THE STUDY OF ENGLISH AS LINGUA FRANCA IN VIRTUAL YOUTUBER INTERACTION

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Abstract

This study analyzes the use of English as a lingua franca in virtual YouTubers' interaction. Virtual YouTubers, a form of media entertainment that has been popularized in Japan, have started to become a global phenomenon and the increased English usage in them. The writer identifies the usage of English in communication between virtual YouTubers that are not native to English. The virtual YouTubers of Japan and Indonesia have been chosen as their level of understanding of English differs from each other. Archived YouTube streams are observed for further research regarding each virtual YouTuber and their conversations using English with fellow virtual YouTubers. The observed data are later analyzed using data reduction, data display, and concluding verification. The writer found that the use of English as lingua franca is usable to a certain degree when used on shorter sentences and can be replaced by common objects and terms that are familiar to both parties.

Keywords: *English, Lingua Franca, Virtual Youtuber, Interaction*

1.1 Introduction

Communication plays a major role in human activity and language has become the common means to achieve it. Along with the expansion of English colonization and education in immigrant workers, English has been further spread to a wider region. The growth of communication technology has simultaneously impacted literacy and communication practices.

Lingua franca was used when groups of people that speak different languages communicated (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). The Lingua franca can be an internationally used language or native language from one of the groups or a mixture of two or more languages that are spoken natively by any of the groups with a simplified structure. The use of English become very common among groups that speak different languages, including when they are used on a media platform like YouTube.

YouTube as modern online media culture is constantly growing, with the numerous numbers of video-sharing platforms, YouTube has become the ground for users around the world to attempt to recreate and capture their experiences, not only as video sharing media but also as an international advertising medium (Dehghani et al., 2016).

YouTubers or the host of each YouTube Video used to be mainly organic human beings. Along with the start of virtual Idol Kizuna Ai, the term Virtual Youtubers become a trend in which a virtual character was used to display or represent the human counterpart in leading the video or stream activity. The host of the YouTube video controls the activity while having their identity behind the digital character that might not directly resemble themselves.

Virtual Youtuber has reached an international level since their first trend

appeared in Japan. Earning both audiences from their native region and international, the use of English as lingua franca become a popular demand to communicate with their audience.

Based on the research background described above, the writer has described the problem: How and what is the speaking virtual YouTuber trying to convey in English and what did the recipient virtual YouTuber interpret the message as. The purpose of this research is to find out how two or more virtual YouTubers of different origins communicate using English against the language barrier.

2.1 Literature Review

The research is expected to contribute theoretically to the knowledge and theoretical development of readers or the next researchers with a similar topic. The research is also expected to contribute practically for the reader to find out the English skill they need to communicate with people of different origins specifically in terms of language.

In the communication process, the human requires language as their main tool of action. Communication between members of society does not only come in one form but can be a mixture of complex and multifaceted mixture of sounds, signs, and symbols to share each other's values and culture. According to McKay (2011), English is now well established as the lingua franca of worldwide communication. English has become the bridge in communication between speakers that might or might not be native to English through the internet.

When it comes to social media, there are many methods of communication one of which is audiovisual that are commonly present on YouTube. YouTube can also be used as a video archive or library that can act as a business medium when needed. The advancement of technology and artistic breakthrough has brought the entertainment industry with virtual idols and celebrities. Hoang & Su (2019) mentioned that studies

on virtual celebrities are spare and require further investigations in the field.

3.1 Methodology

The form of research that was used in this research was descriptive research. Atmowardoyo (2018) described the descriptive method as a method used to accurately describe existing phenomena as possible. The writer will conduct an observation on Virtual YouTubers and their archived streams in the 2019-2020 period where they communicate with fellow virtual YouTubers using English. The writer will also display the pre-observation the writer has done before conducting the research. The writer will analyze the data obtained using data reduction, data display, and concluding/verification technique.

4.1 Finding and Discussion

The writer observed 5 target conversations involving 7 different virtual YouTubers from the YouTube archived streams. The first conversation was from a conversation between Fumino Tamaki from Japan and Taka Radjiman from Indonesia on 8 August 2020, the conversation was performed while both parties were making Naan. Fumino Tamaki and Taka Radjiman had difficulties during their English conversation which led to Taka Radjiman choosing to use the Japanese language as much as possible.

The second target conversation is between Usada Pekora from Japan and Moona Hoshinova from Indonesia, the conversation was done mostly through an in-game text chat system from a game called Minecraft. The conversation went briefly with a slight disruption when Moona Hoshinova tried to understand the text that Usada Pekora send. The text was 'rapisurazuri' which is supposed to be lapis lazuli which also serves as an in-game item.

The third observed conversation is between Houshou Marine, Minato Aqua, and Moona Hoshinova, in which two of the formers are from Japan and the latter is from Indonesia. The conversation happened

mostly through Minecraft's in-game text chat. Minato Aqua and Houshou Marine attempted to recruit Moona Hoshinova into their roleplay which led to a momentary misunderstanding when Houshou Marine mistranslated the sentence, "To the CEO, Moona is important", into "Moona is CEO, important".

The fourth conversation is between Robocosan from Japan and Moona Hoshinova from Indonesia. The conversation happened mostly through Minecraft's in-game chat while Moona Hoshinova tried to build a mechanical structure in it. Before the conversation, both parties have previously contacted each other but the contact was mostly done in silence. In the process of helping Moona, Robocosan attempted to ask for an in-game item from Moona Hoshinova.

The fifth conversation is between Usada Pekora from Japan and Moona Hoshinova from Indonesia. The conversation is done through voice call while both parties play Minecraft to build a structure in-game together. Before the conversation, both parties have previously conversed together using in-game text chat and attempted to individually study conversational sentences that both parties can understand. The conversations in the stream are mostly initiated by Usada Pekora as Moona Hoshinova showed anxiousness during most of the streaming sessions.

The five observed conversations showed 2 similar obstacles that have disrupted the effectiveness of English as lingua franca during the conversations. Three conversations were disrupted by the same obstacle in which the pronunciation of English names or words differ in the Japanese language. Two Conversations were disrupted by the grammatical structure difference between English and Japanese

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion conducted by the writer, it can be concluded that:

1. English is usable as a lingua franca to a certain degree when used to communicate between Vtubers with different origins against the language barrier. The sentences used are preferably shorter sentences with simple or more common English words. When English is not successful enough to deliver the message, the vtuber may use words of their origin that may be easier to understand by their conversation partner.

2. The use of English as lingua franca can be quite minimal when interaction that uses a shared term like an in-game object name as their topic of discussion. In the other cases, the use of English is often neglected by the conversing vtubers when they have difficulty finding the English word and they will use Japanese words in place of it.

3. Often the case when English words are not simple or common enough, the vtuber might have to rephrase or explain their message intention in alternate words for their conversing partner to understand.

Some suggestions that can be given concerning this research:

1. For a non-native speaker that wants to communicate with English speaking conversing partner:

- Non-English speaker is encouraged to learn beforehand words commonly used for daily conversation.

- Non-English speaker is also encouraged to guess the meaning of the words they are confused about, so the message can be conveyed better.

- Non-English speakers should understand the topic of discussion that both parties will discuss.

- Speakers are encouraged to always convey a message in shorter sentences.

2. For Future Researchers with a similar topic on English as lingua franca, they can further research using a real-

life conversation between native English speakers and non-English speakers as their subject.

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