

Conventionalised Impoliteness towards Perceived ESL Users on 4chan

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Abstract

Siegel (2018) suggests that language can be used as an identity marker for an individual. This seems to be the case on 4chan, an anonymous image board where certain users are labelled as 'ESL' even though there are no information regarding their ethnicity, nationality, or languages spoken. Users who are perceived to be incompetent in English are labelled with the term and are usually discriminated against through the use of impoliteness. Analysis of the data shows that different categories of impoliteness are used against perceived ESL users to isolate, exclude and mock them. It is also shown that the phenomenon studied could be regarded as a form of language based discrimination, as perceived ESL users are identified and singled out by 4chan users based on language.

Keywords: Conventionalised impoliteness, anonymity, and language-based discrimination

1. Introduction

English as a Second Language (ESL) is a ubiquitous term that is commonly used in an academic setting. However in certain settings the term could carry a negative connotation. In a study about multilingual students and identity, Marshall (2009) discovers that some students dislike being labelled as 'ESL'. According to one of the respondents:

"I feel humiliating, embarrassing and demeaning about the term ESL and it implies the sense that people who are illiterate are going to need it." (Marshall, 2009, p. 52)

Non-native English speakers studying in English speaking countries are usually required to take remedial ESL classes in their first semester. Marshall (2009) further discovers that ESL students who are required to take these remedial often feel that they are at a deficit, even though they have a high level of language competence, both in English and their native languages. The students feel like the ESL classes are a hurdle that they must overcome before they are accepted as a full-fledged university student. In another study, Sanner and Wilson (2008) discovers that ESL students in a baccalaureate nursing program would often choose not to speak in front of the class because they are too conscious of their accent. More interestingly, the ESL students suggest that the language barrier does not really contribute to difficulty in learning, but propose that stereotyping and discrimination based on their ESL status are the major causes that contribute to their academic struggles. This seems to suggest that language based discrimination and stereotyping towards ESL students are more damaging to their education than their language barrier.

Unfortunately, language based discrimination towards non-native English speakers could also be found beyond academic or professional settings. For example, a part of the users of 4chan, an anonymous message board seems to be unnecessarily hostile towards perceived ESL users. In the website, perceived ESL users are not only labelled with the term, but also insulted and excluded from discussions. Interestingly, the users of 4chan who are mostly native English speakers (Phillips, 2016) usually used impoliteness to deal with perceived ESL users. This research seeks to investigate this phenomenon where users in an anonymous website are impolite towards those perceived to be 'ESL'.

1.1 Research Questions

1: How is impoliteness manifested towards perceived ESL users?

The question explores the pattern of impoliteness towards ESL forumers on the website. 1000 impolite comments towards perceived ESL users from the archive of the website are collected and used as data. Emerging patterns of impoliteness

are noted and discussed in the analysis. The conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2011) are used as the basis for analysis.

2: How is impoliteness co-constructed in 4chan discussion threads?

The research question investigates the co-construction of impoliteness by two parties in 4chan discussion threads: perceived ESL users and impolite commenters. 10 discussion threads containing the interactions between the two parties are used as data.

1.2 4chan: An Anonymous Message Board

4chan is an online message board where users can post images and comments anonymously. Unlike other forums or message boards, 4chan does not require users to register their emails or choose a username to communicate with other users. Due to the anonymous nature of the website, it is almost impossible to ascertain any demographic information concerning the website. However, Phillips (2016) argues the content of 4chan allows us to estimate the possible user demographic of the site. She suggests that based on the content posted on the website, most of its users are white, male, native English speakers from the age of 18 to 35. She also adds that the users of the website are highly misogynistic, and users who identify as females are often harassed with sexual remarks.

Therefore, given the anonymous nature of the website, when a part of the users label other users with the term 'ESL', such act could be considered as speculative. Based on the data from the archive, it could be seen that there are a number of posts that are impolite towards perceived ESL users. For example as of the 30th of August 2017, a search of the terms 'ESL' and 'shit' returns 1524 results, and a search of the terms 'ESL' and 'fuck off' returns 824 results. Figure 1.1 shows a part of the search results, which seems to suggest that to a certain extent, there is an animosity towards perceived ESL users on the website even though their real identities are unknown.

Figure 1: Search results for the terms 'ESL' and 'fuck off'



4chan is an interesting setting for impoliteness studies as impoliteness is not marginal in the website. Culpeper (2011) suggests that it is rather difficult to study impoliteness because impoliteness events are rather uncommon in society. For example, in the Oxford English Corpus, the phrases like 'thank you' and 'please' are much more common compared to pejoratives like 'cunt' and 'motherfucker'. Interestingly, this is not the case on 4chan. For example, the phrase 'thank you' returns 622 821 results, but the phrase 'fuck you' returns 3 201 341 results. This seems to suggest that 4chan is a place where impoliteness events are more likely to occur compared to other public discourses. In addition, studying impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on 4chan could also shed some light into the pervasiveness of language-based discrimination.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conventionalised Impoliteness Formulae

Culpeper (2011) suggests the conventionalised impoliteness formulae as an alternative way to approach impoliteness. Compared to more top-down models such as Culpeper (1996, 2005) and Bousfield (2010), the impoliteness formulae are more data-driven. The formulae are based on several different sources of data, and to ensure their robustness they are tested against the Oxford English Corpus.

The formulae are based on the concept of conventionalisation, which suggests that are certain phrases that are almost always interpreted as impolite across different contexts in the English language. Culpeper (2011) has noted that the formulae do not represent all forms of impoliteness, and there are some types of impoliteness that is not covered by the formulae such as sarcasm. However, it could be argued that due to the anonymity of the data, the formulae are suitable for the data as they are less context-sensitive since they are based on the concept of conventionalisation.

2.2 Anonymity

In order to study the phenomenon in this research (language based discrimination in the form of impoliteness), we must understand the impact of anonymity and the ephemerality of content on 4chan. Not only the website is anonymous, but the website itself does not archive its own content, and threads that have expired are simply deleted from the website. The impacts of anonymity and ephemerality of the website are discussed by several researchers. Ludemann (2018) suggests that the ephemerality of the content on the website pushes its users to be as inflammatory as possible to capture the attention of others. Since threads gets deleted often, users have to resort to using provoking language in order to stand out. In addition, it is important to note that the anonymity on 4chan is almost total as noted by Bernstein, Monroy-Hernández, Harry, André, Panovich & Vargas (2011). Adopting a pseudonym (or username) is a common practice in other internet forums such as Reddit or GameFAQ. However, on 4chan such practice is frowned upon. Almost everyone on 4chan uses the name “Anonymous” with no other identity markers. They further argue that anonymity is the most defining feature of the website. Finally, Phillips (2016) argues that anonymity on the website allows its users to be free of repercussions, therefore allowing their online identities to act differently from their real life counterparts. This behavior is also known as online disinhibition effect. Suler (2004) suggests that there are several possible reasons for online disinhibition. One of them is dissociative anonymity.

He argues that being anonymous allows individuals to dissociate their actions online from their real identity. For these individuals, their online identity or ‘self’ is separate from their real life. What they do or say online have no effect on their real identity.

3. Research Method and Methodology

There are two sets of data involved in this research. The first set of data includes 1000 posts containing the term ‘ESL’ are extracted from a third party archive of 4chan called Desuarchive (desuarchive.org). The data are extracted on the 3rd of September 2016. To begin the process of data collection, the term ‘ESL’ is used as a search keyword. The first 1000 posts are then extracted and transferred into a Word document. For the second data set, instead of collecting individual posts, threads containing interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters are collected instead. Since a thread on 4chan can be up to 600 posts, only strings of conversation containing the interaction between the perceived ESL users and the impolite commenters are used as data. The first post of the thread, (hereby known as OP) which usually establishes the topic for the thread is also included to provide a better context of the thread.

The data in this research are in scripted instead of transcript. Jones and Schieffelin (2016) argue that for online data which are usually text-based, preservation of data in their natural state is a priority (as cited in Sanjek & tratner, 2016). This is to ensure that relevant information such as time of posting and structure of website are kept intact during the process of data collection. For this research, the data from the archive are transferred into a word document to preserve the structural integrity of the data.

When studying discrimination, methods such as interviews or questionnaires allow the researcher to gain an insight into the feelings of the oppressor and the oppressed which are undoubtedly valuable. However, such methods are not suitable for 4chan as any questionnaires or interviews will most likely be responded by trolls on the website. In addition, collecting data about the users of 4chan is a bannable offence in several 4chan boards. Hence, most

researchers studying the website rely solely on the content of the website as sources of data (Bernstein *et al*, 2011, Phillips, 2016, Ludemann, 2018).

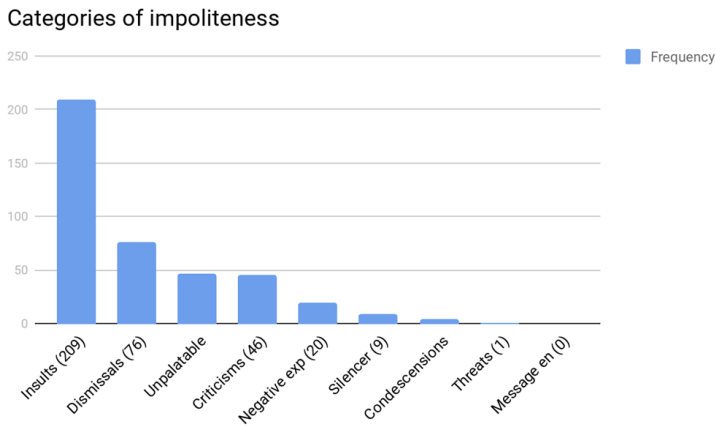
It should also be noted that this research has a small scope as the data are only obtained from one website. Thus any results from this research should not be generalized to other forums and discussion websites as the data might not be comparable. However, in the process of data collection, sufficient data have been gathered for the analysis hence the findings should be able to reflect the population of 4chan to a certain extent.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 What are the Manifestations of Impoliteness towards ESL Users in 4chan?

Out of the 1000 posts collected, 27% of them fits the conventionalised impoliteness formulae. Figure 2 illustrates the frequency of impoliteness categories made by 4chan forumers towards perceived ESL speakers. The general pattern of each categories of impoliteness and the frequency of each categories are discussed in this chapter.

Figure 2: Frequency of impoliteness categories



4.1.1 Insults

In the conventionalised impoliteness formulae, insult is the most encompassing category as Culpeper (2011) considers both direct (second person) and indirect (third person) negative references of an individual as insults. In the data, perceived ESL users are commonly insulted with profanities. Therefore, it is rather unsurprising to see out of all the categories of conventionalised impoliteness, insult has the highest frequency. For example, there are over 50 variations of insults towards perceived ESL users involving the word ‘faggot’ such as “ESL faggot” or simply “ESLfag”. Interestingly, insults also usually co-occur with other types of impoliteness such as criticism or dismissals. Interestingly there are also a relatively high racial slurs being used as insults in the data, particularly against Mexicans and Southeast Asians. The existence of these hateful comments reflect the attitude of 4chan users towards minority groups, which is closely related to language and their status as ‘ESL’ users.

Examples:

/a/ Anonymous Sun 07 Aug 2016 23:15:56 No.145336860 [ViewReport](#)

>>145336772

>>145336818

>ESL spicfag is here

Kill yourself.

/fit/ Anonymous Mon 05 Sep 2016 18:01:55 [No.38588928](#) [ViewReport](#)

>>[38588913](#)

>ESL SEA-nigger

not surprised to be honest

4.1.2 Dismissals

Essentially, dismissals are used in 4chan to drive out perceived ESL users from the website. Most of the dismissals in the data fit the conventionalised pattern

suggested by Culpeper (2011) such as “ESL go away”, “get out ESL”, and “fuck off ESL”. Interestingly, most of the impolite commenters chose the phrase “fuck off” when dismissing perceived ESL users. Culpeper (2011) suggests that impoliteness could be exacerbated and intensified by using more vulgar words. For example in this case, “Fuck off ESL” is more intense in its impoliteness compared to “ESL go away”. Interestingly, the intent of exclusion is made clear in the data. For example:

/int/

English language appreciation thread

Anonymous Sun 14 Aug 2016 18:27:20 [No.63450290](#) [ViewReport](#)

This thread is for native english speakers only, ESL people need to fuck off.

The comment above singles out ESL speakers as a group, and not just one single ESL individual.

4.1.3 Unpalatable Questions

Asking questions that could cause the hearer discomfort can be categorised as a form of conventional impoliteness. In the case of 4chan, unpalatable questions are often used to question the status and the sense of belonging of perceived ESL users on 4chan.

/k/ Anonymous Fri 02 Sep 2016 09:09:42 [No.31186262](#) [ViewReport](#)

[>>31186035](#)

Your reading comprehension is atrocious.

Are you ESL?

By asking the perceived ESL user such questions the native English speakers of 4chan seems to insinuate that due to their poor grasp of the language,

they do not belong on the website. This will surely create a feeling of discomfort amongst perceived ESL users.

4.1.4 Criticism

Interestingly, the data show that criticisms often co-occur with discussion of language. The data show that most of the criticisms or complaints are impolite commenters complaining about the language of perceived ESL users. For example:

/mlp/ Anonymous Fri 19 Aug 2016 03:32:39 [No.28191195 ViewReport](#)
[>>28191128](#)

He's probably an ESL. He doesn't have a very good grasp on English and that's why most of what he ever says consists of the two simple words: fuck off. Anything more complex requires too much effort and the result often is... well, you can see for yourself.

Criticisms found in the data are interesting because it shows a connection between the perceived weak language of perceived ESL users and the impoliteness used by native speakers of English in 4chan. This connection is further explored in chapter 5.

4.1.5 Negative Expressives

According to Culpeper (2011), this category includes curses such as “fuck you” and ill-wishes such as “Kill yourself” or “I hope you die”. In the data, most of the ill-wishes involve impolite commenters wishing or hoping perceived ESL users death. For example:

/a/ Anonymous Tue 23 Aug 2016 13:11:15 No.146131717 ViewReport
>>146131243

Kill yourself ESL-kun

These negative expressives usually involve an imperative, as can be seen in the examples above, the words ‘kill’ and ‘die’ are used to wish ill-things to perceived ESL users. There are also several variations of ill-wishes other than the examples mentioned above. For example:

/a/ Anonymous Wed 10 Aug 2016 07:20:00 No.145451869 ViewReport
>>145451823

You exacerbated it you fucking ESL ape. Go step on a live wire.

4.1.6 Silencers

Silencers are commonly used to censor or suppress the hearer from further talking or responding. Argue that telling others to shut up, which is a type of conventionalised silencer is ‘*an aggressive means of impending speech*’, (p. 1559). In the context of 4chan, silencers could be seen used against perceived ESL users. For example:

>>64420827

Shut up you fucking ESL moron.

In the example above, the silencer is used in conjunction with the insult ‘moron’, and intensified with the word ‘fucking’. There are also variations of silencers in the data due to the nature of the medium. Since 4chan is mostly text-based, examples below have the same effect as the more conventional silencers such as “shut up” or “stop talking”.

/a/ Anonymous Mon 29 Aug 2016 21:20:33 [No.146436380](#) [ViewReport](#)

Quoted By: [>>146436581](#)

[>>146436308](#)

>You're retarded

ESL Mexican please stop posting

4.1.7 Condescension

Culpeper (2011) associates condescensions with patronising behaviours, which can include emphasizing one's superiority by belittling others. For example:

/r9k/ Anonymous Sat 27 Aug 2016 23:37:28 No.30993993 ViewReport
>>30993973
not him but that's pretty close, little ESL boy

In the example above, the impolite commenter patronises the perceived ESL user by describing him as a boy and using the adjective 'little' as a descriptor. There are also other variations of condescension in the data. For example, impolite commenters would also often add the honorifics 'kun' when addressing perceived ESL users. In Japanese, even though the honorific 'kun' could be used by boys of the same age to signify closeness, 'kun' could also be used by superiors to address their male and female subordinates. For example:

/a/ Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 11:39:16 [No.145966058](#) [ViewReport](#)
>>[145966025](#)
Go to bed ESL-kun

In the comment above, the impolite commenter is asserting power over the perceived ESL user by commanding him to go to sleep and by adding the honorific 'kun', like a parent demanding the child to go to sleep.

4.1.8 Message Enforcer & Threats

As shown in figure 4.1, there are relatively low number of enforcers and threats in the data. This pattern is certainly interesting and there are several inferences that could be made based on the the medium of communication and the total anonymity of the website. Culpeper (2011) suggests that message enforcers could be used to intimidate someone in a face to face situation. For example, a police

officer could use message enforcers to intimidate a possible suspect. However, communication in 4chan is text based and non-spontaneous. Therefore, intimidation by message enforcers would not really be effective due to the medium of communication. In addition, due to the anonymity of 4chan users it is very difficult to carry out threats which also makes them ineffective as an intimidation tool.

4.2 How is Impoliteness Co-constructed in 4chan discussion threads?

The first research question looks at the different manifestations of impoliteness in individual posts. On the other hand, this question examines the co-construction of impoliteness by analysing the interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters. This section discusses how the impoliteness in the context of this research is triggered, and how the impoliteness is escalated.

Jacoby and Ochs (1995) define the term co-construction as the collaborative effort of two or more interactants in a certain context. In this context, the term co-construction is used to describe the interaction between perceived ESL users and impolite commenters and how the occurrence of impoliteness could be attributed to the action of both parties.

4.2.1 Identification of Perceived ESL Users through Perceived Language

Due to the anonymity of the website, it is almost impossible to ascertain the number of users involved in one discussion thread. However, as suggested by Phillips (2015) in her study about 4chan, the content of the website could offer some clues about the participants involved in a discussion. The data collected suggest that there are at least two distinct groups that revolve around the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users. On 4chan, comments that contain the term 'ESL' are usually insults targeted towards perceived ESL users. Comments like these usually degrade perceived ESL by insulting or dismissing them as

shown in the first research question. In the context of this research, the writers of such comments will be called impolite commenters in this research. On the other side are the perceived ESL users themselves, they are users who have been identified by the impolite commenters as being 'ESL', and have received criticisms and insults because of that. The subsequent section discusses how the impolite commenters identify and label perceived ESL users.

Collecting strings of conversation that contain interactions from both impolite commenters and perceived ESL users are pivotal in understanding the possible reasons of impoliteness in the website. The data collected show that impolite comments towards perceived ESL users are usually triggered by posts that do not adhere to conventional grammar rules such as posts that contain spelling errors. In other words, a 4chan user is more likely to be perceived as an ESL and be harassed with impoliteness if the comment written by the user is agrammatical. Out of the 10 threads collected, 9 of them contain agrammatical posts which might have triggered the impolite comments.

Anonymous Sun 04 Sep 2016 07:09:59 [No.146691847](#) [Report](#)

I FUCKING TIRED OF THIS BITCH!

If she is your waifu, you have a disgusting

LAWLz !LAWLzaWU1A Sun 04 Sep 2016 07:11:48 [No.146691939](#) [Report](#)

[>>146691847](#)

Go to bed ESL-Kun.

Anonymous Sun 04 Sep 2016 07:19:26 [No.146692339](#) [Report](#)

[>>146691939](#)

No, and Fuck You Fucking Autist Retarded Shitty

In the string of replies above, a perceived ESL user is dismissed by a commenter who tells the user to go to bed. The dismissal seems to be triggered by a post written by a perceived ESL user that is agrammatical ('I FUCKING

TIRED OF THIS BITCH’). Given the fact that the commenter specifically mentions the term ‘ESL’ in the dismissal, it is possible that the dismissal is caused by the language used by the perceived ESL user. By labelling the user with the term ‘ESL’, the commenter implies that the user’s language is not as proficient as a native speaker’s. This has made the dismissal more substantial, as it suggests that the perceived ESL user should be dismissed due to his or her inability to communicate effectively.

In this context at least, the type of impoliteness used is dismissal. At its most basic level, the dismissal could be seen as an attempt to exclude perceived ESL users from discussion. However more interestingly, we could also interpret the dismissal as patronising because of the Japanese honorific ‘kun’ that is used. According to Matsuda (2002), the Japanese honorific ‘kun’ is usually used to address either someone who is of lower status than the speaker (for example, a teacher addressing a student) or male children. Using the honorific ‘kun’ in this context can be seen as an attempt by the impolite commenter to patronize the perceived ESL user. By using the honorific ‘kun’, the impolite commenter implies that the perceived ESL user is either someone who is of lower status or simply a child. By telling the ESL user to go to bed, the impolite commenter is being patronizing, comparable to an adult telling a young child to go to sleep because it is past the child’s bedtime.

Finally, there is a response by the perceived ESL user (which is interestingly agrammatical). As suggested by Culpeper (2011) sometimes impoliteness is used to elicit a response or to trigger the hearer. In this case, the response has clearly angered the ESL user. Even though the impolite commenter was being impolite by dismissing the ESL user, the ESL user escalates the situation by disagreeing with the impolite commenter (refusing to go to bed), and using the conventionalized negative expressives (fuck you), and further insulting the impolite commenter. In this case, we could see how both parties have a different role that contribute to this phenomenon. Interestingly, as shown by the subsequent examples the phenomenon is again repeated due to the attitudes of both sides.

Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 05:44:22 [No.145253919](#) [Report](#)

Both anime and manga are fucking stupid that why /a/ hate this shit.

Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 05:51:30 [No.145254255](#) [Report](#)

[>>145253919](#)

Fuck off ESL

Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 05:56:45 [No.145254476](#) [Report](#)

[>>145254255](#)

No

Anonymous Sat 06 Aug 2016 06:00:49 [No.145254633](#) [Report](#)

[>>145254476](#)

this is an english speaking board.

In the example above, a perceived ESL user is dismissed by a commenter after posting the comment ‘Both anime and manga are fucking stupid that why /a/ hate this ‘. The perceived ESL suggests that /a/, the anime board of 4chan hates both the anime and manga of a certain franchise because they are ‘stupid’. Rather than responding with a rebuttal or a counter-argument, the commenter simply dismisses the perceived ESL user by calling the user an ‘ESL’ and telling the user to ‘fuck off’. By labelling the perceived ESL user with the term ‘ESL’, the commenter brings attention to the language being used in the post. As suggested by Nishimura (2010), in cases where the identity of the interactants are unknown (such as an anonymous message board like 4chan) the message itself becomes a part of identity. In the example above, it is possible that the perceived ‘ESL’ user is called an ‘ESL’ due to the language that is used in the post written by the user. Hence, the commenter assumed the identity of the perceived ESL through the content of the message and used impoliteness to point out that there are grammatical inaccuracies in the post written.

Interestingly, the dismissal is responded with a simple ‘no’ presumably by the perceived ESL user, suggesting that the user refuses to leave the discussion.

The response, although a lot tamer compared to the previous example, highlights the outlook of perceived ESL users on the board. In both examples, when ESL users are being labelled as ESL and dismissed, they showed a clear refusal to the demands of the impolite commenters. In the final post of the discussion, the impolite commenter adds that /a/, the anime board of 4chan is an English speaking board, which implies that the website is not a place for perceived ESL users. This escalation by the impolite commenter further strengthens the view that the perceived ESL user is being labelled with the term 'ESL' and is being dismissed due to the language used by them. Other than the perceived grammatical inaccuracies, there are no other indications that the user might be a second language speaker. Similar to the previous example, the escalation displays a strong sense of exclusion, where perceived ESL users are shown to be not welcomed by impolite commenters.

Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 23:06:21 [No.146284265 Report](#)

[>>146283933](#)

Arthur's character is not even relatable with real fate fans him being the Male lead is a huge mistake.

Kys if you like him so much.

Anonymous Fri 26 Aug 2016 23:14:19 [No.146284519 Report](#)

[>>146284265](#)

>that horrendous sentence structure

>Capitalization all over the place

>kys

Properly learn English before trying to convey a message using it, ESL-kun.

Previous examples have shown how agrammatical sentences might contribute towards perceived ESL users being dismissed and labelled with the term 'ESL'. However, interestingly in this particular example the relationship between language use and impoliteness is more direct. The interaction begins

when a perceived ESL user criticizes a character from a manga, and suggests that the fans of the character should consider suicide. A commenter then criticizes the language used in the post, particularly the 'horrendous sentence structure' and the seemingly 'random capitalisation'. The commenter also advises the perceived ESL user to learn English properly, before using it to convey a message. Since the criticism is targeted towards the language used by the perceived ESL user, it could be suggested that the impoliteness (in this case criticism) towards the user is triggered by perceived language incompetencies. Interestingly, the impolite commenter also uses the honorific 'kun' in the comment towards the ESL user, which makes the message more patronizing when combined with the criticisms and the advice given. Even though there is no escalation here, the example shows a clear relationship between the impolite commenters and perceived ESL users.

Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:37:34 [No.145971042 Report](#)

[>>145970638](#)

That is true, but then chances are, those guys are also ESLs, so you end up getting idiots paying for shit translations. Really, learning moon is the way to go.

Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:48:35 [No.145971389 Report](#)

[>>145971042](#)

I find posts like yours quite... funny, some people learn english and japanese besides their native language to translate shit so some idiot can complain "it's not perfect for me, you ESL"

Note that I'm not defending SHIT translations, I'm just pointing your asshole attitude and commentary implying that only english natives can provide good translations.

Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:50:14 [No.145971433 Report](#)

[>>145971389](#)

>ESL-kun being triggered and can't accept that his English is shit

Anonymous Sat 20 Aug 2016 13:50:41 No.145971445 Report

>>145971389

Not him but 99% of ESL translations read quite awkwardly at certain points if not through the whole thing. It's always best to translate into your native language.

The interaction above revolves around the issue of unofficial manga translation. For less popular manga titles that do not have official translations, fans would usually translate the manga themselves. If there are no volunteer translators for a manga, fans would at times commission a translator group to translate their favorite manga from Japanese into English. The discussion begins when a user suggested that the majority of the individuals involved in translating manga into English are second language speakers themselves, so they will not be able produce a decent translation. The user then suggests that manga fans should learn Japanese instead of relying on the subpar translations provided by ESL translation groups. Interestingly, a perceived ESL user (the user is labelled as 'ESL' by a commenter for this post) replies that he or she is baffled with such views since the ESL translators must have spent a tremendous amount of time and effort into learning a second language. So according to the user, suggesting that only native speakers could provide excellent translations is rather rude. A commenter then responds by suggesting that the previous user is an ESL who could not accept the fact that his or her English is terrible. Another commenter adds that almost all of the translations done by ESL translators read rather awkwardly and it is better for them to translate Japanese manga into their own native language rather than English. It is also interesting to note that the impolite commenter addresses the perceived ESL user as 'ESL-kun'. The example above is interesting because it strengthens the view that perceived ESL users are being harassed with impoliteness by other 4chan users due to the errors contained in the posts written by them. It is clear that a certain number of 4chan users believe that ESL users are not able to communicate in English effectively, and that their command of English is inferior compared to native speakers.

5. Discussions

5.1 Impoliteness as a Form of Language Based Discrimination

The previous chapters have discussed how perceived ESL speakers on 4chan are treated with hostility by other users of the website. It must be noted that impoliteness is not marginal on 4chan, and several studies have described the propensity of the users of the website to use offensive language, e.g. Phillips (2016) argues that trolls on 4chan often use and engage in behaviours and language that are “so outrageously offensive it almost defies categorization” (p.72). In another study, Ludemann (2018) describes how posters on 4chan would usually paint people of color as either being childish, or having other negative qualities. For example, a poster implies that Middle Eastern immigrants who currently reside in Germany are useless and rely heavily on the welfare system.

Even though impolite language is to a certain extent normalized on 4chan, we must not simply regard the impoliteness towards perceived ESL users on the website as usual banter among users. The impoliteness towards perceived ESL users must be understood as what it really is- a form of language based discrimination. As shown in chapter 4, perceived ESL users isolated and dismissed due to their perceived weakness in communication.

To further explore the notion of impoliteness (towards perceived ESL users on 4chan) as a language-based discrimination on 4chan, we shall discuss the nexus of language discrimination as suggested by Ng (2007). He discusses language-based discrimination under several headings which made discrimination possible despite the laws that have been put in place to curb it. To start, he defines language-based discrimination as the biased or discriminatory action against a person or a group due to their language, which can include language proficiency, accent, and even styles of speech. In the context of this research, perceived ESL users are being discriminated by native speakers of English due to their perceived weak grammar. In this case, the discrimination takes the form of impoliteness, where native speakers of English insult, dismiss, and ridicule perceived ESL users on the website due to their language incompetence.

The first heading discussed by Ng (2007) is linguistic justification of discrimination. He argues that competence in a privileged language usually becomes the justification to discriminate others (for example immigrants or refugees) who might not speak said language well. For example, an employer who does not want to hire foreign nationals could simply reject their applications for failing to meet the language requirement set for the job. Unfortunately, Ng (2007) added that language-based discrimination is closely related to other forms of discrimination such as ones that are based on ethnicity, nationality or even age. For example, he argued that in Hong Kong in the 1950s, discrimination based on age was rather rampant since only the younger generation could speak English well.

In the context of this research, we could find justifications given by native speakers of English to defend their attitude towards perceived ESL users. For example, the data show that the perceived ESL users are usually blamed for the diminishing quality of threads on 4chan. According to some users, the inability of the perceived ESL users to communicate well has caused the quality of discussion on 4chan to deteriorate. The perceived ESL users are also blamed for other language related issues. For example, in the anime board perceived ESL users are usually blamed for bad fan translations of popular manga and anime. Ironically, the complaints usually come from self-identified native English speakers who could not understand Japanese and had to rely on fan translations.

Secondly, language-based discrimination could also be encoded in the language and culture of a certain group. Prejudiced stereotypes which paint those who do not speak the privileged language in a negative light could further discriminate the oppressed group. Ng (2007) argues that sexist language shows the linguistic encoding of patriarchy, while racist stereotypes and racial slurs reflect the racist encoding that is available in a certain language. For example, he further argues that the word Arabs and Muslims are often associated with several negative qualities such as barbaric and violent in the western world since the 11th century.

Interestingly, in this research the insults used against perceived ESL users also include these encoded racist discriminatory languages that further support the notion of language-based discrimination on 4chan. For example, several posts discussed in 4.1.1 include racial slurs such as ‘spic’ when insulting perceived ESL users. The usage of racial slurs when insulting perceived ESL users suggest that the discrimination against perceived ESL users are not only based on language alone, but also include other factors such as ethnicity or race. Ng (2007) summarises the linguistic encoding of discriminations as:

Language is a cultural repository of ideas for portraying particular out-groups. These ideas and the language in which they are encoded reflect power inequalities and associated discriminations (e.g., sexist, racist, and ageist languages). (p. 106)

Finally, after a period of time, language based discrimination could be routinised. In such cases, the language-based discrimination against a particular group has become normalised and widely practice by individuals in a society. For example, the usage of male generics (chairman, mankind) is still widely practiced today even though more gender neutral alternatives are available.

In this research, it could be argued that discrimination against perceived ESL users which takes place in the form of impoliteness has become normalised to a certain extent. Several posters in the data has mentioned that the hate towards perceived ESL users has become somewhat of a meme on the website. This seems to suggest that the complaints and the insults thrown towards perceived ESL users occur regularly enough that they have spread across different boards on the website. In addition, the word ‘ESL’ on 4chan has also evolved to carry a rather negative connotation. Perceived ESL users are not only blamed and criticised for their communication skills, but also for other unrelated reasons. For example, in the data perceived ‘ESL’ users are blamed for posting unrelated content to the topic of discussions even though such claims could never be verified due to the anonymous nature of the website.

6. Conclusion

The phenomenon of perceived ESL users being treated with impoliteness on 4chan is caused by several factors. Firstly the data suggest that the impoliteness is usually triggered by grammatical posts on the website. In other words, impolite comments towards perceived ESL users are always written as responses towards posts with poor grammar. It could be argued that since there are no identity markers on 4chan, perceived weak command of the English language has become an identifier for ESL users.

It must be noted that the most striking aspect of the phenomenon is the fact that impoliteness is the main way to respond to perceived grammatical weakness. The hostility towards perceived ESL users could be explained by several factors. Firstly, as argued in earlier chapters anonymity plays a large role in 4chan. Hiding behind anonymity, 4chan users are more likely to use hostile language during interaction due to toxic disinhibition and the lack of accountability. Researchers such as Bernstein *et al* (2011), Phillips (2012, 2015), and Ludemann (2018) have also noted the tendency of 4chan users to use inflammatory language in discussion.

Finally, the co-construction of impoliteness shown in the data reveals that impoliteness in this context is often escalated either by the impolite commenters or the perceived ESL users themselves. The escalation will further fuel the aggression between these two groups thus making it easier for the phenomenon to be repeated again in the future.

This research highlights the hostility towards perceived ESL users on 4chan, which could be seen as a form of discrimination based on language. Even though the findings in this research might not change or lessen the hostility towards perceived ESL users on 4chan, it is hoped that the exposure would bring more awareness to the struggle of second language speakers of English especially in online communities. This would be especially helpful for moderators or administrators of online communities that want to reduce language based harassment on their sites.

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