Multimodal Pragmatic Markers in Digital Communication: A Contrastive Analysis of Japanese, English, and Czech

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This study investigates how pragmatic markers in digital communication are realized multimodally across Japanese, English, and Czech. While traditional contrastive analyses of pragmatic markers have focused primarily on verbal elements (Aijmer & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2006), the multimodal nature of contemporary digital communication necessitates examining how verbal, visual, and interactive elements combine to create pragmatic meaning. Drawing on data from a purpose-built parallel corpus of social media interactions (160,000 posts per language), I analyze how speakers of these typologically diverse languages deploy different semiotic resources to achieve similar pragmatic functions.

The research particularly focuses on three pragmatic functions: mitigation, emphasis, and epistemic stance-taking. For each function, I identify language-specific multimodal constructions and examine their distribution patterns. Preliminary findings reveal significant cross-linguistic differences in the integration of visual and verbal elements. Japanese users rely heavily on pictographic elements (emoji, kaomoji) functioning as grammaticalized pragmatic markers, often replacing verbal hedges entirely. English users typically employ a hybrid approach where emoji reinforce rather than replace verbal markers. Czech users display the strongest preference for verbal markers, with visual elements serving primarily as affect intensifiers rather than independent pragmatic markers.

The methodological approach combines computational analysis using a custom-designed annotation schema for multimodal elements with qualitative discourse analysis. To address the challenge of establishing tertia comparationis across such diverse languages, I employ a functional-pragmatic framework that focuses on communicative effects rather than formal equivalence. This approach reveals that while the pragmatic functions remain consistent cross-linguistically, the semiotic distribution and grammaticalization patterns of multimodal markers vary systematically according to both typological features and cultural communication patterns.

These findings contribute to our understanding of universal and language-specific aspects of pragmatic marking in digital environments and demonstrate how multimodal contrastive linguistics can provide insights into emerging communication patterns in multilingual digital spaces. The research also offers methodological contributions by proposing a scalable framework for analyzing multimodal pragmatic phenomena across typologically diverse languages.