

The Use of *Youjigo* Vocabulary on Instagram: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Account @uuui_ycoo

Heny Kurniawati

STBA Cipto Hadi Pranoto, Bekasi, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
henykurniawati@stbachp.ac.id

Diserahkan: 20-10-2024

Diterima: 29-11-2024

Diterbitkan: 30-11-2024

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the use of "youjigo" vocabulary in social media communication, particularly on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo. "Youjigo" (幼児語) refers to the language used by children in Japan, characterized by simpler vocabulary, syllable repetition, and a cuter or more playful way of pronunciation. Originally a phenomenon associated with children, the use of youjigo has recently gained popularity among adults across various social media platforms, including Instagram. This raises questions about the function, reasons, and impact of using youjigo among adult audiences in online communication. The study employs a qualitative approach with content analysis to identify and categorize the youjigo vocabulary used in various posts on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo. Data for this research was obtained by classifying the youjigo terms found in these posts. Additionally, the study analyzes the social and cultural reasons behind the use of youjigo by adults on social media, as well as how such vocabulary functions to create emotional closeness and familiarity between the account owner and the audience. The findings indicate that the use of youjigo on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo is intended to create a more relaxed, friendly, and playful atmosphere in social interactions, evoking positive feelings from the audience. Vocabulary such as "うきうき" (*uki uki*), "だっこ" (*dakko*), and "ぴよんぴよん" (*pyon pyon*) plays a significant role in establishing a sense of closeness and charm. The use of youjigo by adults highlights a new dynamic in Japanese language communication, blurring the lines between child and adult speech. This phenomenon is also influenced by social changes and technological advancements, allowing adults to communicate in a more free and emotional way, in line with current social media trends.

Keywords: *Youjigo*, children's language, social media, Instagram, sociolinguistics, digital communication.

Introduction

Language is the primary tool of communication used by humans in everyday life. In the context of the Japanese language, the phenomenon of vocabulary usage across different stages of age development presents an interesting diversity to study. One such phenomenon that has attracted considerable attention in linguistic research is the use of vocabulary typically associated with children, known as *youjigo* (幼児語). *Youjigo* refers to the vocabulary and language forms used by children in Japan, which often differ from the language used by adults. Characteristic features of children's language include simpler words, cuter or more playful pronunciations, and sometimes the repetition of syllables to enhance appeal or comfort in communication.

For example, some commonly used *youjigo* vocabulary includes:

- わんわん (*wanwan*): referring to a dog (adult language: 犬 *inu*).
- にゃんにゃん (*nyannyan*): referring to a cat (adult language: 猫 *neko*).
- ぶーぶー (*buubu*): referring to a car (adult language: 車 *kuruma*).
- おいちい (*oichii*): the children's version of おいしい (*oishii*, meaning delicious).
- ねんね (*nenne*): referring to sleep (adult language: 寝る *neru*).

Sudjianto and Dedi Sutedi (2011) in their book *Bahasa Jepang: Teori dan Penerapan* explain that *youjigo* is a form of language variation in Japanese society that



arises from communication between children and their parents or caregivers. *Youjigo* vocabulary is often created to help children understand and pronounce certain words more easily. For instance, terms like わんわん (*wanwan*) for a dog or ねんね (*nenne*) for sleep are used by adults when communicating with children, fostering a closer emotional bond. They also highlight that the use of *youjigo* reflects a unique pattern of child language development, where syllable repetition and simplified pronunciation help children learn the structure of language.

According to Takahashi (1990), *youjigo* is a form of language used by preschool children, with distinct features both in pronunciation and vocabulary selection. The use of *youjigo* often serves to show the child's developmental stage in language acquisition while creating a more comfortable and friendly atmosphere for the child. Fukuda's (1998) research emphasizes that *youjigo* not only reflects the child's language ability but is also closely related to the socialization process and interactions with the surrounding environment. The use of simpler vocabulary and word repetition helps create a sense of closeness and understanding in communication.

Susanti (2017) in her research *Kajian Kosakata Youjigo dalam Bahasa Jepang dan Relevansinya terhadap Pembelajaran Bahasa Jepang di Indonesia* mentions that *youjigo* has unique characteristics that make it interesting to teach in Japanese language learning due to its simplicity and charm. The study also reveals that an understanding of *youjigo* can enrich the knowledge of Japanese language learners in Indonesia about Japanese culture and communication in general.

Sakurai (2003) adds that *youjigo* in Japanese often includes syllable repetition, altered pronunciations, and simpler vocabulary, all of which function to create a sense of familiarity and appeal in communication. In recent years, social media, particularly Instagram, has become a popular platform among various age groups, including children and adults. Accounts that share content based on daily life or personal emotions often reflect aspects of culture and language in specific contexts. One Instagram account that is interesting to analyze is @uuui_ycoo, which showcases posts using vocabulary more associated with *youjigo*.

Previous studies by Takahashi and Fukuda (1995) reveal that *youjigo* is not only used by children for communication but also by adults in certain social contexts to create warmth and closeness. The use of *youjigo* on social media, especially in accounts targeting an adult audience, can create a childish or playful impression that evokes positive feelings from followers. Another local study by Nugroho (2020), titled *Fenomena Penggunaan Bahasa Jepang Kekanak-Kanakan di Media Sosial*, highlights that using *youjigo* on social media can enhance the friendly and attractive image of the account, especially in building a more pleasant personal image.

This study aimed to analyze the use of *youjigo* vocabulary in videos from the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo from a sociolinguistic perspective. Using qualitative analysis methods, the study will examine the *youjigo* vocabulary found in the account's posts and explore their adult language equivalents. It will also uncover the social and cultural reasons behind this phenomenon and how this children's language is used on social media to create a closer and more intimate connection with the audience, despite the account being run by an adult individual.

Based on the analysis above, this study hopes to provide a deeper understanding of the interaction between child language and adult language, as well as how sociolinguistic dynamics in the digital world are creating new forms of communication in the Japanese language.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The primary focus of the research is content analysis of posts on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo, specifically examining the use of *youjigo* vocabulary within the context of digital communication.

The research design employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research method. It focuses on content analysis to identify and understand the use of *youjigo* vocabulary on social media, particularly on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo. This approach allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in depth, including the social and cultural context behind the use of *youjigo* in digital communication.

The primary data source in this study is the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo, which is characterized by the distinct use of *youjigo* in its posts.

Data was collected using content analysis techniques on the posts found on the Instagram account. This analysis includes the identification of *youjigo* vocabulary used, its frequency, and the context of its usage in each post. The process involved observing and recording the video content uploaded on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo, including transcribing the *youjigo* vocabulary that appeared in the videos. It also involved identifying the context of *youjigo* usage in video interactions, including relevant captions or comments. A literature review was conducted by gathering relevant theories and concepts from various sources to support the data analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using a sociolinguistic approach to understand the social and cultural functions behind the use of *youjigo*. This analysis explores the reasons for using such vocabulary and its relationship with the dynamics of digital communication on social media:

1. Content Analysis

Analyzing the *youjigo* vocabulary that appears in the videos based on the distinctive features of *youjigo* outlined in the literature review (e.g., syllable repetition, simplified forms, and a cute impression). Comparing the *youjigo* vocabulary used in the videos with its adult language equivalents.

2. Contextual Analysis

Examining the social and cultural context of *youjigo* usage in videos, such as the communication purpose, the emotions intended to be conveyed, and its relevance to an adult audience on social media. Analyzing how *youjigo* contributes to fostering closer and more intimate connections with the audience.

3. Qualitative Interpretation

Interpreting the results of the analysis by connecting them to sociolinguistic theory and previous studies. Drawing conclusions about the patterns, functions, and impacts of *youjigo* usage in communication on social media.

Result and Discussion

This study aims to analyze the use of *youjigo* vocabularies found on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo. This account exhibits the use of vocabularies that tends to be simpler and sounds cute or childlike, even though it is intended for an adult audience. An



analysis of posts from the ages of 0 to 2 years reveals that 80% of these posts use *youjigo* vocabularies, both in videos and captions. Below are some examples of the *youjigo* vocabularies found on the account:

1. ぼぼ(**bobo**): Let's Play (*Asobou*)
2. もーめん(**momen**): Apologize (*Gomen*).
3. わんわん (**wanwan**): Dog (*inu*).
4. おいちい (**oichii**): Delicious (*Oishii*)
5. もぐもぐ(**mogumogu**): Chew (*taberu*)
6. バイバイ (**baibai**): Byebye (*sayonara*).
7. じいじ (**jiiji**): Grandfather (*ojiisan*).
8. ぶーぶー(**buubuu**): Car (*kuruma*).
9. だっこ (**dakko**): Carry (*daku*).

The use of this vocabulary is often combined with visual expressions such as emojis, cute illustrations, or cartoon characters, further emphasizing the childlike impression created by this account. Moreover, an analysis of follower comments reveals that the use of *youjigo* vocabularies in captions is not only intended to attract the audience's attention but also to foster an emotional connection between the account manager and its followers. Followers' comments often include similar vocabulary, indicating imitation and interaction through the use of simpler and cuter language.

DISCUSSION

1. The Use of *Youjigo* in Social Media

The phenomenon of using *youjigo* vocabulary on Instagram @uui_ycoo reflects a language adaptation that tends to align with "soft power" — a form of communication that is not forceful but rather emotionally engaging. Originally used by children, *youjigo* has been adopted by adults as a means of intimate and familiar communication. As explained by Takahashi (1990), *youjigo* plays a role in creating closeness and familiarity. In the context of social media, this vocabulary becomes a tool to foster a friendlier and warmer atmosphere between the user and their followers. The use of words like わんわん (*wanwan*), おいちい (*oichii*), and もぐもぐ (*mogumogu*) demonstrates how children's language can be understood as a symbol of affection and familiarity. This aligns with Fukuda's theory (1998), which suggested that the use of *youjigo* reflects a closer social relationship, used to strengthen bonds between individuals, even in more formal contexts like social media.

2. Sociolinguistic Implications

The use of *youjigo* by adults on social media, particularly on accounts targeting an adult audience, creates an intriguing sociolinguistic duality. On one hand, this language reflects a shift in social norms and communication culture, where formality is diminishing, and emotional closeness is increasingly emphasized. On the other hand, the use of *youjigo* also functions as a form of digital identity creation, allowing account owners to portray themselves as friendly, playful, and approachable. According to Sakurai (2003), the use of *youjigo* by adults not only reflects linguistic aspects but also establishes a social zone that feels safer and more comfortable. In the context of social media, this can be seen as a strategy to build rapport with followers, particularly in an unstructured and informal environment.

3. The Influence of *Youjigo* Usage on Adult Language Patterns

The growing use of *youjigo* vocabularies among adults is leading to changes in formal language patterns within Japanese society. This aligns with the findings of

Sakurai (2003) and Takahashi and Fukuda (1995), which indicate that the use of *youjigo* by adults is not limited to interactions with children but also occurs in specific social contexts where warm and intimate communication is desired. By incorporating *youjigo* vocabulary into daily conversations, Japanese society may begin to experience a shift in formal communication norms, with more casual and lighthearted language being used in various communication contexts, including professional or public relationships. This has the potential to alter the way Japanese people interact with one another, leaning more towards closeness rather than maintaining social distance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study on the use of *youjigo* vocabulary on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo, it can be concluded that this phenomenon reflects a dynamic shift in communication styles among adult audiences, particularly in the context of social media. The use of *youjigo*, which was initially a linguistic phenomenon exclusively used by children, has now begun to permeate adult communication. Simpler and "cute" vocabulary is employed to create a warmer and more familiar atmosphere among followers.

1. Adoption of Youjigo Vocabulary by Adults. The use of *youjigo* vocabulary on this account demonstrates that, although this language was originally used by children, it has now been adopted by adults as a way to express emotions in a lighter, more playful, and informal manner. Words such as わんわん (*wanwan*), おいちい (*oichii*), and もぐもぐ (*mogumogu*) illustrate how this childlike language holds a strong appeal in fostering stronger emotional connections between the account manager and its followers. The successful use of *youjigo* also indicates that adult audiences are increasingly open to more informal and intimate language variations.
2. Shifts in Social and Linguistic Normativity. The use of *youjigo* on social media signifies a shift in social norms regarding communication. Traditionally, Japanese society has upheld formal language norms, but there is now a growing tendency to use more casual and accessible language, particularly in personal or professional relationships that involve more intimate interactions. This aligns with the theories of Fukuda (1998) and Takahashi (1990), which suggest that *youjigo* not only reflects children's language abilities but also serves as a medium for fostering social closeness between individuals.
3. Digital Identity Creation through Youjigo. The use of *youjigo* in Instagram posts also serves as a tool for digital identity creation for the account manager. By incorporating *youjigo* vocabulary, the owner of the account @uuui_ycoo constructs a persona that is friendlier, cuter, and more approachable. This allows the audience to feel more emotionally connected to the content presented, creating a more enjoyable and personal experience. It also reflects an acceptance of more flexible self-expression in digital communication, free from the constraints of formality or rigid standard language rules.
4. Emotional and Psychological Appeal in Social Media. The use of *youjigo* vocabulary on social media also indicates a connection between language and emotion in the digital realm. As explained by Sakurai (2003), the characteristics of *youjigo*, such as syllable repetition and the use of simple vocabulary, foster a deeper emotional bond between users and their followers. By incorporating cute and playful elements into communication, account owners not only make followers feel closer but also provide



a positive experience that strengthens the sense of connection within a digital community.

5. Social Implications of Youjigo Usage in Digital Spaces. This phenomenon also opens up new opportunities for the formation of more inclusive and flexible digital communities. The use of *youjigo* demonstrates that adults are increasingly receptive to variations in language styles that reflect not only linguistic aspects but also social and emotional dimensions. The use of *youjigo* can be seen as an effort to introduce a more accessible and friendly communication style, facilitating connections not only in personal social contexts but also in professional interactions within the digital world.
6. Future Prospects of Youjigo Usage. As technology and social media platforms continue to evolve, the use of youjigo vocabulary is likely to become more widespread and integrated into everyday conversations. This development opens the possibility for society to reshape how people interact in the digital world, incorporating more relaxed, enjoyable, and emotionally driven language elements. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which youjigo will influence changes in formal language norms in Japan, particularly in the digital realm, and whether it will have an impact on public or professional communication in the future.

Thus, this study reveals that the phenomenon of *youjigo* usage on social media, particularly on the Instagram account @uuui_ycoo, not only demonstrates a transformation in language use but also highlights a shift in how adults communicate in the digital world. Through the use of simple and cute vocabulary, *youjigo* fosters emotional closeness, strengthening the relationship between the account manager and the audience. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of linguistic interactions in the digital realm and their impact on changing patterns of social communication in Japan.

REFERENCES

- Fukuda, H. (1998). *Sociolinguistic Aspects of Japanese Child Language*. Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin.
- Fukuda, M. (1998). 子どもの言語発達と幼児語 (Perkembangan Bahasa Anak dan Yōjigo). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Fukuda, M. (1998). 子どもの言語発達と幼児語 (Perkembangan Bahasa Anak dan Yōjigo). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Fukuda, M. (1998). 子どもの言語発達と幼児語 (Perkembangan Bahasa Anak dan Yōjigo). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Fukuda, Y. (1998). *The Study of Youjigo: Child Language in Japanese Society*. Tokyo University Press.
- Haryadi, R. N. (2024). Penerapan Pembelajaran Kolaboratif Dalam Meningkatkan Kompetensi Menulis Bahasa Inggris Pada Siswa. *Wistara: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 5(2), 123-135.
- Holmes, J. (2001). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Kramsch, C. (Ed.). (2003). *Language Acquisition and Language Socialization: Ecological Perspectives*. London: Continuum.
- Miyamoto, K. (2000). 幼児語と発達心理学 (Yōjigo dan Psikologi Perkembangan). Tokyo: Shinyōsha.
- Nugroho, B. (2020). Fenomena Penggunaan Bahasa Jepang Kekanak-Kanakan di Media Sosial. *Jurnal Linguistik dan Budaya*, 8(2), 110-125.
- Sakurai, K. (2003). *Child-Like Speech and its Functions in Modern Japanese*. Osaka

- Linguistic Studies, 25, 34-52.
- Sakurai, S. (2003). *The Role of Youjigo in Social Interaction: A Sociolinguistic Perspective on Language Use among Children and Adults*. Japanese Language and Society, 12(3), 56-70.
- Sakurai, S. (2003). 日本語幼児語の特徴 (Karakteristik Yōjigo dalam Bahasa Jepang). Tokyo: Sanseido.
- Sudjianto, A., & Sutedi, D. (2011). *Bahasa Jepang: Teori dan Penerapan*. Bandung: Kesaint Blanc.
- Sudjianto, D., & Sutedi, D. (2015). *Analisis Bahasa Anak dan Penggunaannya dalam Komunikasi Digital: Studi Kasus pada Penggunaan Youjigo di Media Sosial*. Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra, 6(1), 34-48.
- Susanti, E. (2017). *Kajian Kosakata Youjigo dalam Bahasa Jepang dan Relevansinya terhadap Pembelajaran Bahasa Jepang di Indonesia*. Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra, 10(1), 75-88.
- Takahashi, S. (1990). *Developmental Patterns in Japanese Child Language*. Kyoto: Minerva Press.
- Takahashi, S., & Fukuda, H. (1995). *The Use of Youjigo in Adult Communication: A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Kyoto Journal of Language Studies, 10(2), 102-118.
- Takahashi, T. (1990). *Youjigo: A Linguistic Analysis of Child Language in Japan*. Nihon Bunka Gakuin Press.
- Takahashi, Y. (1990). 幼児語の発達とその社会的意義 (Perkembangan Yōjigo dan Makna Sosialnya). Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Takahashi, Y., & Fukuda, M. (1995). 言語発達と社会化：幼児語の視点から (Perkembangan Bahasa dan Sosialisasi: Perspektif Yōjigo). Tokyo: Kōbunken.

