

The Interpersonal Function of the Japanese Teen Slang *Mazi manzi*

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This study claims that the Japanese teen slang *mazi manzi* or *manzi* (“マジ卍” or “卍”), often used by female high school and college students, has the interpersonal function. One of its significant characteristics is that it can describe either positive or negative situations:

- (1) a. Tesuto goukaku! *Mazi manzi*! (positive) “I passed the exam! Woo-hoo!”
b. iPhone kowareta. *Mazi manzi*. (negative) “My iPhone has broken. Jesus.”

The grammatical characteristics of *mazi manzi* have been revealed as below in comparison with the Japanese degree expression *yabai*, which is also known as a word bearing the bipolar feature:

		<i>Mazi manzi</i>	<i>Yabai</i>
Category		Adjectival Verbs / Interjection	Adjectives / Interjection
U sage	Predicative	✓	✓
	Independent-word	✓	✓
	Adverbial	*	✓
Pragmatic characteristics		It requires more information than <i>yabai</i> to interpret.	It only requires a context to see if it has a good or bad meaning.

Then, one intuitive question will arise: why do people use such euphemistic expressions instead of straightforward ones which are much easier to communicate? I argue that the use of *mazi manzi* is motivated by the mind peculiar to younger Japanese: they purposely choose the expression instead of sharp ones such as *mukatsuku* “disgusting” to avoid disturbing the atmosphere of conversation:

- (2) Aitsu, { *mazi mukatsuku* / *mazi manzi* }! “She / He really pisses me off!”

Since the use of the explicit expression like *mukatsuku* may hurt hearer's feelings and destroy the relationship between a speaker and hearer, younger Japanese sometimes choose *mazi manzi* as an alternative, i.e. softening (Satake (1997)). In particular, the use of *mazi manzi* in (2) has an effect to hide speaker's feeling of anger and make the statement somehow funny.

The argument above is further supported by studies on Japanese vague expressions such as *rashii* “it seems” and *zyanai desuka* “as you know,” both of which have interpersonal function (Murata (1994), Horasawa (2011) etc.):

- (3) a. Minna shinro ga kimatteiku zyan. Zibun hitori oiteikareta mitaide cho *yabai rashii*.
“You know, everybody decided their course after graduation. I feel I'm left behind. It seems I'm in a super awkward situation.”
b. (When A and B first met)
A: Tabemono no suki-kirai wa naino? “Do you have any issues with food?”
B: Watashi sakana ga taberarenai *zyanai desuka*. “I dislike fish, as you know.”

We usually do not use *rashii* to refer to self and also do not use *zyanai desuka* when a speaker and hearer first meet. However, if *rashii* and *zyanai desuka* are not used in the above sentences, they will sound somehow icy and acrid. Then, they dare to use these euphemistic expressions to make their statements softer. This state of mind goes for the negative use of *mazi manzi*, as shown in (2).

There is no such a strategy in conversations in English, because its native speakers usually try to clarify their position. The use of *mazi manzi*, therefore, reflects the typical mind peculiar to teen female Japanese and it deals with interpersonal relationship among them.

References

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