japanese community in Austin to which they both currently belong. Given that the community is a highly bilingual, bicultural one, Satoshi's ideology about the community, depicted in his choice of script, suggests less 'Japaneseness' and highlights the 'locality' of Austin as an English-speaking environment. In his words, "‘オースチン’ has already become ‘Austin’" in the present local community. In contrast, Tae's ideol-

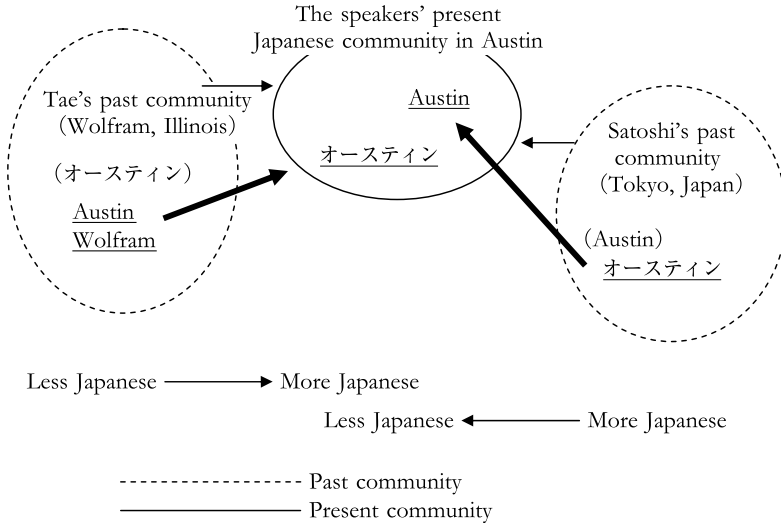


Figure 4: Tae and Satoshi's script preferences and residential communities

ogy seems to draw attention to the greater degree of 'Japaneseness' of the present community compared to her past community in Illinois where there were fewer Japanese people around her. In this way script choice seems to index current ideologies about past communities specifically in terms of the 'Japaneseness,' and the nebulous meaning of this term seems to emerge from the quality and degree of interaction in which the participants have had with other Japanese people in the local communities in which they have lived.

Along the axes of 'Japaneseness' and 'locality,' the negotiation of script choice is also evident in representations of other local place names including coffee shops, stores, and street names. In Example 8, Satoshi provides several examples of local names in Austin demonstrating his preference for English script when he types the names.

(8) *Katakana* vs. English

Satoshi . . . 言葉たちが自分の生活とどれぐらい近いのか遠いのか、
だよな。もちろん使用頻度が高く、学校のこと、生活のこと
と . . . 今日メールで、カクタスカフェって、カタカナで書いて

ちゃったけどちょっとこっばずかしかった。最初にカタカナでかいちゃったから続けたけれど、普段だったらカクタスカフェってふつうにローマ字で、英語で打ってる... コープなんかも、co-op だね。コープもカタカナで書くと日本のコープになっちゃう... グアダルーペもカタカナで書くとこっばずかしいよね。だからスペル難しいけど、わざわざ英語で書く... 良い例が 6th street だよ。だって学生とか六番通りとか、書くでしょ。でも日本に紹介してるウェブとかみてもみんな 6th street って書いてあるし、で、しかもそれをシックスストリートって書いてもやっぱりこっばずかいしよね。英語で 6th、6、T, H, ストリートってかかないと...

((English Translation))

Satoshi ... It's a matter of how close these words are to you. Of course the frequency is high... for instance, today I accidentally typed "Cactus Cafe" in *katakana* in an email today, and I felt a bit embarrassed. I did so because I started in *katakana*, but normally I type it in *romaji*, or English. Another example is "co-op". When I type "co-op" in *katakana*, it means co-op in Japan... I would feel a bit embarrassed if I type 'Guadalupe' in *katakana*. That's why I intentionally switch to English to type "Guadalupe" although its spelling is difficult... A good example is '6th street'. Students write it as "*rokuban doori*" (literal translation of "6th street"). In websites that introduce "6th street", it's written as "6th street". So writing it シックスストリート ((in *katakana*)) would make me feel a bit embarrassed anyway again. It has to be "6th": six, t, h, and street.

In this excerpt, Satoshi repeatedly claims that typing¹² certain local names in *katakana* makes him "feel a bit embarrassed." His preferences for using English scripts for certain local names suggest that speakers' exposure to visual representations of local names may play a significant role in creating a strong preference of one script over the other. For instance, "Guadalupe," one of the places mentioned in this excerpt, is the name of a major street near the university campus (Figure 5). There is no doubt that Satoshi is frequently exposed to "Guadalupe" written in English rather than in *katakana*. As a consequence, exposure to the Roman script may result in a preference for English script to *katakana*.



Figure 5: A street sign for “Guadalupe”

Like Satoshi, other participants in this study acknowledged that in IM conversations with members of the Japanese community in Austin, they prefer to use alphabetic spellings in order to express local place names and other vocabularies they acquired after moving to Austin. This preference for alphabetic spellings is not because typing English is more convenient, but rather is a reflection of participants’ local identities as Austin residents. This negotiation of script choice based on the axis of ‘locality’ becomes a particularly salient practice in everyday conversations through Instant Messaging.

Methodological Implications

One challenge of this project was developing a transcript that adequately represents research participants’ “verbal” metalinguistic accounts of their typewritten conversational practices. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, whereas Instant Messaging conversations took place in virtual space. The challenge, therefore, was to assess those accounts and practices across modal boundaries.

Use of Romanized transcription is an established methodological convention for representing spoken language data, but unexpected difficulties arose while transcribing the spoken data about typewritten conversations. It is a struggle to adequately capture the indexical meanings of multiple scripts that were verbally explained in the interviews. Words that were uttered with identical pronunciations may reflect different social meanings and identities, which in turn are distinctively indexed by different scripts.

This theoretical and methodological challenge is captured in Example 9 which consists of a single utterance excerpted from the interview previ-

ously mentioned in Example 7. Here, Satoshi discusses the shift of his script choice for expressing “Austin” versus “オースチン” in IM conversations.

(9) Austin¹³

Satoshi	オースティン	は	もう	Austin	なん	じゃない？
	Oosutin	-wa	Mou	Oosutin	-nan	janai?
	Austin-	TOP	Already	Austin	-NOM	COP NEG

‘Austin has already become Austin.’

The transcript consists of four lines: a Japanese transcription, a Romanized transcription, an English gloss and an English translation. As the bold-faced portions of the Romanized transcription show, Satoshi pronounced “*oosutin*” (‘Austin’) twice in the same way. However, in the Japanese transcript of the interview, the first “*oosutin*” is represented in *katakana* as “オースチン,” whereas the second “*oosutin*” must be represented in Roman alphabetic letters as “Austin” because there has been a shift in Satoshi’s script choice from *katakana* to Roman alphabet. This graphical differentiation demonstrates Satoshi’s point that “Austin has already become Austin.”

Written transcripts allow us to closely analyze language practices across a range of social settings with diverse speakers, but there are limitations. For example, in her classic article entitled, “Transcription as Theory”, Elinor Ochs (1979) illuminated the possibility that use of standard orthography hides certain aspects of human behavior, such that if the focus of research is on the phonetic representation (e.g. analyzing sound play among children), a standard orthography may “mask” the shape of sounds, which may be more important than the content of the utterances.

Similarly, in the case of the interviews about script choice in IM conversations, it became apparent that use of Romanized transcription for phonetic representations of place names did not adequately represent speakers’ sensitivities to the subtleties associated with their graphic manifestations. Script choice is a nuanced linguistic practice which is inextricably linked to community membership and identity. Therefore the purpose of transcribing the interview data was not to represent sound features of the speech, but to represent the participants’ accounts for their script choices in IM

conversations.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that as everyday interactions become increasingly mediated due to technological developments, speakers actively adopt new tools and creatively use both the affordances of existing linguistic practices and features of the new tools. In their Instant Messaging conversations, the Japanese-English participants make jokes, represent English-origin names, and talk about the graphic representation of names by manipulating their script choices. The script choices in IM conversations, therefore, become new ways of indexing local identities and community memberships.

I have suggested that in analyzing “spoken” interview data about typed (or “written”) IM conversations, the Romanized transcription, which is normally assumed to be a neutral means for phonetically representing Japanese, was revealed to be imbued with social meanings. The participants talked about the meaning of Roman alphabet in comparison to other scripts. For the analyst, therefore, the transcription must be able to encompass the various meanings associated with different scripts. Additionally instead of separating verbal interaction from virtual interaction, it is important to consider what IM conversations tell us about identity construction because the bilingual (and bicultural) participants in this paper regularly manipulate their language practices both verbally and virtually.

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Notes

1 In their study of teletypewriter (TTY) conversations between Deaf American Sign Language users, Nash and Nash (1982) identify another example of real-time interactions that is typed. The thrust of the study, however, focused on how TTY communications resembled spoken telephone conversations.

2 The term that Ayaka and Tae use to refer to IM is “チャット” or “*Chatto*”, a borrowing originating from the English word ‘chat’. Technically ‘Chat’ and ‘Instant Messaging’ are different types of real-time communication programs. However, taking into account that the participants use an IM program and call their medium *chatto*, I translate *chatto* as IM in this paper.

3 TOP (topic), ACC (accusative), LOC (locative)

4 “QWERTY” refers to the first six letters in the first row on the standard English keyboard.

5 Abbreviations are also considered borrowings (e.g. Smith 1996, Nishimura 2003).

6 In the follow-up interview, Chiemi said that she was unaware that she had made a mistake when she typed line 2. Thus “*sankyū-*” in line 3 was expressed in *hiragana*.

7 This response includes a mischievous word play phonetically applying part of a Japanese predicate, “. . . (*de*)*sukai?*”, to an English word, “sky”.

8 There are two major Romanization systems for writing Japanese: the Hepburn system and the *Kunrenshiki* system. In the Hepburn system, a long vowel is expressed with a circumflex accent over the vowel (e.g. “*ā*” or “*â*”).

9 Pinyin is a standard Mandarin Romanization system.

10 In line 1, ‘Wolfam’ is typed in two-byte letters.

11 Unlike Tae, he switches the typing mode from Japanese to English when he enters ‘Austin’.

12 In this videotaped interview, Satoshi frequently makes “typing” gestures with his hands while he says “writing” in his discourse, suggesting that he interchangeably uses “writing” and “typing”.

13 FP (Final particle), NOM (Nominalizer)

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