

A comparison of the attitudes in the usage of Emoticons by generation between Korea and Japan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to obtain some insight into improving communication through the use of emoticons focusing on different generations, and differences between Korea and Japan. People can have a better understanding of the context of a message when they are able to observe body language cues or hear the inflections of the people's voice. However, with the development of new technologies, people have many opportunities for non-face-to-face communication such as with e-mails or mobile chat. In these kinds of text based communication, the lack of nonverbal information is sometimes compensated for by using emoticons. Emoticon is a compound word incorporating the words emotion and icon. This is a simple and easy way to express ones feelings in a text message, and is used a lot in informal or social communication. However, there are few earlier studies that have analyzed the use of emoticons. Furthermore, there does not appear to be a commonly used standard or guidelines for the use of emoticons. For this reason, we will conduct a survey about the use of emoticons, including an examination of frequency and characteristics, in mobile technology usage, and we will compare the differences in usage between Korea and Japan.

Keywords: *Emoticon, social communication, non-face-to-face communication*

1. Introduction

Humans since they are born have participated in communication, which includes seeing faces, interpreting their expression, and understanding speech, that is important part of our development and growth. In a communication, emotions are essential part because it affects a lot. They convey important information about personality and emotional state in the human to human interaction. Emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, fear, etc. can often co-occur with verbal messages or act as substitutes for verbalizers to convey a message (Reddy, 2004). Communication of emoticons tells us the change of communication tools and methods.

With the development of new technologies, communications have become less face to face, removing an important aspect of communication- the nonverbal aspect. Ordinarily, one can have a better understanding of the context of a message when one can see the bodily expressions or vocal inflections of whom we are talking with. One can tell if somebody is being sarcastic or joking by the expressions on his or her face or by the change of pitch in the voice. This element, however, does not exist when the communication is limited just to the textual form. The loss of the nonverbal aspect of communication can be compensated by emoticons (Reddy, 2004). The purpose of the emoticons is to enhance the communication and decrease misunderstanding due to the lack of other communications techniques like voice and facial expressions.

2. Methods

Emoticons are graphical representations of facial expressions that many mobile phone users embed in their message. As one of the most popular text message tools, emoticons have not been investigated in comparison of generations between different countries. This study sought to explore the attitudes in the usage of emoticons by generation between Korea and Japan.

This research was done through survey for data collection. It was conducted from May to July in 2013 in a three-stage approach, which is described as follows: The first step was analyzing preceding research, making a questionnaire and classifying the questions into three parts, which measured for frequency, opinion and types of emoticon. Second step was dividing the age of respondents into three parts, under thirty five, from thirty five to fifty, over fifty, and counting the number of survey differently depending on the age. For 'under 35', twenty five papers were surveyed, for 'from 35 to 50', fifteen papers were surveyed, and for 'over 50', ten papers were surveyed. This difference was because of the difficulty of collecting data from older group. Third step was comparing the results between Korea and Japan. The amount of survey was total one hundred papers. Each team, Korean and Japanese were scheduled to do fifty papers for survey.

3. Results

Korean participants comprised about 56% and Japanese participants about 44% of the sample. The number of collected data was ninety papers, fifty from Korea and forty from Japan. On Korean side, 25 papers (50%) were collected for 'under 35', 15 papers (30%) were collected for 'from 35 to 50' and 10 papers (20%) were collected for 'over 50'. On Japanese side, 40 papers were collected only for 'under 35' and no paper was collected for the other age groups, and there were 10 papers (20%) which were uncollected.

Table 1
Comparison the usage of emoticon between Korea and Japan in 'under 35'

| Factor | Korea | Japan | Sum |
|--|-----------|------------|------------|
| Frequency (How often do you use emoticons?) | | | |
| Always | 7 (28%) | 10 (25%) | 17 (26.2%) |
| Usually | 14 (56%) | 11 (27.5%) | 25 (38.5%) |
| Sometimes | 3 (12%) | 14 (35%) | 17 (26.2%) |
| Rarely | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.5%) |
| Never | 0 (0%) | 5 (12.5%) | 5 (7.7%) |
| Opinion (Are you for using emoticons on mobile? pros & cons) | | | |
| Yes | 25 (100%) | 30 (75%) | 55 (84.6%) |
| No | 0 (0%) | 10 (25%) | 10 (15.4%) |
| Types of emoticon use (What kinds of emoticons do you usually use?) | | | |
| Funny | 21 (84%) | 40 (100%) | 61 (93.8%) |

| | | | |
|-----------|---------|--------|----------|
| Sad | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| Angry | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| Surprised | 3 (12%) | 0 (0%) | 3 (4.6%) |
| Etc | 1 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (1.5%) |

Table 1 presents comparison of the factors between Korea and Japan. For frequency, there was little difference. Koreans used more emoticons than Japanese. For opinion, all Koreans agreed with using emoticons, but 75% of Japanese agreed and 25% of them disagreed. For types of emoticon use, the most frequently used emoticon was 'Funny'. All Japanese said they use 'Funny' emoticon, however, Koreans used various emoticons such as 'Funny' and 'Surprised'.

Table 2
The comparison of emoticon use by generation in Korea

| Factor | Under 35 | 35 ~ 50 | Over 50 | Sum |
|--|-----------|------------|---------|----------|
| Frequency (How often do you use emoticons?) | | | | |
| Always | 7 (28%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 7 (14%) |
| Usually | 14 (56%) | 3 (20%) | 1 (10%) | 18 (36%) |
| Sometimes | 3 (12%) | 6 (40%) | 3 (30%) | 12 (24%) |
| Rarely | 1 (4%) | 3 (20%) | 4 (40%) | 8 (16%) |
| Never | 0 (0%) | 3 (20%) | 2 (20%) | 5 (10%) |
| Opinion (Are you for using emoticons on mobile? pros & cons) | | | | |
| Yes | 25 (100%) | 11 (73.3%) | 9 (90%) | 45 (90%) |
| No | 0 (0%) | 4 (26.7%) | 1 (10%) | 5 (10%) |
| Types of emoticon use (What kinds of emoticons do you usually use?) | | | | |
| Funny | 21 (84%) | 11 (73.3%) | 8 (80%) | 40 (80%) |
| Sad | 0 (0%) | 1 (6.7%) | 1 (10%) | 2 (4%) |
| Angry | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |
| Surprised | 3 (12%) | 1 (6.7%) | 0 (0%) | 4 (8%) |
| Etc | 1 (4%) | 2 (13.3%) | 1 (10%) | 4 (8%) |

Table 2 presents comparison of emoticon use by generation in Korea. For summarizing the features, firstly 'under 35' used emoticon most frequently comparing with the other age groups. Secondly, 'under 35' all agreed with using emoticons on mobile, but in '35~50' and 'over 50' there were small number of disagree opinion. Lastly, overall all the age groups used 'Funny' emoticon.

4. Discussions

Table 1 showed the difference between Korea and Japan in frequency and opinion. Both Korean and Japanese use emoticon frequently and agree with using it. However, there are some Japanese who never use emoticon and disagree with using it because they didn't need it and worried about misunderstanding of emoticon's meaning. This difference seemed that Japanese considered formality and politeness because using it appears informal way to communicate. Table 2 showed the difference by generation in frequency. Only 4% of 'under 35', but 40% of '35~50' and 60% of 'over 50' used emoticons rarely or never. This difference was come from the characteristic of communicator. 'Under 35' interacted with familiar friends, but '35~50' and 'over 50' dealt with unfamiliar business partners or their boss.

Our study had two limitations. First, due to the lack of sample, the result had low representativeness of population. Second, there was only Korean result for comparison of emoticon use by generation. Therefore, for further research, there will be more data collection and added result of Japanese generation comparison.

Reference

Reddy, V. R. (2004). *Communicating emotions to virtual agents: An emoticon-based approach* (Doctoral dissertation, Master's thesis, International School of New Media, Universitat zu Lubeck, Master of Science in Digital Media (June 2004)).