

A Case Study of Acronyms (Pinyin and English) and Homophonic Chinese Characters Used Online from the Perspective of Cooperative Principle

Yiyun Zhang^{1*}

¹ School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Nanjing, China

Email Address

zyy_oli98@163.com (Zhang Yiyun)

*Correspondence: zyy_oli98@163.com

Received: 31 August 2023; **Accepted:** 20 September 2023; **Published:** 10 November 2023

Abstract:

“Top Ten Internet Terms in 2021” was released by the National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center on December 6, 2021. “YYDS” was successfully selected. Internet buzzwords are popular among netizens as a new language variant, which can reflect current social hot spots and social mentality in real time. The article focuses on multiple domestic social media platforms, collects a certain amount of first-hand real corpus, and uses the case analysis method to study the use of network acronyms and homophonic Chinese characters in online conversations from the perspective of Grice’s Cooperative Principle.

Keywords:

Cooperative Principle, Network Buzzwords, Acronyms, Homophonic Chinese Characters

1. Introduction

With the popularity of the Internet, Internet Linguistics has become another field of linguistics [1]. Linguists have studied Internet buzzwords in many fields such as cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. As Internet buzzwords become a new language variety and are frequently used in people’s communication, they have constituted a large number of vocabulary and knowledge sources related to all aspects of people’s lives, and reflect current social hot spots and people’s livelihood issues in real time. This study explores the function and conversational meaning of some online buzzwords in 2021 from the perspective of Grice’s Cooperative Principle, in order to help people use Internet buzzwords more appropriately in online conversations and achieve the desired dialogue effect.

1.1. Research object

One of the features of the Internet is rapidity. Overnight, a new word, never heard before, can catch fire all over the internet. When turning on the social media apps, some people would be really confused for not catching up the hot spot. From “给跪了” in 2012, “喜大普奔” in 2013, “我也是醉了” in 2014, “打 call” in 2017, “C 位” in 2018, “集美” in 2020, many new words emerge on the Internet every year. Some of them are not short-lived, still being used by many people even in their daily face-to-face conversations.

In 2021, “YYDS”, the acronym of Chinese Pinyin “yǒng yuǎn dē shén”, used to appraise everything gradually, has hit online, especially during the period of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. On July 24, 2021, in the final of the women's 10m air rifle at the Tokyo Olympics, China's Yang Qian won the championship, winning the first gold medal for the Chinese delegation. With the winning of first golden medal, the words “YYDS” caught fire, becoming a national phenomenon-level term. In addition to “YYDS”, “awsl”, “zqsg”, “u1s1”, “emo”, “BE 美学” and some other acronyms of Chinese Pinyin and English has been widely used online.

Paralleled with acronyms, some homophonic Chinese characters, like “蚌埠住了”, “肿么了”, “芜湖”, “我不李姐” and etc., can be widely seen online. Some of them is not difficult to understand, when put into specific conversation contexts. However, some of them cannot be understood if not typing them into search box in advance.

1.2. Research objectives

As of June 2021, the number of Internet users in China reached 1.011 billion, an increase of 21.75 million from December 2020, and the Internet penetration rate reached 71.6% [2]. Online life has constitutes a part of the lives of Chinese people. The online conversations and network buzzwords should be paid more attention. The article aims to explore the function and conversational meaning of some online buzzwords in 2021 from the perspective of Grice's Cooperative Principle, in order to help people use Internet buzzwords more appropriately in online conversations and achieve the desired dialogue effect.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cooperative Principle

Since both sides of the conversation can tacitly conceive of each other's intentions, the American Linguist Herbert Paul Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle in 1967, which he defined as: “The principle observed by two sides mutually is to make sure that the conversation goes smoothly.” [4] The theory consists of an abstract “general principle” and four concrete maxims based on the German philosopher Kant's four categories (quality, quantity, relation, and manner). This theory and conception essentially reveals the most general universal laws of human communication.

Many scholars who criticize Grice believe that the theoretical basis of the Cooperative Principle is fundamentally flawed, has no universality, is divorced from reality, lacks operability, and so on. Kasher [5] questioned, the Cooperative Principle on which the four maxims rely was not well founded. Harnish [6] echoed the counterexample (in the face of the Gestapo, there was no need to give all the information) to question Grice's “quantity” and “quality” maxims. Over years, many scholars have tried to improve or replace Grice's Cooperative Principle.

According to Grice's conception of conversational implicature theory, we can describe specific conversational behavior and explain the implicature of the communication by the four maxims. Cooperation is the foundation, and conversational maxims are references, different from the normative norms of the legal and moral categories, having no explicit compulsion for people's specific conversational behavior, but only a scientific methodology used to describe and to explain the most general laws of rational speech and behavior in interpersonal communication [7].

The contribution of Grice's Cooperative Principle is unprecedented, and is a key to describing and explaining the nature of verbal communication behavior in real life.

2.2. The research on network buzzwords

With the popularity of the Internet, many scholars have noticed the significance of network buzzwords. Zhang Yansen [8] has did a research on microblog sentiment analysis method based on a double attention model. Song Dan [3] did a research on the conversational implicature of Internet catchwords during Epidemic period from the perspective of Cooperative Principle. Zhou Yan [9] published the book "Chinese Internet Buzzwords: Research on Network Languages in Internet Group Communication."

2.3. Network acronyms and homophonic Chinese characters

Using English acronyms online and in daily communication is common, with the globalization and the influence of the English language. In 2021, a new type of acronyms like "YYDS" suddenly attracts people's attention and is widely used not only online and even in daily communication. Paralleled with acronyms, some homophonic Chinese characters emerge. This article aims to explore the function and conversational meaning of this two types of buzzwords in 2021 from the perspective of Grice's Cooperative Principle, in order to help people use Internet buzzwords more appropriately in online conversations and achieve the desired dialogue effect.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research questions

The following research questions were formulated:

(1) Does the use of acronyms (Pinyin and English) and the use of homophonic Chinese characters in conversations affect the smoothness of conversations?

(2) Why and how the acronyms and homophonic Chinese characters affect the conversation?

3.2. Methodology

This article deploys the case study method to analyze the corpus collected.

3.3. Data collection

The corpus, which is fresh and can reflect the actual use of acronyms and homophonic Chinese characters online or in daily life, in this article collected from several domestic social media platforms, like Sina Weibo, Bilibili, Wechat and so on. In order to protect the privacy of users, the user name is hidden in the article.

being true, respectively. T, in fact, did not know what “emo” is, but he told E that “emo” is probably a hot game. E may hear that recently the “Squid Game” is hot, a South Korean online series, which is not a name of a game. She took it for granted that “Squid Game” is a game and she talked it with T. This shows that she violated the maxim of Quality. There is another possibility that E knew “Squid Game” is a TV series but did not explain it to T, showing that E violated the maxim of Quantity. Throughout the whole conversation, E and T thought they were talking about the same thing, but they were saying their own things.

Many other people, like E and T, are busy with their own things like education and work, sparing very little time to surf the Internet. In the comment box of one article, with intention to explain what “emo” is, published by China Daily in its WeChat public account, many netizens left their comments below.

Case two:

The acronym “awsl”, whose full name is “ā wǒ sǐ lē”, generally used to describe the excitement of seeing a cute thing, can widely be seen on the bullet curtain language on Bilibili, a popular website within young groups, and other social media platforms.

Setting: an interview of Wang Ziyi (one Chinese young idol)

Interviewer: 听说你也是个冲浪达人。让我来考考你。

(I heard that you like surfing the Internet. Let me test you a little bit.)

Wang: 好啊。

(All right)

Interviewer: “awsl” 是什么意思?

(What’s the meaning of “awsl”?)

Wang: 啊! 我生了!

(Ah! I give a birth to a baby!)

Interviewer: 哈哈哈哈哈。

(Laughter)

In this case, obviously, Wang Ziyi did not the exact meaning of “awsl”. If it was not a interview but a real conversation, there is no doubt that this conversation could not go smoothly. Wang Ziyi may consider that the interviewer must say something that is known to him. His following response may cause the violation of any maxims.

Case three:

The acronyms of “HE” and “BE” are not created and used by native English speakers but by some Chinese speakers, which is interesting. “HE” means “happy ending” and “BE” means “bad ending”, which were firstly used to describe the outcome of novels. But gradually the two words can be applied in many other occasions, like the outcome of a TV series and so on.

Provider: 茶 xxxC (Weibo ID)

Setting: two friends (C and T) talking the TV series they like

C: 我最近看了《东宫》，好虐啊! 不过，真真是 BE 美学，让人印象深刻。

(I have watched “Good Bye, My Princess” recently, it hurts me a lot! But it’s kind of “BE aesthetics”, really impressive.

T: 《东宫》不都是人类么？有谁的真身不是人么？

(The characters in “Good Bye, My Princess” aren't they all human? Is there anyone not human?)

C: 都是人类啊。

(All humans.)

T: 我听不懂你说的话了。

(I can't understand your words.)

C: 怎么不懂啦？

(Why?)

T: “Be 异” 不是 “Be 非人类” 的意思么？

(“Be yi” means “Be non-human”?)

C: 是悲剧的意思。

(It means tragic ending.)

Friends talks are usually cooperative. In this case, C violated the maxim of quality and the maxim of manner. C took it for granted that T could get the meaning of “BE” who actually did not and she did not explain it to T. T thought C’s words must be relevant to their topic and gave her response which was not quite relevant to their topic, causing her violation of the maxim of relevance.

From the three cases above, it is clear that if using such acronyms in conversation, the two sides have to make sure the meaning of acronyms being mutually known to each other.

Case four:

The homophonic Chinese characters “我不李姐” is equal to “我不理解”, originating from “起夜急李姐”, the homophonic Chinese characters of “企业级理解”, used to describe that someone’s understanding of something is quite tricky, with comedic effect.

Provider: 你 xxxx 兽(WeChat ID)

Setting: a casual talk between siblings(N and O)

N: 这世界上居然有这样的人。

(There are such kind of people in this world.)

O: 我不李姐。

(I can't understand.)

N: 雀实。

(Me too.)

In this case, the use of homophonic Chinese characters did not bring out misunderstanding or ambiguity in the conversation, even enhancing the expressed emotions, without the violation of the four maxims. Compared with acronyms, the

homophonic Chinese characters are easier to understand, maybe thanks to people's linguistic knowledge.

Through the pragmatic analysis of the above typical texts, the researcher found that the largest proportion of the use of network buzzwords violated the four maxims of Cooperative Principle. People, especially the young, intentionally or unintentionally violate these maxims in online conversations of face-to-face conversations in order to express their implicit meaning or increase the feelings of the dialogue such as a sense of humor.

5. Conclusions

As an increasingly popular language category, Internet buzzwords have shown an irreversible trend in the Internet age. The true meanings of Chinese network buzzwords go far beyond their literal meaning, and because of the informal and casual nature of the online context, online conversations are more likely to produce additional conversational meaning. Using network buzzwords in no matter online conversations or face-to-face conversations needs more caution and taking more pragmatic knowledge, like the Cooperative Principle, into account, in order to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Reference

- [1] Crystal, D. The Scope of Internet Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- [2] Zhang, B.S. The size of China's Internet users exceeds 1 billion. People's Daily Overseas Edition, 2021-08-28(002).
- [3] Song, D. Exploring the conversational meaning of Internet buzzwords during the epidemic from the perspective of cooperation principle. *Journal of Harbin University*, 2021, 42(06), 113-115.
- [4] Grice, P. Logic and Conversation. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- [5] Kasher, A. Conversational maxims and rationality. In Kasher (ed.). *Language in Focus: Foundations, Methods and Systems*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1976, 197-216.
- [6] Harnish, R. M. Logical form and implicature. In T. Bever, et al (eds.). *An Integrated Theory of Linguistic Ability*. New York: Crowell, 1976, 313-392.
- [7] Letter of Letter. Forty years of Grice principle. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2008, 05, 1-8.

- [8] Zhang, Y.S.; Zheng, J.; Huang, G.J.; Jiang, Y.R. Microblog sentiment analysis method based on double attention model. *Journal of Tsinghua University(Natural Science Edition)*, 2018, 58(02), M 122-130.)
- [9] Yan, Z. Chinese Internet Buzzwords: Research on Network Languages in Internet Group Communication (1st ed.). Routledge. 2021.



© 2023 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)