

## **A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Japanese and English Non-Verbal Online Communication: The Use of Emoticons in Weblogs**

Barry Kavanagh, Tohoku University

Using Hall's (1976) high/low context distinction and Hofstede's (1980) individualist versus collectivist cultural dimension, this paper examined non-verbal representations of communication across high and low context cultures within the low context medium of computer-mediated communication. A sample of 80 Japanese and English personal diary weblogs that were divided into blog topic content, entries, and comments from these individual blogs were examined for emoticon use. Findings showed that the gender of the blog author as well as the topic of the personal blog may play a role in influencing emoticon use and that the majority of emoticon usage could be seen in the blog comments rather than the blog articles themselves, where interaction is reduced to the blog writer and blog commentator. The data also showed that the use of these non-verbal contextual cues is culturally grounded with high context cultures such as Japanese relying heavily on these graphical accents in their blog entries regardless of sex. In contrast, low context cultures were found to use these emoticons sparingly in comparison.

Hall's (1976) proposed cultural framework stated that all cultures can be situated in relation to one another through the styles in which they communicate. Explicit statements in text and speech are categorized as low context cultures such as America. On the other hand, high context cultures such as Japan typically have communication patterns that are indirect, ambiguous, harmonious, reserved, and somewhat understated.

This paper will examine these contrasting communication styles in online communication through the Internet, which is largely a low context medium that stemmed from a low context society. What strategies do high context cultures use to compensate for a lack of context in a medium that is high in content and low in context? How does face-to-face verbal and non-verbal communication compare with written communication on the web and how do communication styles deeply embedded in the culture from which they came manifest themselves in computer-mediated communication?

Using Hall's cultural distinctions (1976) complemented with Hofstede's (1980, 1991) individualist versus collectivist cultural framework, this paper will attempt to examine high- and low context cultural online communication through the language of Japanese and American weblogs. This paper will look at non-verbal representations of communication through paralinguistic cues specifically looking at emoticons and graphical accents across high and low context cultures and to also examine how the blog writer's gender affects or influences these paralinguistic features.

Table 1  
*Types of CMC: High & Low Context Cultures*

	One to one	One to many
Mode		
Asynchronous	E-mail, Web CT	Bulletin boards, listservs, WebCT
Synchronous	Instant Messaging (IM)	Internet Relay Chat (IRC) IRC (Internet relay chat)
		Multi-user dungeons (MUDs)
		Multi-user object oriented (MOOs)
		WebCT chat

*Note.* Adapted from “Four Classes of CMC,” in *See You Online: Gender Issues in College Student Use of Instant Messaging* (Baron, 2004, p. 4).

### What is Computer Mediated Communication?

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) refers to a group of interpersonal communication systems used for sending messages to individuals or groups, mainly over the Internet via computer. CMC can be divided into two modes, one being synchronous which requires CMC users to communicate in real time, instant messaging (IM), for example. Asynchronous modes do not require interlocutors to be present online at the same time. Both modes can be between two people, one to one or from one person to multiple interlocutors, or one to many as illustrated in Table 1.

Hall (1976, 1990) describes low context communication (arguably the West) as verbally explicit and to the point, with relatively little attempt to conceal one's feelings. In contrast, high context communication is characterized as indirect, often ambiguous, and sensitive to the specific situational context (e.g., the relationship between the interlocutors and the suggestion of facial expression or tone of voice). Fussell, Qiping, and Setlock, (2008) state that “low context communicators are likely to disagree outright with their conversational partners, whereas high context communicators may use silence or indirect speech to indicate disagreement” (p. 904). Figure 1 illustrates high and low context cultures across nations, with Japan being thought of as the highest of the high context cultures.



*Figure 1.* High to low context cultures.

Source: Hall, E., & Hall, M. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*.

#### Hofstede's Individual Versus Collectivist Cultural Framework

According to the Hofstede model (1980, 1991), national differences can be understood through national culture. He calls this the collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. His studies identified and validated four independent dimensions of national cultural differences through his cultural dimensions model, one of them being the *Individual versus Collectivist* distinction. This dimension characterizes individualistic culture as low context and collectivism as high context. In collective cultures, the meaning within communication can be found in the nature of the situation and the relationships between the interlocutors, not just in the words themselves. In such cultures, it is taken for granted that a lot of the information is latent in the structure of the message and assumes that the listener understands what the speaker wants to express without being told directly.

Triandis (1995) suggests that low context or individualistic cultures seek little information in the context of the situation but instead rely on the explicit, the verbal, and through this direct form of communication, little is left to the imagination or intuition. These cultures place an emphasis on assertiveness, honesty, and getting to the point to avoid misunderstandings or miscalculated interpretation. In contrast, he suggests collective cultures are more reliant on face-to-face communication in which the context can be read as opposed to individualists who would be satisfied with the written word.

How, then, do these cultural dimensions provide a conceptual framework for understanding online computer-mediated communication? In a text-based virtual environment, where all actions are verbal (that is to say, written) how is nonverbal communication achieved? How are these cultural characteristics reflected in CMC?

### Non-Verbal Communication in CMC

Is it possible to express non-verbal communication in CMC? In speech and writing, differing strategies are used to express emotion. In face-to-face communication, emotion can be transmitted through paralinguistic tools such as facial expression, body posture, or physical proximity to our interlocutor along with the volume and intonation of our voices. However, when we write, none of these means of expressions can be used for obvious reasons. CMC can be described as an unstable or face-threatening form of communication. It cannot sufficiently represent non-verbal information, for instance, personal background or status, the display of emotion and context through gesture, body language, and tone of voice.

Communicative difficulties or even communication breakdown could arise if communicators are unaware of the types of messages they are sending and how the receiver is interpreting those messages. If the sender's message does not fit the receiver's perception of social norms for the particular situation, problems may arise.

Harris and Paradice (2007) suggest recipients of messages will interpret the senders' emotional intentions using paralinguistic cues contained and sent within the message. Paralinguistic cues refer to message characteristics in text-based CMC used to convey meanings normally achieved via tone of voice, body gestures, and other behaviors in face-to-face communication. For example, online emoticons—a phenomena going back over 25 years—were also explicitly created with the goal of clarifying the writers intended meaning within their messages. A number of studies have looked at this phenomenon within online communication.

Studies concerning gender within CMC have found that emoticons tend to be used more frequently by female users of CMC (Witmer & Katzman, 1997). A glance at the literature would suggest that cultural factors do indeed shape how people use CMC and the visual and paralinguistic cues that are available to users. Specifically, Fussell, Qiping, and Setlock (2008) state that auditory and visual cues appear to have more importance for members of collectivistic, high context, relationship-orientated cultures than they do for members of individualistic, low context, task-orientated cultures. Consistent with this argument, recent research does in fact suggest that people's cultural background affects CMC.

In a study conducted by Kayan, Fussell, and Setlock (2006), 78 instant messenger users (28 American, 21 Indian, and 29 East Asian consisting of 26 Singaporeans, 2 Chinese, and 1 from Hong Kong) were examined regarding their instant messaging online habits. Through questionnaires, they found that emoticons were rated differently in order of importance across cultures, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Mean Rated Importance of IM Feature by Cultural Group (1 = Not At All Important; 5 = Very Important) (From Kayan, Fussel, & Setlock, 2006)*

	North American	Indian	East Asian
Emoticons	2.61	3.29	3.03

These findings indicated that North Americans rated emoticons significantly lower in importance than did Indians, and marginally ( $p = 0.9$ ) lower in importance than East Asians. These findings mirror Gudykunst and Kim's (1997) assertion that nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions may be more important for communication in high context cultures as represented here through India and East Asian countries. These nonverbal cues in the CMC environment are substitutions for the nonverbal cues that are missing from CMC in comparison to face-to-face communication (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). However, this study reflects synchronous real time online communication and should be seen differently to asynchronous communication, which does not take place in real time; this in turn may influence how users communicate within the technological medium. Within asynchronous communication, for example, there is time to edit a message before sending it on into cyberspace.

#### Emoticons

American Standard Code for Information Interchange or ASCII-based emoticons are thought to have been used in cyberspace for the first time by Scott Fahlman in 1982, a researcher who used the :) mark to express his sentence as a joke and the symbol :( to show that the sentence was written in a serious tone. These marks, written sideways, were dubbed *emoticons* as they were utilized to represent the emotion of the writer. Sproull and Kiesler (1996) state that emoticons are simple character sequences that express emotions and are intended to soften the tones of written messages and therefore aid in avoiding potential and unnecessary confrontation and argument. Sugimoto and Levin (2000) state that "both Japanese and US emoticons are intended to have this same function" (p. 143). The main difference between the appearance of Japanese and American emoticons is that the U.S. smiley emoticon is rotated to the left whilst the Japanese one is upright as in the following: :) represents the American smiley and the (^\_^) is the basic smiley of Japan. Sugimoto and Levin (2000) state,

The uses and conceptualizations of those technologies reflect, intentionally or unintentionally, the cultures they were created in. And when they come to another sociocultural context, the technologies often bring with them these cultural and social ideologies and value systems. (p. 133)

Sugimoto and Levin give the example of the Japanese emoticon of (^\_^;) or (^^(;) which has the symbol of cold sweat on the side of its face and which reflects a form of Japanese

communication. This emoticon acts as a hedging device to soften an utterance that may be considered too assertive or strong by the writer. It is considered an expression of the Japanese cultural value of modesty in communication.

Like many aspects of technology, Japan has seized a Western concept, adapted it to their own culture, and arguably improved on it. Japanese CMC participants have a unique set of emoticons. They are intricate in their design and somewhat ambiguous and numerous in nature. Katsuno and Yano (2002) state that although it may be difficult to track down the first emoticon, or *Kaomoji*, used in Japan, it has been speculated that the most popular and basic symbol, (^\_^), first appeared in *pasokon tsushin* or PC communication around 1996.

Although there is a growing literature concerning the relatively new field of computer-mediated communication, the majority of it is on the English language. The bulk of research concerning weblogs has looked at anonymity and self disclosure (Qian & Scott, 2007), gender differences in weblog usage (Pedersen & MacAfee, 2007), and on the use of online graphical accents in relation to gender (Wither & Katzman, 1997).

Very little research, comparatively, is on the Japanese language. Katsuno and Yano (2002) examined the smiley emoticons used in e-mail and cell phone messages. Matsuda (2001) examined Japanese web diaries, focusing on the construction of *voice* and Matsuda (2002) looked at identity and power in e-mails written by Japanese teachers of English including honorific use. However, with reference to non-verbal communication use in online communication across cultures, very little research has been done. This research aims to address this gap.

### Weblogs

Weblogs can be categorized as an asynchronous mode of CMC derived from usually one writer whose thoughts, opinions, and description of events are written in diary-like entries to a broad audience that may result in a selective readership. Blog entries are usually posted in reverse chronological order and invite comments from their readership after each article or entry, and the author of the blog can respond to and interact with those who leave comments by responding accordingly. Blogs can attract a select readership depending on the nature of the blog. In most Japanese- and American-based blogs, fans or blog friends can register as *fans* on the blog and appear on the writers' blog, leading to a blog community whereby a group of blog writers read and respond to each others' blogs by leaving written comments following these blog articles. Currently, there are a variety of blog trackers. Sites like Techneme, Blogrunner, and Technorati have been tracking the hottest blog posts for quite some time.

Technorati is an Internet search engine for searching blogs. By June 2008, Technorati indexed 112.8 million blogs. On its home page, blogs are broken down into searchable categories for the reader, with webpage drop downs such as a blog directory, which lists blogs by topic or by the most popular, top 100 blogs. There are dozens of these blog trackers in both Japanese and American websites that follow the same outlines and processes in how they categorize blogs according to content and with respect to popularity and rank. As well as weblogs being numerous, they are also vast in the types of weblogs that can be found. Online

personal blogs or online diaries will form the background and the analytical target for this study.

### The Study

A total of 80 blogs (40 from American blogs, 40 from Japanese blogs) were taken from a variety of blog trackers (Tecnocrati, Yahoo Japan, Blogumura) that contained blog directories of personal blogs or online diaries whereby blogs were broken down into topics such as sports, travel, and politics, and then ranked according to popularity through the number of hits or readers the blog received.

The data used to create corpora of these personal blogs were broken down into four topics (sport, family, travel, and general non-theme specific personal blogs). The reasoning behind these four choices was to examine whether the topic of the blog would influence the use of emoticons in these blog articles and comments. Sport is considered a male domain conversationally, an important aspect of men's speech, while family is considered more feminine or a topic that women talk about rather than men (Cameron, 1997). Would these topics therefore witness the use of more or fewer emoticons when compared to each other and the other topics? Travel was decided to be a more neutral topic as far as gender goes, with the uncontrolled fourth topic being an assortment of blogs in the overall top 10 when the sample was taken. That is, the topics varied from politics to hobbies and were not controlled within the research. These were termed general personal blogs.

Each topic was ranked in accordance with popularity and the first top five male- and female-authored blogs from these ranked lists were selected from the blog trackers. Gender of the blog was determined by blog profiles that stated author gender; blogs that were not or could not be categorized into gender were rejected. Within each weblog topic, five blogs were selected and five entries from each blog were taken for analysis. Combined, the data consisted of 100 entries across the four topics with a total of 40 blogs as illustrated in Table 3.

The same process and number of blog entries and topics was used for gathering the Japanese blog data. In total, the corpus of data consisted of 80 blogs and 200 entries.

In order to make the corpora of equal size and to make the resulting data of counting these paralinguistic phenomena more reliable when comparing the two sets of corpora, a number of data modifications were created to enable this. Each blog entry, both Japanese and English, was limited to 20 sentences. Blogs that exceeded this limit were edited accordingly. Those entries that were under this limit were rejected and the next chronological entry was chosen. With these modifications, every blog entry was of the same size and could be compared equally for frequencies of non-verbal emoticon use. In total 8,000 (4,000 per language) sentences were analyzed.

Table 3  
*Breakdown of Blog Topic and Number of Entries*

<b>Blog topic</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Travel</b>
Number of blogs per blog topic	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs
Number of entries per blog	5 entries per blog (5 blogs x 5 entries per blog = 25 entries)	5 entries per blog (5 blogs x 5 entries per blog = 25 entries)	5 entries per blog (5 blogs x 5 entries per blog = 25 entries)	5 entries per blog (5 blogs x 5 entries per blog = 25 entries)
Total number of blogs and blog entries per topic	10 combined female and male blogs with a combined 50 entries altogether	10 combined female and male blogs with a combined 50 entries altogether	10 combined female and male blogs with a combined 50 entries altogether	10 combined female and male blogs with a combined 50 entries altogether

Table 4  
*Breakdown of Blog Topic and Number of Comments*

<b>Blog topic</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Travel</b>
Number of blogs per blog topic	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs	5 male-authored blogs 5 female-authored blogs
Number of comments per blog	3 comments per blog entry, 15 comments per blog. (10 blogs x 15 comments = 150 total comments)	3 comments per blog entry, 15 comments per blog. (10 blogs x 15 comments = 150 total comments)	3 comments per blog entry, 15 comments per blog. (10 blogs x 15 comments = 150 total comments)	3 comments per blog entry, 15 comments per blog. (10 blogs x 15 comments = 150 total comments)

In addition to the above blog entries, comments from these blog articles were also taken and examined for emoticon use. The comments were collected in the following ways. For each blog entry a total of three comments were chosen which resulted in 15 comments per blog, and 75 comments per blog per sex (see Table 4). This resulted in 150 comments per topic multiplied by four topics, for a total of 600 comments. The same process was completed for each corpus with a total of 600 comments from English blogs and 600 from Japanese blogs. In order to ensure that the comments were of equal size, the comments were edited to, and limited to, three sentences per comment, resulting in 3,600 sentences (1,800 per language) that were analyzed.



Table 5  
*Number of Emoticons from the English Corpus*

Gender of blog author	Emoticons Character based	Graphic emotions
Male	2	0
Female	11	4

Table 6  
*Number of Emoticons from the Japanese Corpus*

Gender of blog author	Emoticons Character based	Graphic emotions
Male	190	61
Female	88	161

These blogs and their comments were then examined for non-verbal forms of paralinguistic communication. Emoticons were divided into two categories when the data were collected and analyzed, character based as in :- ) or ^\_^; and graphical emotions such as



### Results and Discussion

Within the blog articles of the English data, with both sexes there were very few occurrences of emoticons (17 in all), with female-authored blogs outnumbering their male counterparts for emoticons (see Table 5).

Interestingly, 5 of the 11 emoticons counted within the female blogs were found in family blogs but nevertheless the total of 11 emoticons suggests these blog articles are not reliant on these visual cues in projecting or aiding what the writer wants to say.

The Japanese data provided vastly different results with a total of 500 character-based and graphic emoticons, as seen in Table 6. The results here show that character-based emoticons seem to be favored by male users and the graphic emoticons by female writers. In total however, both men and women in this sample used emoticons in equal frequency overall (251 for men and a total of 249 for women).

In these articles, the highest figure for emoticons in female written blogs were found within the travel topic at 160 emoticons. In contrast, the highest numbers of emoticons within male-authored blogs were found within family blogs, totaling 156. Sports blogs produced the fewest occurrences of emoticons for both genders.

The data lifted from the comments section of these blogs produced more emoticons overall in both languages than the blogs they commented on. Considering that the overall corpus size of the comments data (3,600 sentences) was smaller than the corpus of blog

Table 7

*Number of Emoticons From the Comments of Both Corpora*

<b>Comments from 80 blogs</b>	Emoticons Character based (^_^)	Graphic emotions ☺
Japanese men blogs (300 comments)	212	73
Japanese women blogs (300 comments)	190	55
Total	402	130
American men blogs (300 comments)	31	21
American women blogs (300 comments)	29	20
Total	60	41

articles, this shows that there is an increase in use and tendency to utilize these paralinguistic cues more so in comments when the communication becomes a dialogue between two people (for example, the blog writer and the comment writer) or within a small group, perhaps the blog writer and two comment writers.

Table 7 breaks up the number and type of emoticons found within the English and Japanese comments. It must be stressed at this point that it was impossible to always decipher the sex of the comment author which led these comments to be treated as mixed in gender and not classified as being female or male authored.

Within the total of 101 emoticons used within the English comment data, the highest set, 35, was found within the comments written on family blogs. The Japanese data showed similar results with the highest set, 145 of the 532 emoticons, also coming from comments taken from family blogs.

Across both sets of data, there seems to be a tendency to use emoticons more frequently in family blogs in at least one gender and less frequently in sports blogs with both genders. The largest number of emoticons within the comments data also derived from family blogs of both languages. A larger corpus will need to be created in order to test this hypothesis of topic influence and to examine the reasons why this phenomena may or may not occur. Based on the current data, reasons for this may be that a sense of camaraderie and feelings of shared experience breeds familiarity and this is shown in these emoticon usages within this universal topic. The English blogs consisted of the so called Daddy or Mommy blogs, whose dialogue (comments) and monologues (articles) are of stories that have a commonality: misbehaved children, housework, good (or more commonly, bad) husbands, and the need to share ideas and experiences with people of a similar mindset and within a similar community. These entries are similar to diaries; the comments and the advice within them are sympathetic and the mood is playful and sometimes satirical, especially of their selves. Such a community may

unconsciously promote such emoticon use. However, within these high and low context cultures, the use of emoticons reflected the culture from which they came.

### Function of Emoticons

The following are examples of emoticons found within the comments section. They are from writers who are addressing someone specifically and have a specific reader or audience in mind, and have employed these devices in order to ensure smooth communication.

#### 1. As devices of modesty

The use of an emoticon as an aid to soften the utterances:

いつか、こんな彼女ができるのかなあ～。^\_^;

*Itsuka, kona kanojo ga dekiru kanaa*

(Hope I can get that kind of girlfriend someday.)

#### 2. Hedging devices

##### English example

Ah, it makes me smile to know you're in my old stomping ground! Maybe you guys can do the zoo next time :)

[Here the use of the hedge, *maybe*, accompanied by an emoticon at the end of the sentence, softens the forcefulness of the suggestion being made here.]

##### Japanese example

もう少し涼しくなってからの方が良いかも(^ m ^\*)ﾌｯ

*Mou sukoshi suzushikunatte kara no hou ga yoi kamo*

(I think you should wait until it has cooled down a bit.)

[This example also has the hedge, *かも kamo*, meaning perhaps to soften the assertive force of the utterance.]

#### 3. To soften requests

相談に乗ってくださいね m(-\_-)m ぺｺ [An emoticon reflecting bowing]

*Soudan ni nosete kudasai ne*

(Please give me some advice.)

#### 4. Positive politeness strategies

Can be used as *positive politeness strategies* (as in noticing admirable qualities or possessions, to show interest or to exaggerate):

##### English example

Harpers outfit is soooo cute. Glad to hear she is doing well. :)

## Japanese example

ホントになんでも作っちゃうのがスゴイ！！ヽ(o'w`)/.。°

*Honto ni nandemo tsukuccya no ga sugoi*

(You can pretty much cook anything, fantastic!!)

## 5. Rapport building

### English example

Wow! Beautiful couple!

My husband and I have been married ten years also. :)

[Here the comment writer compliments the picture within the blog of the married happy couple and in a sense of solidarity mentions her own happy marriage.]

### Japanese example

(●●)ノ))凸ぽちッ♪

[Here an emoticon, showing euphoria and accompanied by the Chinese character 凸 which can mean *dekokoboku* 凸凹 (“rough,” “bumpy,” or “uneven”) in written Japanese but within this example is creatively used to represent the index finger, followed by *pochitsu* ぽちッ、(the onomatopoetic sound meaning “click,” as in a button being pressed). This relates and refers to the commenter reading the blog, finding it interesting or captivating and showing their appreciation of this by showing the visual act through this paralinguistic representation of the comment writer pressing the *kessaku* 傑作 (“masterpiece”) button. The number of times this button is pressed on the weblog page coincides with its rankings in the web rankings. If a blog article is therefore seen as especially popular, this link (button) is pressed more frequently than other blogs and consequently propels it into the upper rankings in the most popular blogs.]

## 6. Humour

### English example

We like the  sexytime around here very much 

[The use of emoticons make this example visually humorous and complements the sentence as an intended joke.]

### Japanese example

[Here in a male-authored blog article, it describes a panic situation when the author's wife has forgotten something from their son's school:]

妻「Σ(°Д°;≡;°Д°)忘れたんだわ！あなたダッシュよ！」

Tsuma: *'wasuretanda! Anata dassyu yo!*

(Wife: I forgot it! You dash (back for it)!)

ヒロシオ「工工工工工工工工工(°Д°)工工工工工工工工工  
おまえが忘れてきたんだからお前が行けよ。」

Hiroshi: *omae ga wasuretekitan dakara omae ga tori ni ike yo*  
 (Hiroshi [Husband]: You forgot it so you go back for it.)  
 (Hiroshi: Ehhhhh! [Vocal spelling of surprise] You lost it so you go back for it!)

[Here the combination of emoticon and vocal spelling is used for humorous effect and to convey the story with as much realism as possible, filling the gaps or context that the written word cannot provide alone.]

## 7. To help convey emotion, humanize online interaction


の入った紅茶なんですねw w  
 あのふちふち感が(・ω・\*)イイネ!!(\*・ω・\*)イイネ!! ヽ(\*・ω・\*)/イイ——ネ!!!!  
 私も自分で作れるならやってみようかなw  
 ワク((o(ΦωΦ\*o)(o\*ΦωΦ)o))ワク  
 ~(=^..^)\_。傑作 フチャッ  
*Tapioca no ireta koucya nan desu ne*  
*Ano puchipuchi kan ga ii ne ii ne ii-----ne!!!!*  
*Watashi mo jibun de tsukureru nara yattemiyo kana*  
*Kessaku buchitsu*

(It's tea that you put tapioca into hey!  
 A kind of squeegee feeling. Cool! Cool! Cooool!  
 If I can make it myself, I wanna give it a go!  
 Feeling excited!) (Presses the masterpiece button).

[The use of onomatopoeia here makes it playful and more interesting, as in *waku waku* (exciting).]

## 8. Emphatic use

The use of an emoticon just before a word or a phrase whose meaning the emoticon denotes:

単に、夕食の「白ご飯」 を控えてるだけですが、  
*Tan ni, yusyoku (shirogohan) wo hikaeteru dake desu ga,*  
 (I just simply abstained myself from rice.)

\*Only found in the Japanese data; English data typically used smiley graphical emoticons.

## 9. Lexical use

The use of an emoticon to replace the lexical item as in:

今日も会社へ行って、仕事を片付けてきました。



*Kyou mo kaisya e itte, shigoto wo katazuketekimashita.*

(Today too, I went to work, got my work sorted out and came home.)

### Factors Influencing Emoticon Use

The random sampling techniques of the data gathering meant that the age variable was not taken into account. Emoticons are thought to have been used mainly by young CMC users. However, the majority of users within this study were married with young children rather than being young teenagers.

Further influences can perhaps be found in the cultural or low context factor. The need for these blog authors and comment writers to aid their communicated intentions through these non-verbal paralinguistic cues is perhaps not a requirement in the eyes of these writers whose reliance is more on the written word.

However, the Japanese data showed very different results, perhaps because of these cultural factors influencing emoticon use. The abundant use of emoticons could suggest a reliance on these creative symbols to support the smooth flow of the message in an environment where the context is low and content high. That the above examples have shown instances of Japanese modesty, indirectness, and strategies of politeness (indirectness and the consequential politeness that results from modesty) is itself a characteristic of high context communication (Hall, 1976).

Katsuno and Yano (2002) quote a user of electronic bulletin boards within their study who uses emoticons (*kamoji* in Japanese) to assist the verbal meaning of the message:

I used kaomoji when my messages sounded too serious. Kaomoji has the power to soften the nuance of a message. Conversely, I also used it when I wanted to put emphasis on something. Then I would use a kaomoji that showed my emphasis. Whereas in my face-to-face conversations, I felt I could always transmit the nuance of my sentence through my tone of voice or facial expression, in cyberspace-chat or e-mail communication, I cannot express the gap between what the sentence represents and what I want to say. To fill this gap, I used to use kaomoji. (p. 216)

These thoughts reflect the collective cultural ideology of being more reliant on face-to-face communication in which the context can be read. To substitute these gaps in online communication, these emoticons are employed in numbers by these Japanese CMC users regardless of sex.

### Conclusion

The present study and resulting data has found that across high and low context cultures communicating on a low context medium, namely the internet and through weblogs, a high context culture (such as that of the Japanese) is more dependent than low context cultures (such as America) on emoticons as non-verbal and paralinguistic cues to convey information smoothly across cyberspace to unknown recipients.

High context values of indirectness, harmonious dialogue, and the importance of non-verbal communication were evident throughout Japanese blogs and the comments that accompanied them. There are similarities between face-to-face (non-verbal) communication

and the (non-verbal) conversational strategies in these blogs; these similarities are more pronounced in Japanese, which is testimony to how higher context cultures find these cues a necessity for smooth communication within a low context environment. In contrast, the use of these non-verbal contextual cues in low context cultures and as reflected in the data here was less relied on to promote and necessitate agreeable communication within this low context medium.

These features were used sparingly in the blog articles themselves and significantly less in frequency (a total of 101 to the Japanese data total of 532) in the comments section. These paralinguistic tools were employed more by comment contributors to these blogs within both sets of data where dialogues between two people (the blogger and comment writer) are evident and whereby the interaction is more personal in the sense that you know who the recipient of your messages is.

The topic of the blog may also influence emoticon use regardless of gender of the blog author (emoticons were more evident in family topic blogs). Could it be argued that a "domestic topic," such as family, influences bloggers and commenters to write in a similar way? Does the community and its written style of discourse unconsciously promote this? Likewise in sports blogs, few emoticon representations were found regardless of sex. It has been said that women use conversation to facilitate social interactions, while men tend to use conversation to convey information (Cameron, 1997). It was found that in these family blogs, these emoticons facilitated social interactions and helped create a bond or solidarity between online users, more so within the Japanese data. The conveying of information was predominately seen in sports blogs with few occurrences of emoticons regardless of sex. However, in order to examine whether a pattern between blog topic and discourse style does in fact exist, a larger corpus would need to be examined before any firm assertions can be made. Further study could also include the use of questionnaires or surveys to these blog writers which could give us additional information for the motive, function, and reason for the use or non-use of these non-verbal cues within these online communities. It has been shown that CMC users from high context cultures like Japan are more likely to adopt the visual effects through emoticons and graphical accents to convey their messages more effectively than their low context American counterparts.

The theories of Hall and Hofstede were applied to diverse cultures and written at a time when the Internet was a mere idea rather than the phenomenon it is today. The world has moved on and become more global since these publications of the 1970s and 1980s. That may be true but there has been no evidence to suggest that these traits within cultures are not applicable today, and through the data here, these communication patterns still resonate even within online communications.

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