

A Pragmatic Study of Internet Buzzword “Our Zihan”

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Abstract:

With the rapid development of the Internet, people have created many new Internet buzzwords in the process of communicating with various online media platforms, and “our Zihan” is one of these buzzwords. From the perspective of speech act theory, this paper reveals the specific speech act used in Zihan style and explores the pragmatic function of “our Zihan” by analyzing the use of Zihan style that appears in Weibo and Tiktok post and comment areas. This paper finds that our Zihan plays the role of network person deixis, which is most commonly used as first-person deixis and third-person deixis; the speech acts mainly include representatives, commissives, directives and expressives; the emotional attitude expressed by Zihan style include not only negative emotions such as complaints, dissatisfaction, threats, but also positive emotions such as praising.

Keywords:

Internet Buzzword, Our Zihan, Deixis, Speech Act, Pragmatic Function

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet, new Internet buzzwords are constantly emerging, widely disseminated and used, which has also attracted the attention of many relevant scholars. Recently, an unfamiliar name has appeared on many online platforms—“子涵” (Zihan). In the comment areas of major networks, comments containing the name “Zihan” emerge in an endless stream, forming a widely used and different forms of “子涵体” (“Zihan Style”). The Zihan-style mainly refers to various sentences that contain the phrase “我们家子涵” (“Our Zihan”). At present, most of the Internet buzzword studies focus on the relationship between their language construction, production mechanism and normative terms, and there are few related studies from the perspective of pragmatics. Based on this, this paper will use speech act theory to study and analyze the use of Zihan style that appear in Weibo and Tiktok post and comment areas.

This paper aims to analyze the referents of “我们家子涵” (“Our Zihan”), reveal the speech acts used in them, and explore the pragmatic functions of Our Zihan, so as to enable everyone to have a deeper understanding of sub-conformities and enrich the research on related Internet buzzwords.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Internet Buzzwords

Internet buzzwords are the most active language symbols that are spontaneously used by netizens in the network field in a certain period of time, have special significance with fermentation function, and often have an impact on social reality [1]. The initial research of domestic Internet buzzwords mainly focused on the language itself, focusing on the word formation characteristics, phonetic variation, and language norms of Internet buzzwords [2]. In recent years, the focus of language research has begun to shift from the overall analysis of Internet buzzwords to the study of individual words, and such research mainly analyzes the semantic changes of words and their causes. With the wide spread of Internet buzzwords, domestic scholars have begun to combine Internet buzzwords with communication studies to analyze the hidden social motivations behind them. At the same time, there are also many scholars who study from the perspective of memetic theory. On the whole, the classification of Internet buzzwords by scholars in the past is mainly from the perspective of morphological characteristics, and the research results in this area are quite abundant. Although they are different, there are many overlaps. And the research results are similar.

2.2. Emerging Internet Person Deixis

Deixis is an important area of study in linguistic pragmatics that has caught the attention of philosophers and pragmaticians at home and abroad. Etymologically, the term “deixis” derives from Greek, which means “anchoring” or “pointing” [3]. In simple terms, a deixis is word or structure that can only be used in context to determine its referent or the information it refers to. From the perspective of the content involved in the instructions, the deixis can generally be divided into person deixis, time deixis, place deixis, discourse deixis and social deixis [4]. With the increasing popularity and deepening of the Internet, new types of online person deixis have emerged one after another, which have received some attention in the academic community, such as Zhong has studied the referent “Ta” of unknown gender in the new vocabulary of the Internet [5]. However, there are problems in the study of relevant deixis, which are incomplete and unclearly defined, and scholars also have their own opinions on what exactly is included in the person deixis in Chinese [6]. This study believes that the new type of Internet person deixis should not only include personal pronouns, but “我们家子涵” (“Our Zihan”) in the Zihan style plays the role of person deixis in the specific context.

2.3. Speech Act Theory

Proposed by Austin in 1962, the speech act theory is one of the most influential theories in pragmatics. Austin interprets speech acts into three parts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts [7]. The locutionary act is the speech itself, the illocutionary act is related to the intention conveyed in the verbal communication, and the perlocutionary act is the consequence of the speech. He summarized these three as follows: the meaning of the word, the power of the word, and the result of the word [8]. Austin's Speech Act Theory has certain limitations, and the American philosopher Searle inherited and developed Austin's theory, elevating the theory of speech acts and the study of discourse meaning to the study of human communication. Searle argues that Austin's classification of actions that act by words is simply a

classification of the verb that acts [9]. Searl reclassified the act of acting on words into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations [10]. Speech act theory has been applied to many cultures and languages, and the results of applied research are quite remarkable. However, there are few studies on the speech act of Internet buzzwords, and most of them focus on the research on the specific speech act of specific groups, such as the pragmatic study of speech acts suggested by Li on the Internet forum, and the interpretation of online news language by Lin under the theory of speech acts [11,12].

2.4. Summary

To sum up, most of the previous researches on network buzzwords focused on the features of word formation, expression forms and popular causes, and there were few researches on the use of speech act theory to analyze the reference and pragmatic function of network buzzwords. Therefore, this paper will adopt speech act theory to analyze the “Zihan style” comments appearing in the comments section of Tiktok and Weibo. This paper probes into the referential situation of “我们家子涵” (“Our Zihan”) and the pragmatic functions achieved by the speech acts used by them.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

The study focuses on the following research questions:

- (1) Who does “我们家子涵” (“Our Zihan”) in the Zihan style refer to?
- (2) By what speech act does Zihan style commentary achieve what pragmatic function?

3.2. Data Collection

The data came from Tiktok and Sina Weibo. Keyword search was conducted on the two online platforms with their own search functions, and comments that were irrelevant and repeated to the research objective were eliminated. A total of 10 comments were analyzed in this study.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

“Zihan style” originated from a chat screenshot, in a kindergarten small class of 66 parents group, because the child was bitten by a mosquito at school, Zihan’s mother was in the Wechat group to blame the kindergarten teacher, questioning the statement is as follows: Teacher Wang, our Zihan when went to school in the morning is still good, after school found a mosquito bite, kindergarten like this to look at children? The teacher answered: Hello, Zihan mother, our kindergarten has insecticide every week, and mosquitoes cannot be completely eliminated, summer mosquito bite is normal. So Zihan’s mother then asked: Then why not bite other children? Although it is impossible to verify the authenticity of the chat screenshots, Zi Hanti’s comments and copywriting quickly appeared on major online platforms. The original “our Zihan” refers to a kindergarten child named “Zihan”. Through the analysis and summary of the collected corpus, it can be found that “our Zihan” in can be used to refer to people deixis, not only to replace the first-person deixis “I”, but also to refer to other people or objects related to the speaker.

4.1. Internet Person Deixis—“我们家子涵” (“Our Zihan”)

“我们家子涵” is often used at the beginning of a statement or sentence, replacing “I” as a singular first-person deixis, which is shown in example 1.

Example 1:

老师，我们家子涵说要砍死这个世界上的每一个人。

Laoshi, womenjiazihanshuoyaokansishijieshangdemeiyigeren.

Teacher, **our Zihan** said they want to kill every person in this world.

Example 1 comes from Weibo. Through checking other Weibo posts of this blogger, we can find that the blogger is facing the end of the term and has many exams to review, so he posted this Weibo to express his negative emotions. In this context, “our Zihan” refers to the blogger himself, that is, the singular first-person deictic to replace “I”. Through the tone of “our Zihan” to directly vent their dissatisfaction and complaints, while reducing the negative impact of such impulsive words.

But in addition to being used as a first-person deixis, “our Zihan” can also be used to refer to people or things related to the speaker, like example 2.

Example 2:

老师这不是我们家子涵吧?! 我们家子涵没这么帅吧?!

Laoshizhebushiwomenjiazihanba?! Womenjiazihanmeizhemeshuaiba?

Teacher, this isn't **our Zihan**, right?! Is **our Zihan** really that much of a heartthrob?!

“Our Zihan” in Example 2 refers to the speaker's idol. The speaker deliberately uses our Zihan here to express the closeness of the relationship between himself and his idol and to reduce the social distance between himself and his idol. He also expresses his admiration for his idol and his surprise by exaggerating his tone. At the same time, it is worth noting that the “Zihan style” here expresses positive emotions, mainly praise for the appearance of their idols.

In addition to the above two cases, “our Zihan” can also be used to refer to something related to the speaker, such as examples 3 and 4.

Example 3:

老师我们家子涵怎么馋成这个样子了

Laoshiwomenjiazihanzenmechanchengzhegeyangzile

Teacher please explain: How did **our Zihan** evolve into a snack-terminator

Example 4:

老师! 我们家子涵这么可爱, 为什么不让她当小班长啊? Emoji

Laoshi! Womenjiazihanzhemekai,weishenmeburangtangxiaoban zhanga?

Teacher! How is **our Zihan** not qualified for class president when she's literally sunshine in human form?

It can be seen from the picture and context that “our Zihan” in Example 3 refers to the speaker's cat, and this reference also shows the speaker's love and ridicule for the

cat. In Example 4, “our Zihan” refers to the speaker's game character, expressing his love and praise for his game character, while using questions to strengthen the expression of emotion.

4.2. Speech Act

By analyzing the collected corpus, this paper finds out that the four main speech acts involved in the comments of “Zihan style” include representatives, commissives, directives and expressives.

4.2.1. Representatives (Descriptions)

Example 5:

老师我们家子涵在北京变白了。

Laoshiwomenjiazihanzaibeijingbianbaile.

Teacher, **our Zihan** has become fairer in Beijing.

In Example 5, the speaker uses the comment of Zihan style to describe the fact. “Our Zihan” refers to the speaker himself. The speaker uses Zihan style to describe the fact that his skin has lightened after living in Beijing, without too much emotional attitude.

4.2.2. Commissives (Threats)

Example 6:

老师，以后班内投票这种事情我们家子涵就不参加了。回来就在大哭，天杀的男生，我要报警抓你们，我以后都不会给你们朋友圈点赞的，毕业以后就把你们都删了。

Laoshi,yihoubanneitoupiaozhezongshiqingwomenzihanjiubucanjiale.huilaijiudaiza idaku,tianshadenansheng,woyaobaojingzhuanimen,woyihoudoubuhuigeinimenpengyo uquandianzande,biyeyihoujiubanimendoushanle.

Teacher, **our Zihan** won't be participating in any more of these class vote. She came home bawling her eyes out because of those little devils pretending to be classmates! I'm filing a police report this instant, mark my words. Not a single like for your WeChat posts from now on, and I'll purge every last one of you from my contacts the second graduation's over!

In Example 6, “our Zihan” refers to the speaker herself. Here the speaker uses a series of sentences to complete a threatening speech act. Speakers threaten to call the police and arrest people, refuse to like, and delete friends after graduation.

4.2.3. Directives (Requests)

Example 7:

老师，我们家子涵怎么没有广告位

laoshi womenjiazihanzenmemeyouguanggaowei

Teacher, why wasn't **our Zihan** given a featured spot?

In example 7, “our Zihan” refers to the idol of the speaker, and Zihan style is used here to request the listener to give his idol advertising space.

4.2.4. Expressives (Blame, Praise, Complaint)

Example 8:

老师下次这种书我们家子涵就不看了, tszsygyqlydxmlydddr, 你太为难她了

Laoshixiacizhezhongshuwomenjiazihanjiubukanle,tszsygyqlydxmlyddr,nitaiweinantale

Teacher, **our Zihan** won't be reading this kind of material ever again. Tszsygyqlydxmlydddr! You're pushing her way too far!

In Example 8, "our Zihan" refers to the speaker herself, and Zihan-style is used here to express blame for the teacher. By refusing to read such books and describing the teacher's behavior, the speaker expresses his dissatisfaction.

Example 9:

老师我们家子涵怎么有这么多班要上啊

Laoshiwomenjiazihanzenmeyouzhemeduobanyaoshanga

Teacher, why has **our Zihan** been assigned so many work shifts?

In example 9, "our Zihan" refers to the speaker himself. The speaker used a rhetorical tone to express his complaints and dissatisfaction with work.

Example 10:

Vocal 老师!!!给我们家子涵拍的好帅 emojiemoji

Vocallaoshi!!geiwomenjiazihanpaidehaoshuai

OMG! Teacher!!! You absolutely SNAPPED with our Zihan's photos! He looks straight FIRE in these shots! emojiemoji

"Our Zihan" in Example 10 refers to the speaker's idol. Here the speaker uses an exaggerated tone and three exclamation points to compliment the photographer's skill and the speaker's idol's appearance.

5. Conclusions

Overall, through the above analysis of the corpus, this paper finds that "our Zihan" in Zihan-style play the role of network person deixis, which are most commonly used to replace the first person deixis and the third person deixis, and can be used to refer to the speaker himself or to people or things related to the speaker. The speech acts involved in Zihan-style mainly include representatives, commissives, directives and expressives. According to the specific context, the emotional attitude expressed by Zihan style is also different. It can be used to express negative emotions such as complaints, dissatisfaction, threats, and positive emotions such as praise.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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