

INTERLANGUAGE HOMOPHONES AS A SOURCE OF WORD GAME

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A homophone is a word that is pronounced the same as another word but differs in meaning and may differ in spelling. Usually when we speak about homophones we mean homophones inside one language. But there are also homophones that belong to different languages or interlanguage homophones. In this research we studied homophones between Japanese and English languages.

First, we would like to highlight the difference between Japanese language and non-hieroglyphic languages. For speakers of non-hieroglyphic languages letters only stand for sounds. But when you read hieroglyphs your brain actually works in a different way: you perceive pronunciation, the meaning of the word and the meaning of the hieroglyph itself. Japanese also use specific alphabet (katakana) for writing loan words, also Latin alphabet can be used to write down Japanese words, and when it coincides with English words it becomes a source of word game.

It is also necessary to mention changes that an English word faces entering Japanese language. First of all some consonants are changed, because they just do not exist in Japanese phonetics and Japanese native speakers of English find it difficult to pronounce them. Because of these differences in phonetics of languages [l] sounds is changed to [r], [v] is changed to [b]. Also the word's structure is changed quite drastically when it is pronounced by Japanese, because consonant clusters are not very common for Japanese language, so they tend to put additional vowels between consonants to form consonant+vowel syllable in the place of consonant clusters. All these changes can be well seen on the example of word «love», which in Japanese version of English is pronounced not as [lʌv], but as [r ʌbu]. So we have to say, that actually it is not an English word that becomes an interlanguage homophone, but it is its slightly changed form, that appears when Japanese natives speak English.

There are some studies on the topic results of which are important for our research. For example, Grosjean (1988), Li (1996) showed in their studies, that the pronunciation of the word is crucial for recognition (is the word pronounced as a borrowing or the same way as in source language). Also Li's study showed the importance of context. If the context is constraining, 59 % of the words is needed for correct identification against 72 % if it is not. One of the further studies (Shulpen, Dijkstra, Schriefers and Hasper, 2003) examined the processing of homophones in Dutch-English bilinguals. Homophones were more difficult to isolate than control words. They gave homophones in

isolation (along with control words) and asked participants to rate their confidence that it was a Dutch or an English word. Homophones were more difficult to isolate than control words.

All examples for our study were taken from song lyrics. Song lyrics are a good source of examples, because if you listen to a song, in which interlanguage homophones are used, you are very likely not to notice them as when we hear a word in context, even if it resembles a word from another language, we tend to associate it with the language of the context. So if we want to use interlanguage homophones as a source of word game, we need some «trigger», that will switch our perception from the language of the context to another language. In case of Japanese language spelling can be used as such «trigger». As there are three different writing systems used in Japanese (four, actually, if we include romaji – the application of the Latin script to write the Japanese language) it allows us to emphasize the word, which is used as interlanguage homophone, by spelling it in a different way from the context.

Here are some examples.

1. 大大Die好き (Artist: SuG, song: LOVE SCREAM PARTY)

[dai dai dai suki]

Here we have full homophones. One of the readings of Japanese kanji for «big» (大) is [dai], sounds exactly like the English word «die». 大好き [dai suki] means «to like\love very much» in Japanese, but if we change the kanji to «die», it changes the meaning to «I love you so much I want you to die».

2. 「普通」 守るためにがんばらKnight! (Artist: SuG, song: Vi-Vi-Vi)

[futsuu mamoru tame ni ganbaranaito]

Here while listening to the song we hear only ~がんばらないと [ganbaranaito] in the end of the line, meaning «you have to do your best» in Japanese. But in the lyrics the ending of the verb is written with English word «knight» which is pronounced as [naito] in Japanese English. So the meaning of the full line changes to «you have to do your best to protect normality, knight!»

3. また暗いCry (Artist: SuG, song: Vi-Vi-Vi)

[mata kurai kurai]

暗い [kurai] means «dark» in Japanese. And the word «cry» is pronounced as [krai] in Japanese English as well. So when you listen to the line you hear «It's dark, dark again», when actually written text is «It's dark again, cry»

4. KILLERxKILLERxKILLER (Artist: BugLug, song: KILLERx-KILLERxKILLER)

[kira-kira-kira]

The song title is KILLERxKILLERxKILLER which in Japanese sounds like [kira-kira-kira] and «kira-kira» is Japanese onomatopoeic word for «sparkle, glitter, twinkle». Combined with the song's poppy sound a bit negative and aggressive feeling of the word «killer» gives interesting contrast of the meaning of the lyrics and poppy sound.

5. 演奏は哀(あい)ポッド (Artist: Plastic Tree, song: Consent)

[ensou wa aipoddo]

This one is the combination of Japanese word «ai» which means sadness and English word «pod», which in the context of the song means «shall of sadness» but it also sounds as [aipoddo] which is Japanese pronunciation of iPod, which fits the meaning of the song, as there are a lot of references to different devices used during composing\performing.

6. 論理 ロンリネス (Artist: Plastic Tree, song: Consent)

[ronri ronrinesu]

The first word in this line is [ronri], which means «logic» in Japanese. But the word «lonely» sounds [ronri] in Japanese pronunciation as well. And as second word is just English word «loneliness» written in katakana (a Japanese syllabary, used for transcription of foreign language words into Japanese and the writing of loan words) we can interpret this line both as «logic and loneliness» or as «lonely loneliness».

As we can see from these examples, changes that an English word faces in Japanese variant of the English language can change it into interlanguage homophone. The process of finding such word pairs may be interesting both for linguists and people who just speak both languages. In my opinion, further studies of interlanguage homophones can lead to better understanding of the process of understanding in bilingualism and recognition of interlanguage homophones as one of expressive means of language.

Литература

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