



Language Change in Progress: The Overview of Evolution of Chinese Network Language

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Abstract

The age of digital and technology has led to the trend of network language popularity and has given rise to a new variant of Chinese that includes abbreviations, emoticons, and unique vocabulary specific to the internet, allowing people to communicate faster and express their emotions. With the amplifying effect of the internet, hundreds of words and neologisms have been added to the English dictionary. Undeniably, in this era dominated by abundant internet information, we have transferred our communication strategies and assumptions from the “real world” onto the keyboard and vice versa. However, its popularity is a blessing as well as a curse. The development of Internet language is inseparable from human cognitive activities. Thought must rely on language for expression, while language also has a reciprocal influence on thought. As a means or medium for expressing human ideas, language helps us analyze and clarify the actual meaning of words and guides us to use language appropriately and accurately, enabling effective expression of our thoughts. Despite the growing trend of using internet language, its diversification also carries many risks: the casual nature of internet language may lead to the rampant spread of vulgar language; the pursuit of novelty and uniqueness can result in semantic ambiguity; young internet users’ adoption of new words may create a generation gap in communication; and the use of crude internet language can pollute the values of the online community’s spiritual world. Therefore, this paper intends to provide an account of the development of buzzwords prevalent on the Internet and their influence on social culture and people’s thinking. In addition, considering the mixed quality of the ever-changing internet language, which not only pollutes the online environment but also contributes to a growing shallowness among people, it is necessary to prioritize language policies that regulate the proper use of network language.

Keywords

Buzzwords, language change, language policy, language progress

1. Introduction

The usage of computer-mediated communications, and specifically the Internet has grown exponentially over the last few years, moving from conventional forms of correspondence. Thus, the Web has become the first port of call for both information enquiry and leisure activity. Undoubtedly, this kind of electronic medium plays a double role in the development of the modern language: firstly, as a means of mass communication that provides an opportunity to popularize new linguistic phenomena in the shortest possible time and with maximum range, and secondly, as a generator of new linguistic forms that would be impossible without the Internet itself. Bruns (2020) holds that the Internet presents us with a channel that facilitates and constrains our ability to communicate in ways that are

fundamentally different from those found in other semiotic situations. Indeed, it is widely believed that there exists a form of language called “Newspeak” which displays unique features that are exclusive to the Internet, emerging from its nature as an electronic, novel, and interactive medium. Network language emerged on Internet communication platforms, employing a diverse range of unique expressions including Chinese Pinyin, English, numbers, letters, symbols, and images. It is widely used in chat rooms, forums, and other stages as a variant of the language, showcasing the proficiency of young people and grassroots communities in playing with “alternative” linguistic and textual styles. What is more, as a new linguistic phenomenon, it differs from the development of traditional language. It promptly reflects social changes, records hot issues in society, and undertakes social language innovation, problem transformation, and symbol creation. It propels the change and evolution of language in the new era.

2. The language change and variations propelled by the internet

It’s argued that language, like any living being, undergoes constant change and evolution to adapt to the needs of its users. Therefore, the Internet language being an emerging language variant is not an exception, and it keeps pace with cutting-edge changes in the rules, structure, and spelling of traditional language. Simplified forms, for example, such as abbreviations and emoticons are commonly used in network language, as well as unique grammatical structures and pronunciation methods that differ from standard written language. In addition, network language also has strong regional and group differences, and the network language used by different regions or groups may vary. That is, it is a social linguistic variant widely used in virtual online communication platforms, with the aim of achieving efficient online communication. It is characterized by its concise, avant-garde, and humorously casual language variations, as well as its modular, emotional, and fragmented linguistic style, which enriches the expressive forms of traditional language. The personal and casual nature of this language coding behavior creates a sense of disdain, breakthrough, and subversion towards traditional linguistic authority, bringing a sense of pleasure.

There exists an innovative scholarly research of “Internet linguistics” that conducts comparative research of the variations of electronic discourse and the expansion of language revolution inside these means of communication. In favor of this view, Graddol argues that the advent of the Internet and the rapid development of electronic communication increase the rise of new kinds of language, and the revolution in electronic communication may give rise to new modes of communication. AbuSa’aleek (2015) sheds light on the importance of electronic discourse, indicating that the use of the Internet and computer technology has an essential impact on language change and usage. Crystal (2001) claims that technology contributes to linguistic research: Netspeak is left to be desired for scholarly study. He also summarizes the “once in a lifetime” chance provided by the emerging means of communication. Similarly, by comparing a 200,000-word Electronic Language Corpus with traditional genres of written and spoken English, Baron (1998) argues that language is more ‘involved’ than ‘informational’, and less narrative, thus the language used within this specific niche closely resembles the style found in public interviews and written letters. With that in mind, he puts much emphasis on the characteristics of net lingo which allows a mixture of speed, efficiency, informality, and creative typography whereby many of the traditional rules of grammar and style are subverted. Internet language exists within specific online communication contexts and is governed by rules based on family resemblance and social constructivist theories, determining its regular usage.

A broadly similar point has also recently been made by Werry (in Herring, 1996), who notes that the intricate arrangement of sequences and communication structures can be observed through various elements, such as the combination of different conversational threads, brief exchanges, a significant level of ‘addressivity’ (referring to the use of nicknames to avoid confusion among multiple participants), and minimal backchannelling from listeners (e.g., uh huh, mm hm). It is no coincidence that these two authors Talib AI-Kadi and Ali Ahmed hold that the Internet has given rise to what is arguably a new variety of English that differs from standard varieties. After tracing back the history of English from bricks to clicks, they highlight that online interlocutors today innovatively come into contact by using face-to-face communication (Talib AI-Kadi & Ali Ahmed, 1998). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has likely influenced language and culture more significantly than other historical events, although this phenomenon is not exclusive to technological development. The emergence of the Internet has led to a new form of English known as Internetese, which some linguists consider to be a distinct language due to its unique structure and usage. Internetese is currently the most widely used medium for intercultural communication (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008), attracting significant attention from various branches of linguistics such as sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, and psycholinguistics. The constant evolution of the English language, especially with the advent of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, has resulted in the introduction of numerous new words and phrases.

Additionally, social media has also repurposed some existing words for different meanings. It is possible to track recent changes in the development of modern varieties of English by examining computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is an expanding area of research.

In summary, the netlingo represents a recent and recognizable linguistic phenomenon, signifying the evolution of English in the Internet era. It has been referred to by various names such as Internetese, Emailese, and Textese. The modifications above have led certain linguists to embrace a fresh field of study within linguistics, known as Internet linguistics. This area focuses on analyzing the novel linguistic and paralinguistic characteristics observed in the current usage of the English language. While some language researchers (Ali, 2012; Kern, 2006) perceive this new form of English as a deviant version of formal English, Crystal (2008, 2011) considers it a distinct genre within English varieties. This variety is continually evolving, and text messaging has been acknowledged as a novel “genre” of modern English (Crystal, 2008; Prøysen, 2009).

2.1 Issues and challenges of language change in computer-mediated communication

However, it cannot be denied that the incessant emergence of network language variants poses a huge challenge to the current language system. In this familiar system, everything is quickly and easily identified, labeled, defined, and ultimately escalated into a viewpoint based on prejudice. The exchange of meaningful facts and opinions no longer exists. For example, expressing confusion about something is “Thanks a million” and praising someone’s experience is “old driver”. Through these words typed out by themselves and spoken from their mouths, people passively or actively simplify their cognitive systems rapidly. Just as George Orwell wrote in his dystopian novel 1984, “Newspeak” was born. This so-called “Newspeak” not only reduces the vocabulary size on the surface, but also decreases the meaning of words, uses crude and simple orthography, and employs a simple syntax. Its essence is the “decay of language”, which includes four types: dying metaphors, operators or verbal false limbs, pretentious diction, and meaningless words. It is actually similar in nature to the various forms of network language mutation today.

The use of variant network language has had a huge impact on the current language system, causing many people to feel confused about their own language system. They tend to express themselves in short, abbreviated phrases, even reducing everything to the form of idioms, such as “men stay silent while women shed tears” and “it is too difficult to explain”. However, this kind of language change cannot be compared with the connotation of idioms. It lacks underlying logic and is a free form that everyone can create with a contemporary touch.

At the same time, online language is always in a state of rapid development and innovation, in a dynamic game of replacement and substitution, widely used by the vast online community. However, the diversification of online language also poses many dangers: the randomness of online language may lead to the proliferation of vulgar language; the pursuit of novelty may lead to semantic ambiguity; young netizens’ use of new vocabulary may create communication gaps; and vulgar online language may also pollute the spiritual values of online society (Hu Qinqin & Li Lun, 2015).

The above discussions illustrate how language change via computer-mediated communication creates a new genre of language variations through which the reputation of citizens, civility, and the security of the Internet are sabotaged and challenged. Xuan Wang, Kasper Juffermans, and Caixia Du (2016) have purposed that digital mediascapes open up a new unprecedentedly complex, and less controllable space in which effects of formal policies are accompanied, de-centered, and transformed in a variety of sociolinguistic settings (e.g., Pietikainen and Piirainen-Marsh, 2009). Blommaert et al. (2009) argue that language policy should be seen as a form of “regulation”, which involves the rational production and management processes of normative structures. These normative structures encompass various social and political actors and institutions, with their roles and distributions being uneven. This positions language policy within a comprehensive framework of ideology and a network of cultural meanings. In China, harmony is closely intertwined with language policy. Obscene language has polluted the intellectual environment, overshadowing our spiritual home. In order to rescue the younger generation from the grasp of internet language and rectify the negative trends online, it is necessary for multiple departments, organizations, and systems to work together to eliminate linguistic pollution, foster positive relationships, and cultivate a healthy online language ecosystem. By doing so, we can ensure that language remains a sanctuary for humanity, akin to clear skies and clean water.

2.2 Language policy for rectifying the chaos of network language

Structuring and upholding virtual order is a paramount objective in the endeavor to foster language harmony in

China. The development and enforcement of internet censorship policies have emerged as robust and occasionally forceful measures for regulating online conduct (Varis et al., 2010). In Wang, Juffermans, and Du's work, they have summarized some concrete policies completed for the regulation of Internet language (Wang, Juffermans, & Du, 2016). International media outlets such as The New York Times and The Guardian have extensively reported that China's internet censorship system is the strictest in the world in that Chinese Internet censorship is a new and overt form of policing in response to this phenomenon of globalization (Wang, Juffermans & Du, 2016). In 2016, the Ministry of Education and the National Language Commission released the "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Language and Script Undertaking", which aims to accelerate the legal, standard, and informational construction of language and script, enhance citizens' language proficiency, and establish a harmonious and healthy linguistic environment. Nevertheless, research on language policies specifically targeting online language governance is left to be desired. Most studies on language policy focus on the impact of implementing monolingual or multilingual policies on learners' second language abilities in the field of second language acquisition (Evans, 2009). Others examine how language policies are formulated to protect linguistic diversity and safety in open-source internet searches or explore language policies in different countries.

3. Conclusion

This article has discussed how language has been changing on the Internet. It has also explored how the relatively recent and rapid changes under the auspices of Computer-mediated communication have unleashed new variations of buzzwords. The essence of internet slang is the evolution of language in the era of the internet. It carries different labels, such as "Internetese" or "netlingo". This new form of discourse can be seen as a transgression of formal language and a variant form of language. Moreover, this diversity continues to evolve significantly. However, it can be said that with the development and increasing complexity of technology, linguistic challenges are to be expected. The excessive proliferation of internet slang is bound to affect the proper use of language. They reflect drawbacks such as reading difficulties, spelling errors, and cognitive laziness. Therefore, there is a need to dig into how and in what ways netlingo is used properly on the Internet. As Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out in his language-game theory, language games have rules. Therefore, we are required to emphasize the practical application of language by adhering to unified rules and policies as well as placing language within specific contexts to give it clear meaning. This approach enables successful communication between speakers and listeners.

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