



## The Mark Usage as Message Nuances in Digital Chat Communication Between Japanese and Indonesian Written Communication

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### ABSTRACT

Exclamation mark or kantanfu in Japanese, is one of written language elements used to convey expressions. Based on exclamation mark usage, the meaning and nuance of a sentence could differ. Amidst the COVID19 pandemic that limits one's interaction to another, the frequency of digital communication has significantly increased. Digital communication through chats has become an activity that cannot be separated from everyday life. Therefore, it is important to understand exclamation marks correctly. The aim of this study is to avoid misunderstandings that could happen through chats in Japanese. This study will compare the use and interpretation of exclamation marks in Japanese chat between Indonesians and Japanese. Japanese chat messages containing exclamation marks were analyzed using Hymes' SPEAKING theory. This study uses Creswell's convergent mixed methods, with quantitative data of Indonesians' questionnaire survey results, and qualitative data of interviews with Japanese people. Study results show that there are differences in the use and function of exclamation marks between Indonesians and Japanese.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Based on 2021 survey by the world's biggest top-up cellular platform, Ding, 89% on respondents in Indonesia chose to Whatsapp as a daily form of communication. In Japan, the people there preferred to use Line, a Japanese chat application for chatting. Therefore, it can be concluded that both Indonesians and Japanese people are fond of communicating digitally through chat apps.

Amidst the COVID19 pandemic that limits one's interaction to another, the frequency of digital communication has significantly increased. Chat apps has a lot of benefits that make it popular among the society such as the speed and simplicity in communicating anytime and anywhere with internet. However, using chat apps also has a disadvantage, in that it is sometimes inaccurately convey emotion of the users. The limitations of expressing written communication make the users to use plenty of ways to convey their emotions through texts, one of them is through the use of punctuation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Punctuation is one of the elements in written communication. According to Chaer (2006:71-72), punctuation consists of signs that are used on texts so that the sentences we wrote can be understood as how we intend them to. Therefore, punctuations also have grammatical and pragmatic meanings, to convey the feelings of the writer in a text. One example of punctuations is the exclamation mark (!).

Different countries may have different interpretations in communication, this includes in expressing one's feelings through punctuation. According to Pedoman Umum Ejaan Bahasa Indonesia (2015), exclamation mark is used to end a statement, a sentence, or an expression that comes in the form of excitement or command that depict seriousness, distrust, or a strong emotion. An exclamation mark can also be used as a sign that a sentence is important to notice.

According to Nihon Kokugo Daijiten (1987), an exclamation mark in Japanese conveys feelings such as being impressed or moved, as well as happiness, surprise, anger, and as an emphasis. An exclamation mark in Japanese is 「感嘆符」 (kantanfu) or 「ビックリマーク」 (bikkuri maaku). Based on the use of punctuation especially exclamation mark, a sentence's context and its nuance may transform into a different meaning. Therefore, it is possible that message's context that is given by a sender can be inaccurately understood by its receiver. The difference of communication style of both Indonesian and Japanese society can also be one factor that lead to an inaccurate interpretation between both societies.

In this research, the writer intends to examine meanings and interpretations of the use of exclamation mark on digital chats, to see how the use of exclamation mark can lead to different interpretations of meanings within different contexts. Also, the writer would also like to see whether Indonesians that understand Japanese language may use exclamation mark based on the principles of Indonesian language when communicating in

Japanese. This research is intended so that both Japanese people and Indonesians may understand the context of the use of exclamation mark in daily written communication so that miscommunications may not happen.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In doing this research, the writer studies literatures such as research papers that relate to the use of exclamation mark in written communication as references. A research paper with the title of "Using punctuation as a marker of sincerity and affective convergence during texting" by Reynolds et al. (2017) discusses the use of punctuations in expressing intonations and the effect of the use of punctuation of a sender as a paralinguistic sign for emotional tone. This research is done by using a computer program where participants communicate through messages with artificial partner, and responding to inquiries given by picking one of five identical responses that each consist of a question mark, an exclamation mark, an ellipsis, a period, and without any punctuations. The result of the research shows that participants are quite sensitive towards punctuations as an effective sign for conversational tone. This research also conducted a survey to Indonesian respondents, by giving 10 multiple choice questions to place exclamation mark to 8 dialogues that are taken from screenshots of real chats.

This research uses both quantitative and qualitative method, to collect data that will be used for mixed methods data analysis technique. According to Creswell (2014), the mixed methods method covers a combination or integration of both qualitative and quantitative data sampling in a research study. The writer chose to use mixed method so the result of the research remains objective, and so that each research result may complete one another.

First, the writer collect data using quantitative method through a survey in the form of Google Form that is distributed to 30 Indonesians that have studied, are studying, or understand Japanese, without the limitation of particular age nor gender. The writer then conduct interviews to three Japanese individuals that actively communicate using chat applications. The result of the interview then become secondary data source for the qualitative side of the research. Both data from qualitative and quantitative methods will then be used in the data analysis phase. The data analysis technique that will be used by the writer is one phase mixed methods technique that may be also refer to called as convergent mixed methods design. In this technique, the writer analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data separately, then both data will be compared altogether (Creswell, 2018). In this research, the writer will compare the results collected from Indonesian and Japanese data source, and will analyze those data using SPEAKING theory by Hymes (1974) as well as other related theories.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

As mentioned before about the stages of analyzing techniques of convergent mixed methods, the writer will now elaborate the data analysis in 3 parts, which are qualitative data analysis, quantitative data analysis, and then combining both the results of both analysis.

For the qualitative data source, the writer conducted interviews on three respondents about the usage of exclamation mark or what is called *kantanfu* in Japanese. To examine the user's style in using *kantanfu* in a chat, the interviews were conducted through the chat application LINE.

The results of the interviews show that Japanese people frequently use chat apps in their daily communication. In general, they use chat apps in communicating with friends and families. The respondents also mentioned that they often encounter problems while communicating through chats. The most common problem is that they often find it hard to convey the meaning of the message to their partner, as well as the difficulty of understanding the emotion of their partner correctly. This shows how online chat communication may easily lead to miscommunication. This finding is similar Kaori's statement (2020) that online communications may lead to difficulties in knowing the feeling of their counterparts, making them feel uncertain of the received messages. This is caused by a lack of nonverbal information given by the sender, that would be understood clearly if it is done in person.

The three respondents often use *kantanfu* in their communication. *Kantanfu* is often used by someone to be blunt, as well as in cheering about something. In Japanese language, *kantanfu* usually represents emotion 「フランク」 (*furanku*) or being frank in English, which means being blunt, honest, and truthful. In contrast with Indonesian language, in Japan *kantanfu* is rarely used in imperative sentences. When used in imperative sentences, *kantanfu* will leave a strong yet bad impression. It is known that in Japanese, *kantanfu* is used to convey one's expression or emotion. *Kantanfu* is normally used when someone is surprised of something as well as to emphasize something. This is in accordance to *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (1972) which is to express emotions such as being impressed, moved, surprised, emphasis, etc. Furthermore, *kantanfu* is also used to give a warm and friendly impression. *Kantanfu* is usually used in a sentence with positive context, and is rarely used in sentences with a negative context.

Overall, the respondents were found to use *kantanfu* by considering their counterparts, as well as using it after reading the nuance of a conversation. If the nuance of the conversation is formal, then *kantanfu* is not recommended in that it will leave an impolite impression. Basically, respondents use *kantanfu* with a friendly counterpart, while taking consideration of what impression that they would give to their counterparts. Moreover, the use of *kantanfu* is based on the mood of those who send the messages. It is possible that if a someone has a good relationship with his/her superior, then *kantanfu* may be used in this context even if they are in a higher position. The use of *kantanfu* may change the nuance of a sentence to be more friendly, relaxed, and humorous. Meanwhile, a sentence that uses a period or *kuten* may tend to give a cold, serious, and formal impression.

### 1. Quantitative Data Source

The writer collected quantitative data samples by conducting a survey through Google Forms on respondents that fit the following criteria: he/she

must be an Indonesian citizen, has studied or is studying or understands Japanese (without any minimum skill level), as well as he/she must be active in using chat apps. The survey questions were divided into 4 parts, such as basic profiling part, early part, middle part, and the end of the survey.

## 2. Respondents' Basic Profile

One of the criterias for the respondents in this survey is that he/she who is Indonesian that understands Japanese language. If a respondent does not understand Japanese, then the respondent may not participate in this survey. The total number of respondents that participated in this survey was 30 respondents, while the majority consists of 21 female respondents.

## 3. Beginning of the survey

In this chapter, it is noted that out of 30 respondents, as many as 19 of them have passed Japanese proficiency exam, with the majority consists of 12 N3 level respondents. This fact was taken into consideration by the writer in analyzing respondents' understanding in the middle part of the survey. Based on the answers, it is revealed that most of the respondents learn Japanese in a formal setting, learn Japanese by consuming Japanese media, and interact in Japanese daily. However, the number of respondents that actively communicate with Japanese every day is 3 out of 30 respondents, and the majority of the respondents rarely communicate with Japanese people.

It is revealed that during online chat communication in Japanese, most of the respondents had problems in conveying their message, understanding the language used, as well as in understanding the main idea of the message. This result fits on what Kaori (2020) stated that online chats have several weaknesses such as conveying and understanding messages. Among many kinds of punctuation in Japanese based on *Honyaku Nihongo Hyouki Gaido*, (2013), punctuations that are mostly used by respondents in particular order are *touten* 「、」, *kuten* 「。」, followed with *kantanfu* 「！」 and *gimonfu* 「？」. Based on the respondents' answers, it is revealed that emotion and meaning that the respondents would like to convey when using an exclamation mark is anger and surprise, followed with imperative. It can be concluded that the overall emotion or meaning that the respondents would like to convey is anger and surprise.

Based on the survey, it is revealed that almost half of the respondents considered that the function of an exclamation mark both in Indonesian and Japanese language are the same. This shows how respondents that were aware the differences of the use of exclamation mark in Japanese and Indonesian language are not many, only 10 out of 30 respondents. After relating the respondents answer with their profiles, those who chose 'different' are those who actively use Japanese daily. While those who did not know the functional difference of exclamation mark in Japanese and Indonesian language were those who did not actively use Japanese language daily, regardless of their proficiency level.

#### 4. Middle part of the survey

In this chapter, respondents were given 10 multiple choice questions to place exclamation mark on 8 dialogues that originated from screenshots of real chats. The types of the dialogues were divided into 2 types: dialogues 1-5 were dialogues of a person with his/her superior at the office, and dialogues 6-8 were taken from conversations among friends.



**Figure 1. An Example of Dialogue Number 1 Taken from a Screenshot of a Real Chat**

The following table shows a summary of the accuracy of respondents' answer from dialogues 1-8 that consists of 10 questions. One point will be awarded if the accuracy exceeds 50% to see the overall score of a respondent's answer.

**Table 1. Respondents' Score from Dialogue 1 to 8**

No.	% Accuration	% Mistakes	Points
1	16,7%	83,3%	0
2	30%	70%	0
3	30%	70%	0
4	73,3%	26,7%	1
5	30%	70%	0
6	70%	30%	1
7	66,7%	33,3%	1
8	73,3%	26,7%	1
9	53,3%	46,7%	1
0	46,7%	53,3%	0
<b>Total Scores</b>			<b>5</b>

Based on all of the questions, the right answer is the one that uses *kantanfu*. The table above shows that the respondents succeeded to answer 5 questions with score 5 out of 10. Because of that, it is revealed that the accuracy of the respondents in using *kantanfu* is 50:50. Therefore, it can be concluded that Indonesian respondents that understood Japanese language tend to incorrectly

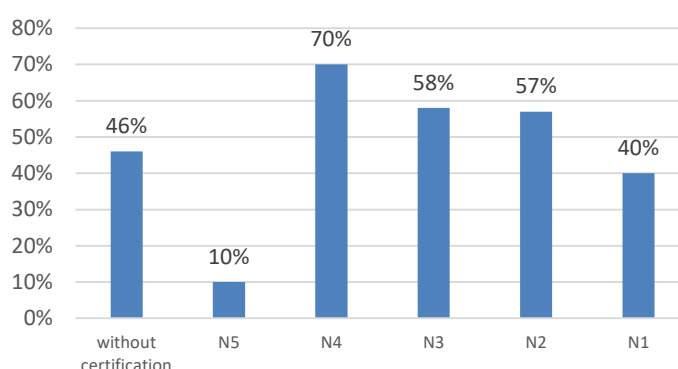
use *kantanfu*. On dialogues 1 to 5 that consist of a conversation between a superior and its subordinate, most respondents interpreted *kantanfu* as an emphasis as well as seriousness. In this case, there is a difference of *kantanfu* interpretation in Japanese, where *kantanfu* itself is rarely used to show seriousness. On dialogues 6-8 that consist of conversations among friends, respondents rarely interpreted serious or emphasis nuance. On all the three dialogues, the nuance or emotion that were interpreted by the respondents were the feelings of admiration, happiness, and surprise. In this part, the interpretation of *kantanfu* by the respondents fit the function and meaning of *kantanfu* in Japanese.

### 5. Analyzing SPEAKING element of conversation on chat apps

The following table shows the writer's analysis of Hymes's speaking event element (1974, in Vakili et al., 2012) that is also called with the term SPEAKING. This analysis is done to examine the elements of speaking events that occur on the chats used in the previous part. The difference of respondents' understanding of SPEAKING element analysis above happen on Key part, which is a conversational tone that is delivered by the usage of *kantanfu*. In the table above, the nuance of the conversation that happen on dialogues 1 to 5 are admiration and cheerful nuance. On the other side, the respondents' interpretation to the nuance delivered are emphasis and serious nuance.

### 6. Analysis Results of the Usage of *Kantanfu* with Respondents' Profiling

In this part, the writer analyzes the accuracy of using *kantanfu* based on the respondents' answer on dialogue questions. The factor that is going to be the writer's analysis is the level of Japanese proficiency and how frequent do the respondents communicate with Japanese. The writer would like to see the connection of the respondents' Japanese proficiency with the errors that occurred when using *kantanfu* in a chat.



**Figure 1. Comparison of Japanese Proficiency Level With The Accuracy in Answering Questions**

The results show that the accuracy of using *kantanfu* in a chat is not influenced by someone's Japanese proficiency. Based on the data, it is possible for someone who has a low proficiency level to use *kantanfu* accurately in the right context or situation, it is also possible for someone with a high proficiency

level that inaccurately use *kantanfu* in a sentence. The frequency of how often respondents' interact with Japanese is linear with how they use *kantanfu* correctly. Therefore, the more someone interacts with Japanese people through chat, then the possibility to use *kantanfu* correctly is also more likely to occur. Krashen (1982) also stated that the best method to improve one's learning of foreign languages is by using it to communicate. Therefore, this fact supports the idea that those who actively communicate with Japanese people using Japanese language will have better understanding on how to use *kantanfu* correctly.

## 7. End of the Survey

After analyzing the use of *kantanfu* in chats, it is revealed that all the respondents perceived that exclamation marks play an important role in chats. This result fits a theory based on *Nihon Dai Hyakka Zensho* (1989), that stated that punctuations are used to convey the writer's intention correctly. In the beginning of the survey, most of the respondents felt that the function of exclamation mark in both Indonesian and Japanese language is the same. While at the end of the survey, they changed their perceptions that the use of exclamation mark in Japanese and Indonesian is different.

**Table 2. Differences in Using Exclamation Mark in Indonesian and Japanese**

Indonesian Language	Japanese Language
Tend to have negative connotation	Tend to have positive connotation
Tend to have imperative and angry nuances	Tend to have enthusiastic and impressive nuance
Rarely used when feeling happy	Tend to be used when feeling happy
May sound forcing one's will at times	May leave a good impression
Is not used dynamically or variative Has no flexible or dynamic use	Has more variative and flexible use
Rarely used to emphasis an emotion/feeling	Emphasizes more emotion/feeling

Most of the respondents stated that the use of exclamation mark in Japanese tend to generate positive emotion, and its use is more flexible than Indonesian language. One example of using exclamation mark in Japanese is



when expressing happiness, apology, and gratitude. Meanwhile in Indonesian language, exclamation mark is rarely used in those contexts. Most respondents thought that in the case of Indonesian language, an exclamation mark tends to be used in negative and serious context such as anger, coercion, prohibition, and command.

#### **8. Quantitative and Qualitative Data Comparison Analysis**

After comparing both data, the writer concludes that there are plenty of differences on how Indonesians and Japanese people interpret *kantanfu*. In fact, the use and interpretation of both countries may tend to contradict each other. For Indonesians, the use of *kantanfu* can be interpreted as a negative nuance such as anger and coercion. But for Japanese people, the use of *kantanfu* tend to have positive nuance such as being friendly, enthusiastic, impressed, etc. Due to these differences in nuance, Indonesians tend to rarely use *kantanfu* in chats compared to Japanese people. The differences may also lie in using *kantanfu*. Indonesians tend to use *kantanfu* based on the type of a sentence such as imperative sentences. On the other hand, Japanese people tend to use *kantanfu* based on their feeling or nuance that they are currently experiencing.

However, there are several similarities in using *kantanfu* on both countries such as cheering, feeling surprised, and emphasizing emotions. Although, emphasizing emotions in this case is more likely positive emotion in Japanese, meanwhile in Indonesian language it tends to be used for emphasizing negative emotion. Also, data analysis reveals that Indonesians who know how to use *kantanfu* correctly are people who actively communicate with Japanese people in their daily life. Therefore, it can be concluded that by communicating and practicing Japanese in real life, one can know the habits of how Japanese communicate with each other, which is something that may not be taught in theories or textbooks.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Based on this research that focuses on comparing the use and interpretation of *kantanfu* or exclamation mark in Japanese language on Indonesian and Japanese people, the writer found several significant differences on how both societies use their exclamation mark. The most significant difference is the nuance and interpretation of exclamation mark for both countries. For Indonesians, using an exclamation mark is more likely to be used for negative contexts such as yelling, feeling angry as well as giving orders. While for Japanese people, *kantanfu* tends to be used for positive context such as enthusiasm, admiration, as well as to leave a friendly impression when speaking or chatting with someone else. An exclamation mark or *kantanfu* on these two languages are both used to emphasizing emotions yet with different nuances. In this research, the writer does not factor age limit nor work status so that future scholars may take these factors into account when doing further researches about *kantanfu* or other non formal punctuations. Moreover, more respondents may be added for further research to validate this study as well as to investigate this topic even further. This research is hoped to help readers to understand the intention and nuance of a written conversation especially with Japanese people,

in order to minimize miscommunication when conversing with Japanese speakers.

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