Language and Identity in Online Gamer Community

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Language and Identity in Online Gamer Community

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Abstract- *The purpose of this study is to explain the relationship between language, identity, and community within online gamer community. This study specifically aims to explain 1) the difference in choice of words between groups, and 2) the implication of types of post in each group. The data were gathered through participant observation and interview. The groups chosen for this study were 4 Facebook groups from 3 online Japanese mobile games entitled Monster Strike, Puzzle and Dragon, and Brave Frontier due to their similarity. The analysis was done by comparing similar expression such as question and request. It was found that even though the game system is similar, each group has different ways to refers to the same thing, this at the same time also serves as group marker. Another finding is that each group has different perception towards particular element within their respective group and this can be analyzed from how they interact within their own group.*

Keywords- online community, language and identity, online game

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet has brought about a great change towards interaction between individuals or even institutions. The change internet brought is that it can accommodate communication to a point where people can greet friends, congratulate their coworkers, trade and negotiate something, and even job interview by simply staying in their room without literally going out. Following the change in communication, community also expand in a similar way and give birth to what is labelled by Rheingold as "virtual community" (1993, p. 5)[12]. with how easy it is to communicate across the world, people over the world start to use internet to accommodate sharing activity.

Facebook is one of many sites that lodges online community, and among many groups founded on Facebook, game group is one of most common ones. People who play the same game will gather together in the group for players who play the same game and share what they know, make guide, and discuss many things related to the game. When such group is created, this kind of group also naturally has their own style to identify themselves through their language. For example, in term of vocabulary specific term related to the game will be created in order to make it convenient when discussing a particular topic of the game in the group, for example players use term "Monster" or "Hero" to refer to unit of the game and it depends on what game they play. Another example is how the term "deck" or "crew" is used to refer to unit team. Furthermore, their language style not only reflects their respective group, but also their own standing within the group itself.

My interest on the relationship between language and one's identity within online game community was piqued by my personal experience when I tried to use a certain game term in another game group, at that time I used the term "summon" to refer to how I got a new unit, but many fellow members commented that it should be "hatch" and not "summon" This makes me realize that the choice of word I use will reflect which game group I belong to and that each game group may have different term to refer the same concept and depending on the choice of word people will be recognized as a member of same group or different group, in other words style can serve as "indexical links", which marks out one's identity (Coupland, 2007, p. 1)[2]

Another interesting experience I found related to language and online community in gaming context was how my fellow players use different degree of directness and demand when asking for ID game to add as in-game friend. When they first play the game, they ask nothing but to add or to be accepted as in-game friend, however as they gradually become better and gain strong unit in game as well complete every content released, they change they request expression from *"please add me, or leave your id so I can add you"* to *"add me, active players, daily gifter*

only" compared when they were still a new player, the change in their expression when asking for in-game friend after they become advanced player has changed greatly. The change in their language is related to their identity change from new to advanced player. According to Miller (2010)[9], the link between language use and identity is that of self-representation, this is in agreement with the notion language as reflection of individual mental state by Bucholtz and Kira (2010, p. 22)[1]

Based on that experience, I want to further study the relationship between players language, their game groups, and their status in their groups; that is how players of each group can be recognized through their language, and to what extent their language reflects their status.

2. LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Identity has been important part of society since people need an identity to interact with other. Simply speaking, identity is anything that you consider can represent who you are, it could be your name and your ethnicity. According to Joseph

(2004), the are two basic aspects of person's identity, the first one which also can differentiate one from another is name, and the other one is tangible, located deep inside.

The essence of identity is the similarity at all times; It is referred as the sameness" of an individual „at all times or in all circumstances" (Edwards, 2009, p. 19) [5]„the condition of being identical' (Joseph, 2004, p. 3)[7] and socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable" (Fearon, 1999, p. 2)[6]. These notions of identity are known as personal identity. It can also refer to a person's traits, characteristics, attributes, goals and values, and ways of being' which differentiate them from social role (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012, p. 94)[10].

On the other hand, social identity is a product resulted from social interaction; that is, one's knowledge and his membership to a particular social group. The theory of social identity is attributed to Henri Tajfel, a social psychologist in the early 1970s. as cited by Joseph (2004)[7], Tajfel (1978)[13] defined social identity as recognition of one's self towards membership of a particular group which is a product from his knowledge, value, and emotional significance attached to that membership.

Identity has close relationship with language. The language that people use can reveal many things about them without them saying anything about it. Social background, group membership, linguistic background, age, mentality, nationality, and even gender can be guessed from the language they use. Language is one of the most basic ways people can establish their own identity and shape others" views of them" (Price, 2010, p. 8)[11] In addition, Joseph explain in his book the two basic purposes of language according to linguists and philosophers. Those

are communication and representation. While communication is as the name suggest, representation is the way how someone see the world in his mind. Discriminating things from one another is what is meant by representation (Joseph, 2004, p. 15)[7]. Communication and representation cannot be separated, when communication takes place language will fulfil its two functions simultaneously, the way people use language to interact is the communication function, while how they see the world and inform it to addressee is the representation function.

Accordingly, as people use language as a tool for communication and at the same, representation, the language, therefore, will indicate the people's view of the world and that is including how they see themselves in relation to particular group and community. This function of language is equal to Edwards „symbolic function Language' which he explains that the essence distinction between the communicative (communication function) and the symbolic functions (equal to representation) lies in a differentiation between language in the sense that language is an instrumental tool, and language is an emblem of groupness, a symbol, a psychosocial rallying-point (Edwards, 2009, p. 55)[5].

Analysis of identity through language has been a concern for many years, and with the need in theoretical approaches to language and identity, Bucholtz and Kira propose an approach to identity analysis through language based on their notion on identity as „the social positioning of self and other." (Bucholtz & Kira, 2010, p. 2)[1].

Their principle is divided into five based particular reason, the first two principles are based on argument that identity is discursive construct that emerges in interaction (Emergence and Positionality principle). The third principle focuses on consciousness of self and other's position in discourse linguistically (Indexicality principle). The next principle is Relationality which highlights the relational foundation of identity. The last of five is Partialness principle which takes in limits and constraints on individual intentionality in the process of identity construction into account. All of the principles will be explained further in the following section

2.1 Emergence

The emergence principle is based on view that the relationship between language and identity is for language to reflect one's mental state. Identity is best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon" (p. 19) from this statement they argue that identity develops from the particular linguistic interaction.

2.2 Positionality

The positionality principle takes identity as something that encompass (a) macrolevel demographic categories; (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions; and (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles.

((Bucholtz & Kira, 2010)[1]. This was supported by recent socio-cultural linguistic work which has been investigating that identity is shaped from moment to moment in interaction, identity also can emerge from the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants involved at the time of involvement.

2.3 Indexicality

Indexicality refers to mechanism of how identity is constituted. It is based on how index depends on interactional context to generate its meaning. In their notion of indexicality, Bucholtz & Kira explains several related indexical processes for emergence of identity in interaction, those are:

(a) Overt mention of identity categories and labels, implicatures and presuppositions of participant's identity,

(b) interactional footings and participant roles and evaluative orientations towards ongoing talk, and

(c) the use of ideologically associated linguistic structures with particular group.

The evaluative orientations are related to John Du Boise's notion of stance which he stated „I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and align [or disalign] with you" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163)[3]

2.4 Relationality

Bucholtz and Kira explained that "Identities are intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarity/difference, genuineness/ artifice and authority/delegitimacy" (p. 23). this principle has two aims, those are to emphasize that identity never stands alone and always relies on other available social identity and actors in order to acquire its meaning, and to revisit the widespread understanding of identity which is based on single axis; sameness and difference.

2.5 Partialness

The last principle is based on reality that identity is inherently relational as stated above, therefore it will be always partial and constructed, recognized by means of contextually situated configurations of self and other. Furthermore, they explain that identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, be it habitual thus often less than fully conscious, outcome of interaction, outcome of others "perceptions and representations, or in part of larger ideological process relevant to interaction. In this principle, they relate it to the concept of agency which is more productively viewed as the accomplishment of social action, and is defined by Duranti (2004) as properties of being having control, having influence, and subjected to evaluation. Identity in this case is intersubjective as it is percepted and represented by several social actors.

2.6 Language and Community

In addition to the principles, community also is also important part in studying the relationship between language and identity. The connection between the three is that while language is mental representation, the way how people represents themselves cannot be separated from the way how they interpret things because different communities do not necessarily attach the same meanings to language (Kölhi, 2012)[8]. For example, the interpretation of word fat, many countries such as Indonesia interpret fat as negative, however in many West African countries it is interpreted otherwise; for them, big is beautiful and obesity is considered to be a sign of wealth. When people use word fat with negative intention, then they position themselves as someone from those group who interpreted it as such, on the other hand, if someone use fat as praise, it can be said that they belong to the other group. in other word, the way how they use fat is related to how they interpret fat, and the interpretation of fat is connected to collective agreement of people who think as such.

3. METHOD

This study employs qualitative approach and is comparative in nature since it aims to find difference between groups of players in term of their language. The sources of data were members of 4 groups from 3 mobile games chosen at random from many active members. The games were called Monster Strike or MS, Brave Frontier or BF, and Puzzle and Dragon or PAD. The data were gathered through observation of and interview. The analyses were done by comparing in group data and out group data in order to find difference in language between the groups and difference between players' status in the same group.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion is divided into three parts, the first part is to explains briefly the games themselves, the second part is to explain choice of words used by players in their respective groups, and the last part is to explain the implication of players" identity in their respective group in relation to their post in group.

4.1 Games' Concept

All the games chosen for this study are online game and can only be played with internet connection. All of the games can be either played in solo or multiplayer mode which makes it possible to play the games together with

other players. Moreover, each of them actually has many similarities. The similarities can be seen from table 4.1

Table 4.1: games' similarities

Games' element	MS	PAD	BF
Level cap	999	+1000	999
Character's form	Humanoid and beast	Humanoid and beast	Humanoid
Obtaining character	Drop and *gacha*	Drop and *gacha*	Drop and
gameplay	Turn-based	Turn-based	Turn-based
Difficulty (easiest to hardest)	Normal, hard, savage, extreme, impossible, colossal.	Normal, intermediate, expert, master, legend, mythical, arena.	Norm quest, vortex quest, trial, strategy zone.

It can be seen from the table 4.1 how they have many similarities, particularly in term of level and characters' form. However, the groups' perception towards these elements is not necessarily the same. From how something should be called, or how important a game's element is, each of them depends on the game community itself.

4.2 Players' Choice of Words

Even though the concept of the game has many similarities as explained in the previous section (4.1), from their choice of words, players" game group can be recognized.

It is because each group has their own way to express idea related to the game and this is influenced by the group's activity and the game itself. Besides their choice of words, they also make abbreviation of terms in order to make it easier to discuss the game. Both choice of words and abbreviation serve as indexical links between the users and the group they belong to as stated by Bucholtz and Kira (2010) because they have significant value for their corresponding groups. The details of choice of words and abbreviation can be seen from table 4.2

Table 4.2: Players choice of words and abbreviation of terms

Games' element	MS group	PAD group	BF group
character	*Monster, **unit	*Monster, **unit	*Unit
Buying character/ *gacha*	*Hatch, **Roll, **Pull	*REM (rare egg machine), **Roll, **Pull	*Summon, **Roll, **Pull
Characters' rarity	*Asc (ascension), evo, *Bevo/Trans (beast evolution/tra nscension).	Evo, *ult evo (ultimate evolution), *Revo (reincarnated evolution)	*OE (omni evolution)
Skills	*NGB (null gravity barrier, *NDW (null damage wall, *NW (null warp), *BC (bump combo), *MS (mine sweeper)	-	*BB, *SBB, *UBB (super/ultr a brave burst)
Character Name's	-	Dathena (dark thena, Dkali (dark Kali), Lkali (light Kali), *ALB (awoken liu bei)	-

*= group's unique way to refer to something
**= acceptable term

Table 4.2 shows that each group has their own unique way to refer to something. They have different ways to refer to units of the game, MS and PAD group refer to units by using term Monster, however in BF group there is no term monster and the players simply call the unit as unit. Although BF have humanoid and beast unit, however term monsters is not acceptable, the proof can be seen from my post in which I purposely used term monster in BF group.

Ariman M Sirin
Hi
I am thinking of returning to the game, but i have no idea how much it has progressed, what monsters are the

current meta? Last time i played it was zeruiah and avant, are those still usable currently? TIA
Comments
Melvin Luis Rodrigo Dazo *yes they are still relevant.*
Dante Kurosaki *Monsters? :/*

It can be seen that in the post, the term which is used for characters is monsters, while Melvis answered the question without any problem, Dante commented on the post with his emoticon: / which can be interpreted as questioning the choice of words. From this, it can be interpreted that both Melvin and Dante actually understood what the term monsters refer to, however Dante's reaction also implies that the term is not appropriate term in Brave Frontier

group, this is in agreement with Edwards (2009)[5] who explained that language is representation of ones' mind on how they position their selves.

Besides monster, the term used by each group to refer to gacha is also one of the group markers. It is important to know that all of three games chosen in this study employs gacha for obtaining game's character, however instead of gacha all of the games have different way to refers to it, and it is influenced by the game and the group itself, the example can be seen from the following post in which I purposely use term gacha

Airman M Sirin

How is your gacha recently?

Comments

Lawrence Oh *What is gacha?*

Ben Ng Sze Kat Veri gd. Confrim anima 😂

Bagus WN *For some reason I always get the unit I want. And its always the best type.*

ElLin Lau *I can predict the unit I'm getting with 100% accuracy* 🟡 *:v*

In the post, I purposely use term gacha in brave frontier JP group, in fact gacha is derived from Japanese language. However interestingly not all members know what a gacha is, the proof can be seen from the comment stated by Lawrence, he asked "what is gacha?" on the other hand, other comments show that they understand what I mean

and can provide answer and even inserting some jokes, this suggests that what it is meant by gacha is understood by them. Ben's answer contains heavily BF game information, the word anima refers to one of five types a unit can have from the gacha. This implies that he understood that what by gacha was actually summoning characters using in-game currency, and the same thing can be inferred from Bagus' and Eilin"s comment. Meanwhile Lawrence's comment suggests that even though the game is Japanese and the game is in Japanese language, but due to the environment he is in, the term may be not understandable and another term is more preferred and easier to understand instead of its original term.

Both examples support Tajfel (1978)'s concept of social identity, that is recognition of one's self towards membership of a particular group. Although using other terms are understandable, but using the appropriate terms is expected because of the agreement of the players in the group which has become group's value and marker.

4.3 In-Group Identity

Despite the fact that the game's elements have similarities, players' perception towards those elements is different depending on what game they play. This also results in the difference of implication of the players" identity when they post something in the group as shown in table 4.3

Table 4.3: Implication of poster's identity

Types of	MS	PAD	BF group
Friend request	-	*Advanced player IF: -Max skilled units are required	High level player IF:-level requirement t is attached
Enquiring Units' sefulness	New player	-	Relatively New player
Clearing hardest dungeon	Skilled player IF:-solo play	Advanced player	Skilled player

*advanced means has decent level and skills

The difference in the implication of the poster's identity is related the groups' perception towards the games' element in table 4.1. BF group considers level as something very important, and high-level players are sought after as in-game friend, and high-level players mostly befriend with players who have the same level, therefore putting high level as requirement implies the poster is also high-level player, this supports concept of positionality by Bucholtz and Kira (2010)[1] as the poster position himself as high-leveled player by putting having high level as requirement. On the other hand, due to complexity of units' utility, enquiring units' usefulness means nothing in PAD group, while in other two game groups it implies player's identity as new player as the games are less complex in their units' utility. In addition, a post about clearing hardest dungeon in the game as explained in table 4.1 does not automatically denotes poster's identity as advanced player

except in PAD group, because in PAD clearing hardest dungeon means the player has multiple max skilled units, and a high-leveled one since level in PAD is related to player's team cost.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the games have similar elements, the Groups' perception is not on the same wavelength, as the results each group produces unique terms and abbreviations by the agreement of the players which also serve as their group marker. Moreover, the difference in their perception also results in the difference of posters identity in their respective group. This also means that the interpretation of language is directly related to the community of the user.

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Currently taking his master degree in language and education at Universitas Negeri Surabaya. He obtained his undergraduate program at Universitas Trunojoyo Madura. He has been actively teaching English since 2009 at Darul-Hikmah Islamic boarding school, and is currently a lecturer at STAIDHI (Sekolah Tinggi Islam Darul-Hikmah)

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He completed his undergraduate program majoring English Education at the State University of Surabaya in 1992. Two years later he was promoted to teaching assistant in his alma mater and has been teaching there since. He completed his MA in Linguistics at Auckland University, New Zealand in 2001 and completed his PhD at the University of Western Australia in 2012. When he was at UWA, he tutored linguistics students, gave the occasional guest lecture, presented papers on seminars, and edited journal of UWA Linguistics Working Papers. His interests are in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. In applied Linguistics, he has been active in assisting the Ministry of National Education to socialize their policies and programs to English teachers nationwide since 2003.