

Sociolinguistic Analysis of Internet Hot Words

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Abstract:

The emergence and popularity of a language are often closely related to the development and changes of social and cultural life. In the era of mobile Internet, the development of new media technology constantly shapes the matching media environment, and dramatically changes the social life style, information transmission ecology and language expression habits. As a representative language text, Internet buzzwords are the language forms generated by media technology in the new media environment through the content and form of social and cultural life. At the same time, the Internet vocabulary constantly produced and spread in the information society is a form of language rooted in practical practice. It originates from the Internet environment of a specific era and is the portrayal of group psychology and emotions. In the actual use process, it plays a different type of emotional pointing meaning. This paper takes the newly coined words in foreign Internet buzzwords as the entry point to explore the characteristics, ways and principles of word-formation of Internet buzzwords. The study of these characteristics of Internet catchwords, and the analysis of their sociolinguistic characteristics and corresponding social functions from the perspective of their production logic and semantic evolution can reflect the change of language life and the real social mentality of the mass society.

Keywords:

Internet Hot Words, Coin Words, Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

In this part, the writer expounds the background and purpose of the research, as well as the theoretical and practical significance of the research, and puts forward the research methods and basic framework.

1.1. Research Background

The rapid development of economy, culture, politics, entertainment and other aspects of society makes language change accordingly. New media has broken the communication mode of traditional media, but also changed the existing way of human language communication, resulting in the emergence of Internet language, a new thing. With the rising status of China in the world, more and more language learners enjoy the massive information resources provided by domestic and foreign new media, and also experience the convenience of communication in the era of new

media. As a new communicative language, Internet language has its unique development prospect.

Language is a mirror reflecting social phenomena, it witnesses the development and change of The Times. As a language variant, Internet buzzwords appear in people's vision, reflecting the close connection between language and social development. Language development is characterized by continuity and stability, but the development of lexical system is faster than that of grammar and phonetics. The generation and use of Internet catchwords is a comprehensive reflection of linguistic and social phenomena. More and more words reflecting new things and new ideas keep emerging. In the past ten years, the number of hot words on the Internet is large and the growth rate is fast. The great influence of Internet hot words on the society has gradually aroused the close attention of linguists. Therefore, it is very important to study it from the angle of sociolinguistics.

1.2. Purposes and Significance of the Study

Internet hot words are generated and spread by the Internet. They are words with high frequency of use, high attention and high recognition on the Internet. They can reflect social hot topics and express the thoughts and emotions of netizens. Internet hot words have the characteristics of concise form, sharp and humorous language, which can reflect a certain phenomenon in a certain period of society and arouse people's resonance and spread.

As a kind of Internet language, the creators and users of Internet hot words are young people, so they belong to a form of youth subculture. At present, China is undergoing social transformation. Different social groups are seeking channels to improve their voice, and so are the youth groups. The development and popularization of the Internet not only enables the rapid dissemination of hot social events, but also enables young people to make comments, interpret or summarize issues of common concern by means of Internet media, and spontaneously form public opinion dissemination, thus promoting the formation of Internet hot words.

Language development is closely related to social changes. Internet hot words come from various cultural fields and have unique word-making methods and word-formation principles. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, this paper analyzes and studies some popular Internet hot words, and discusses the hidden social meaning behind these words and their social functions. Based on the word-formation characteristics, style composition and audience psychology of Internet hot words, this paper aims to understand the mainstream discourse environment and cultural atmosphere of the current society, and guide the young generation to set up correct social values.

1.3. Basic Framework of the Paper

According to the research direction, this paper firstly adopts the literature research method to sort out the main viewpoints of sociolinguistics, and summarizes the current situation of the application of sociolinguistics in the research of Internet hot words. Secondly, this paper also adopts the corpus method to screen, analyze and summarize the Internet hot words collected in the Internet platform, proving that sociolinguistics has guiding significance to it.

In addition to the abstract, this paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the background, purpose, significance and method of the research. The

second chapter mainly introduces the research status of sociolinguistics, the main theoretical viewpoints and the guiding significance to this thesis. The third chapter mainly makes a conceptual distinction between Internet hot words and Internet buzzwords, defines the concept of Internet hot words, and clarifies the characteristics and development trend of Internet hot words. Chapter four analyzes the characteristics and principles of word formation of Internet hot words from the perspective of reinventing words. Some Internet hot words are selected from the corpus for meaning interpretation, so as to reflect the social effects of these words on the youth group, discourse environment and other aspects, and on this basis to explore the social linguistic functions of Internet hot words.

2. Literature Review

This chapter mainly introduces the origin and research status of sociolinguistics, as well as the main research on Internet hot words.

2.1. Studies on Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics, as an independent discipline, was born in the 1960s. It is the product of the combination of linguistics and sociology, aiming at exploring the relationship between language and society, examining the social functions of language and the changing rules of language structure in the social environment. Sociolinguistic theory was first proposed in the late 1970s and 1980s. Sociolinguistics is generally divided into two research fields. One is to analyze the change of language factors from the change of social environment, including the influence of the change of social context on language elements; the other is to explore the change of social factors from the variation of language. Chen Yuan holds that in Sociolinguistics, “Language is a social phenomenon”, “language comes into being with the formation of human society”, “changes in social life cause the variation of language, grammar and vocabulary” [1].

Saussure pointed out that “signs are always in a state of change”, “any part of the language changes, and each period correspondingly has a greater or smaller evolution” [8]. Sociolinguistics should not only discover the variation of language from the changing social development, but also study the change of social development and the future picture from the variation of language. Language is the most important tool of human communication, and sociality is the essential attribute of language. With the increasing social changes, the increasingly close communication between people, and the rapid development of the Internet and mobile technologies, language changes are accelerated and there are numerous language variations, which provide rich valuable topics for sociolinguistics research and show a bright prospect for the development of sociolinguistics. At present, the hot spots of sociolinguistics research mainly include social buzzwords and hot words, social language life and language policy research, but there are few researches on Internet buzzwords and hot words.

2.2. The Social Function of Language

The social attribute and communicative nature of language make the emergence of new words, the demise of old words and the transformation of meaning become the most common phenomena in language change. Internet language is different from traditional language and has certain social practical value. Internet language is not only a language phenomenon, but also a complex social phenomenon.

Hudson defines language variant as a group of language items with the same social distribution, that is, a certain form of language expression commonly used by people with the same social characteristics in the same social environment. Ferguson believes that language variant is a kind of human speech pattern with similar nature. Hudson and Ferguson are consistent in their definition, that is, language variants are defined according to phonological, lexical, syntactic and textual features. Chen Zhanhai argued in Introduction to Sociolinguistics that “the recognition of the close connection between language and society is the fundamental foothold of linguistic research... Sociolinguistics is the study of covariation between language and society” [4]. Therefore, the development of society is closely related to the variation of language, and the study of language has become a scientific perspective to understand social changes.

Language is an important part of culture, a system of symbols that records culture, and cultural characteristics inevitably influence language characteristics and the way they are used. Internet buzzwords break the general requirements of language use due to social and cultural development, social political and economic needs or social psychological changes in a specific period. They originate from the Internet in a unique form and enter people's daily life, which is the most intuitive and realistic reflection of language variation. From the perspective of sociolinguistics, the rapid development of society promotes the emergence and popularization of Internet hot words and newly coined words. At the same time, these new words also conform to the academic definition of vocabulary, and have the same rules of word formation as traditional words. The Internet hot words in the new media era have the characteristics of fast updating, low creation requirements and miscellaneous groups. They come from the public's concern about the real world, and at the same time represent certain opinions and positions, so these words become another form of expression of public opinion, which is one of the keys to their popularity and dissemination.

3. Internet Hot Words

Chapter three mainly distinguishes the concepts of Internet hot words and Internet buzzwords. Then, it briefly introduces the characteristics and development trend of Internet hot words.

3.1. Conceptual Distinction

As Internet buzzwords belong to Internet language, some researches on Internet buzzwords do not strictly distinguish these two concepts. For example, Tang Meiyang thinks that “Internet buzzwords are a special form of spoken language, which are unique, lively and fresh words used by people in online communication” [9]; Yang Ping believes that “Internet buzzwords are created or actively spread by netizens, and then recognized, accepted and used by most netizens” [10]. Such definitions of Internet buzzwords equate them with Internet language without highlighting the “popular” characteristics.

Internet buzzwords and Internet hot words are two different concepts. Internet buzzwords emphasize the popularity of form more, and there is no strict limit on the content. On the other hand, Internet hot words usually come from hot social events or social phenomena. They emphasize “hot” and “attention”, which is a reflection of social mentality. Therefore, Internet hot words belong to Internet buzzwords, but Internet buzzwords are not all Internet hot words. The extension of Internet

buzzwords is larger than Internet hot words. Internet hot words refer to the new words with high frequency which are mainly circulated on the Internet and given the meaning of specific times and language environment. Internet hot words can be formed due to cultural development, communication needs, and social hot spots. The Internet hot words reflect the social changes and public psychology in a certain period of time. They are the comprehensive product of social politics, economy, culture, environment and people's psychological activities in a certain period of time. It has the characteristics of the times. Internet hot words have attracted the attention of netizens and many media, and become a phenomenon of Internet culture worthy of attention.

3.2. Characteristics of Internet Hot Words

(1) Innovativeness

When existing words cannot describe new things, people tend to create new words or expressions. Retweet, for example, originally referred to the actual act of retweeting someone's tweet, is now used to express agreement. When you completely agree with someone, you can simply say "Retweet" instead of "yes, I agree." Digital nomad refers to a group of people who rely entirely on the Internet to generate income and thereby break the restrictions on when and where they can work. They call themselves Digital nomads.

(2) Timeliness

Internet hot words are the most popular fashion words. Like other popular things, they are easy to replace. This is because hot words on the Internet are often the opinions expressed by people on some hot events or topics. As time goes by, these topics or events get less attention. Catchphrase such as the "C-position" "group buying" and "overseas returnees" are rarely used these days. It should be noted that Internet hot words develop and spread faster than everyday words. When existing words cannot describe new things, people tend to create new words or expression.

(3) Simplicity

Internet hot words are simple, easy to understand and profound. In a fast-paced society, time-saving, labor-saving, convenience and efficiency have become the main social principle, that is, to express one's views and attitudes in the shortest possible time and in the most concise way. Such as "yakshit" "niubility" "freedamn" "gelivable", "smilence" and "togayther", a single word can cover a wealth of emotions and attitudes.

(4) Entertainment

In this competitive society, Internet hot words have become an effective way for people to release pressure and adjust their emotions. When people are anxious and not in a high mood, it can let people vent their unease or dissatisfaction in a way of teasing. For example, "Z-turn" "Don'train" "foulsball" "shitizen" "animale" and "antizen".

3.3. Development Tendency

The emergence and popularity of Internet hot words also accord with the meme theory of language. Language and meme have an extremely close relationship. On the one hand, each language unit relies on memes to copy and spread to survive. Memes

are the internal driving force for language to spread. On the other hand, in the process of replication and transmission, language memes produce more alternative language units and their means of expression through mutation such as deformation and merging, thus promoting the enrichment and development of language [7]. In his book *Sociolinguistics*, American scholar Bright put forward the theory of “co-variation of language and social structure” [1]. When social life changes gradually or drastically, language as a social phenomenon will change unequivocally with the progress of social life. As the most active element in language, vocabulary can best reflect the influence of social development and change on language.

The audience group of Internet hot words are mostly young people who are active on the Internet. Most of them have a certain educational background and are active in thinking. The online language used by Z generation teenagers abroad are collectively called *LingosZ*. Generation Z refers to teenagers born between 1997 and 2012, also known as *Zoomer*. Growing up in the age of social media and the Internet, they have their own social culture that is very different from Gen X or Millennials’ parents. Gen X is followed by another Generation, born between 2010 and 2020, called Generation Alpha, or Gen Alpha. Gen Alpha entered the Internet world earlier than Gen X, and since many of their parents are web surfers, the influence of the Internet and social apps on Gen Alpha is obvious.

The development trend of Internet hot words can be roughly divided into three kinds: die out soon after their emergence; stay in the Internet world, become a part of Internet language; get out of the Internet, integrate into society and become part of everyday language. Therefore, we can see that language itself has the function of elimination. For words that do not conform to the development trend of society and Internet as well as the economic principles of language, they will naturally die out quickly. The words that survive are, to a certain extent, entertaining and socially realistic. Not only that, Internet hot words are evolving in the direction of paying attention to real social problems, which is conducive to reflecting social reality and expressing people’s subjective will to a certain extent. Studying the change and development trend of Internet hot words is not only helpful to effectively solve the social contradictions and problems that people are concerned about, but also can grasp the trend of public opinion and guide the establishment of correct Internet values.

4. Word Formation Mechanism

From the perspective of social environment conditions, “the pluralism of society brings the pluralism of language” [3]. After entering the 21st century, the emerging forms of Internet language have been rapidly developed and widely spread through the spread of Internet media. The reasons for the emergence of Internet hot words and new words are as follows: the influence of social and cultural environment; the communality of social communication; social psychological factors. Language has special properties, such as sociality and communicativeness, which lead to the creation of new words and the extinction of old ones. The tension and vitality of new words help people understand the social reality and changes, so as to better integrate into a certain culture.

4.1. Motivation for Word Formation

(1) Phonological motivation

Phonological motivation refers to the relationship between the sound of a word and

its meaning. Common onomatopoeia in English includes “meow” “quack” “croak” “giggle” “murmur” and so on. In recent years, “oop” has been given a new meaning in the Internet hot words. “And I oop” came from a funny video of a drag contest. One of the participants was injured just as he was about to speak and had to stop the race. “I oop”, meaning that something in progress ends with a bad result.

(2) Morphological motivation

Morphological motivation refers to the direct relationship between morphology and meaning. Many words in Chinese and English can be produced according to morphological motivation. Most of the compound words in English can be inferred by the form of the two words. For example, the new Internet words “Halfyuan” “vegetal” and “eggache”. However, some compound words do not have a “morphological motivation”, such as “egghead”, which has nothing to do with the sense of egg, but rather with the sense of “bookworm”. Therefore, the morphological motivation can not be generalized and needs to be analyzed in detail.

(3) Semantic motivation

Semantic motivation is concerned with meaning. Many Internet hot words originate from old words and new meanings. “Through the development and the changes of time, words are given new meanings or new usages different from the original meanings” [2]. According to Oxford Dictionaries, one of the official definitions of “clout” is “power and influence over another person or event”. The social media meaning of the term refers to people who seek more followers or opportunities to gain influence. “basic” is now commonly used online to refer to what is sadly seen as mainstream, with a hint of sarcasm, often paired with the eye-rolling emoji.

(4) Etymological motivation

Etymological motivation refers to the origin of a word as the basis for its creation. For example, “Brexit” is an anagram of “British Exit”, which came from the Brexit plan proposed by the United Kingdom in January 2013. So Megan and his wife announced their separation from the royal family, using the term “Megxit”, which is derived from the “Brexit” analogy.

4.2. Word Formation Interpretation

Scholars such as Yao Zhixiu and Liu Jianhong have studied the formation of new words on the Internet [6,11]. However, since most English and Chinese new words emerge and spread quickly through the Internet, new words often have the characteristics of fashion and popularity. The forms of new English words are varied and individual. There are often abbreviations, homonyms, numbers, symbols and letters mixed together. Abbreviations, acronyms and truncations are also simple and easy to understand. Zhang Xuezhong and Gao Guizhen pointed out that the factors affecting word-formation ability include phoneme, morphology, syntactic meaning and pragmatic limitations [12].

The word “bricolage” was put forward by Levi-Strauss, and the Birmingham School cited and defined it as follows: “In a complete symbolic system, objects are reordered and contextualized to produce new meanings. It includes the meaning of attachment, preference, and precipitation on the object being used” [5]. John Clark believes that subculture has completely subverted and rewritten the forms of discourse through collage [13]. Therefore, the collage of youth subculture has a subversive function, which can produce the significance of confrontation. From the perspective

of youth subculture, the meanings of Internet hot words are associated and extended through the literal meaning, so that they have symbolic significance. Most of its symbolic meanings refer to an event or original meaning as another phenomenon through Internet hot words, the expression of netizens' mentality and the extension of other meanings [12]. A few exaggerate the meaning of words to strengthen the comparison with the real context in the way of joking games, so as to express criticism of the reality.

"Gaddiction" is a combination of "gay" and "addiction". It means that women fall in love with good-looking, talented, knowledgeable and caring men, only to find out they are gay. The term is ostensibly meant to poke fun at homosexuality in society, but it also reflects the growing acceptance of this group. A pluralistic society will ensure that the rights of minorities are given due respect and that their voices are not lost on account of their numerical inferiority. The emergence of such words means that a pluralistic society requires each and every one of us to have an inclusive mind. This mindset is essential to the cultivation of freedom and justice, and belongs to a common idea that recognizes that all men in the world are created equal. "Destinesia" is a combination of "destination" and "amnesia", you can't remember why you set out when you get to a place. This phrase is similar to China's aspiration to stay true to original mission. Young people have their own attitudes to life, and they also have their own considerations for life. "Askhole" means a asshole who never stops asking stupid questions. There is a tradition in Chinese culture to ask questions without shame. But in this fast-paced society, wasting other people's time with silly questions is starting to get annoying. The emergence of the word also indicates that those people in the society who do not use their brains and always try to rely on others to solve everything are beginning to be eliminated by this fast-paced era.

Internet hot words well reflect the chaos of the group of young netizens in the Internet era. Sometimes, they use Internet hot words to mock the hero of the event, resist traditional ideas, criticize social phenomena, entertain and make fun of the current situation, sometimes extract hot words to motivate positive social events, and sometimes create some Internet hot words to express life philosophy. There are many more of these words that are close to people's lives. For example, "chairdobe" is an obvious way to pile clothes on a chair. "Textpetation" is a combination of "text message" and "expectation", meaning the girlish feeling of expectation after sending a short message. "Cellfish" is a play on the word "selfish", meaning that kind of selfish behavior that calls people all the time and doesn't care about other people. "Nonversation", a completely meaningless conversation. An "errorist" is someone who keeps making mistakes. "Youniverse" refers to an extreme egotism, a feeling that you are the only person in the universe who matters. "Onlineness" means being online too much, watching mobile phone and checking Twitter or Wechat moments all the time, but without being more and more lonely. A combination of "car" and "narcolepsy", "carcolepsy" means a condition in which a person falls asleep when the car starts. "Internest" is a cozy nest made of blankets, pillows, etc., and used to stay online for a long time. "Hiberdating" refers to disregarding former friends when you have a partner. "Worderful" means a new word that should exist because it's so good. The Internet hot word we're talking about here is also "worderful".

The rapid popularity of Internet hot words in a short period of time is inseparable from the rapid development of economy, the prosperity of multi-culture, and the support of the ever-changing Internet technology. As a form of expression of youth subculture, Internet hot words are characterized by fragmentation, metaphor and pan-

entertainment, which meets the psychological needs of young people and is conducive to their emotional expression. The flourishing of Internet hot words has injected fresh blood into the enrichment of youth subculture. Some Internet hot words related to social phenomena are more conducive to the expansion of the influence of the central event. Young Internet users no longer use the unique appearance of clothing, ornaments and other shapes to resist the dominant culture, but through the Internet hot words to seek different meanings from the mainstream culture and express their different voices.

5. Conclusions

Language is a ruler to measure social development. It can vividly reflect major social events and every aspect of people's daily life. Internet hot words cover a wide range of meanings. The process of Internet hot words from generation to popularity is closely related to the great development of social environment. The great development of society will not only bring about new things, but also lead to the emergence of new problems, and on this basis, promote the emergence or recurrence of new expressions. The great development of society can be said to fundamentally promote the generation and dissemination of Internet hot words. At the same time, language is the carrier of culture and closely related to culture. Culture is one of the important characteristics of Internet hot words, in the social world, every era will lay its basic imprint, and the Internet hot words themselves can truly reflect the world of the people, reveal their national cultural psychology. Contemporary Internet hot words have changed from single to multiple no matter in source, content or generation mode, which shows people's active thinking and intervention on their own life

Internet hot words prevail in the era of rapid development of Internet technology. The information penetrating into many aspects of social life has a great impact on society. Its influence is positive, but there are also negative aspects that need to be strengthened and regulated, such as vulgarization, which requires strengthening the norms of the media and practitioners, improving the media literacy of young people, effectively easing the emotions of young people, and promoting the sound and healthy development of society. At the same time, as a youth subculture, the Internet hot words have a positive development trend, and constantly blend with mainstream culture and commercialization, promoting cultural prosperity to a certain extent.

Conflicts of Interest

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