

The Emergence of Internet Language and Its Influence on Chinese

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Abstract. Internet language, a kind of communicative language appeared on the internet along with the boom of the Internet, has drawn much attention for its conspicuous characteristics. From sociolinguistic perspective, this paper explores the social causes for language variation. Then it analyses the social causes of internet language variation.

Keywords: Internet language, Emergence, Influence.

1. Introduction

In the past decades, the Internet language has undergone dramatic development in China, which, consequently, poses great impact on Chinese. This influence aroused much attention in the society. Some people frown completely on the penetration of Internet language into Chinese, while others hold the opposite opinion. This paper aims to conduct the tentative study on the emergence of the Internet language and its influence on Chinese, and finally propose what attitudes people should adopt towards this phenomenon.

The Internet language has been the marked symbol reflecting the characteristics of the information era. The rise of Internet enables people to effect communication with quite a different and unprecedented channel, which gives importance to the Internet interaction. "The Internet has been in the trend to penetrate into every aspect of people's life and a language, with the unique and systematic form of its own, has prevailed in the cyberspace and is widely accepted by netizens." (Yu Genyuan, 2001) The Internet has posed impact on both people's daily life and language use. Thus, the great influence of the Internet has aroused the attention of massive researchers and much effort has been put to uncover the mystery. In a broad scope, the Internet language is regarded as the terms or specific words and phrases related to the Internet or computer, such as mouse, hardware and virtual space, or communicating language employed by netizens. However, the narrow sense of Internet language indicates to the frequently used words or phrases by netizens for cyber communication in virtual chattering room or BBS. The paper focuses on the latter definition of Internet language—the language form based on the simplified Chinese with the assistance of Chinese Pinyin, English letters, symbols and numbers. As a communication mode existing in cyberspace, the Internet language has intensively reflected not only the achievements of science, technology and Internet but also the interpersonal relationship; thus, the study on Internet language cannot be conducted without the attention paid to relationship between language and society.

2. Major Reasons for the Emergence of Internet Language

There are many reasons for the emergence of Internet language. It is the interaction of series of complex reasons and factors.

(1) The way of Internet interaction makes Internet context has many characteristics, such as equality, the separation of behavior and responsibility, and the random role-play. It provides the context condition for the emergence of Internet language.

(2) Language is active, and it is a continual process of the ebb and flow. One of the most characteristics of language is active, which partly emerges from the society, and partly emerges from supersession. Every epoch has its own popular variety. With the social development, the old variety constantly disappears, while the new variety takes an upper hand, such as modern Chinese takes the place of classical Chinese. All these prove that language is in development. Internet language could

be viewed as a variety of new era. As a matter of fact, language could gain the approval of a certain sorts of people and become popular in a certain circle, which is an indisputable phenomenon that language is vigorous and energetic. Its existence and development have certain sound reasons.

(3) Internet provides the objective condition and a communication environment. Internet language could provide massive information, not in terms of large quantity, but also in terms of various form. However, the keyboard input affects the rate of information input. In order to improve the input rate, it is necessary to find a convenient and swift substituting pattern. Number, no doubt, becomes a priority. The majority of netizens chooses the Chinese pinyin system as the input, which is an objective reason of the usage of many frequent words or phrases to replace the homophones. In addition, the Internet expense also exerts a passive impact on the netizens, who simply pay attention on the rate, regardless of the correct forms. This also simplifies the Internet language. Under the influence of communication pattern, various kinds of expressions and the combination of action symbols emerge to achieve vividness and vitality.

(4) There are also reasons come from the social cultural factors. Wardhaugh (2000: 202) pointed out the social factors of the language change after a serious study of language variety. First, the language users always wish to enter into a higher social community, so that they don't feel inferior to others. Second, they want to identify themselves different from others. Third, they could be comforted if their cyber friends admit them as a member of netizens. Last, they are forced by the linguistic marketplace, in other words, they are afraid of being lost by the linguistic marketplace of Internet language.

On one hand, Internet language, to some degree, represents the new-tech and modern beings; therefore, it is regarded as a prestige communicational style. Naturally, lots of netizens, who want to elevate their social status, are attracted by the Internet language communication. Apart from this, some netizens want to show their solidarity with the other netizens, or they use the Internet language in order to obtain approval from others.

On the other hand, Internet language is a language used by a special group—netizens. The netizens are mostly the young people with the average age of 27, who are called X-day (Qin Xiubai, 2003). Most of them have received the higher education with a middle higher salary. "The young are always the pioneers for the language change." (Wardhaugh, 2000) Generally speaking, young people's language is active, vivid and creative. They not only can create some new expressions or particular symbols, but also are capable of accepting them as quickly as possible. That's the reason why it is not uncommon to see the young use the Internet language as a language variety.

3. The Influence on Chinese

3.1 The Positive Influence

3.1.1 Internet Language Accelerates the Development of Language

The famous linguist Chen Yuan asserts that "Language variation is a phenomenon occurring on any kind of active language frequently, thus it is developing not in accordance with human's will. A language will be rigid and dead without variation." "Variation is a common social linguistic phenomenon which exists objectively." Internet language qualifies the characters of simplification, shortcut and vividness, which meets the needs of the netizens and brings freshness and activeness to language as well. Furthermore, the usage of a large quantity of new words, borrowing words, letters and numbers, which enrich and develop the Chinese in the lexical layer.

3.1.2 Internet Language Arouses the Development of the Traditional Education Methods, Policies and Consciousness

Reading, as one of the three footstones of traditional education in society, under the attack of the Internet culture, is experiencing "a heavy fission". Comparing to the traditional reading method, reading in the Internet forms its own characteristics and advantages. The first point is the interaction during the reading. Internet technology brings the revolution of reading. Reading in Internet is beyond the paper text, and what the netizens read is the information collection with interwoven nodes. Each

of the nodes is concentrated information net which act to the reader with emanative and non-linear ways of thought. Readers in the Internet discover that the way of information transference is so attractive and stimulating that they prefer to read more in the Internet. Moreover, the BBS serves a free space for netizens to talk what they are interested in or what they are good at. "Interaction is the life energy of Internet reading," one computer expert says. There are also other advantages of Internet reading, such as, the opening of the reading environment, abundance of the reading materials, freedom of publishing comments. These entire Internet reading advantages stimulate and liberate the readers' imagination and creativeness.

3.2 The Negative Influence

3.2.1 It Makes Language Nonstandard

Internet language is the direct result from the starter to receiver, and there is no intermediate level to edit. The author is hard to avoid some carelessness, deficiency and negligence. Thus, there often appears the nonstandard Internet language. It includes the following aspects. First, it do not conform to grammar standard, such as, "好拒绝", "很风景". Second, it makes a farfetched comparison, such as "to fall in love" speaks as "to prime procedure", "be passionately in love" speaks as "to upgrade link" or "super link". Third, it tends to vulgar and coarse, and some popular usage of Internet language lacks refinement, such as "to invite to dinner" speaks as "to eat the rich", and "the lady" speaks as "toilet paper". Fourth, it abuses homophones. The input of Chinese characters is more complex than that of English letters. Due to the restriction of pinyin system, the identical pronunciation is pretty common. Besides, netizens usually pursue the rate to communicate at the expense of the correct form. Under this circumstance, there exist large quantity of homophones, more exactly, wrong characters, for instance, "to telephone somebody" speak as "大点化". Fifth, it distorts the meaning. The distortion usually brings about the ironical meaning to create surprised and new effect, for example, "lovely"(可爱) refers to "one is not to be loved". (可怜没人爱) This situation spoils the purity of language, causes the confusion of language, affects the comprehension for language, and in turn produces the barrier of language communication. Sixth, infantilism arises. Netizens, the old and the young alike, prefers to commit infantilism in Internet language. One salient feature is to be childish. In their language, "一般" speaks as "一般般", "坏蛋" speaks as "坏坏". Seventh, it becomes the mixture of Chinese characters and English letters. Such as, "I 服 U", and "一切 OK". It is an evident harm whatever to Chinese characters or to English letters. Last, the random abbreviation and the overflow of number symbols bears a heavy burden.

3.2.2 It Results in Degeneration of Reading Concentration and Appreciation

Although Internet reading has the reciprocal, open-minded, and rich traits, however, because the enormous information is rich and discrete, with regards special study task, the useless and even rubbish information is in the larger proportion, while useful information is covered by the useless information. The chance to gain the intact benefit without any instruction is vague. It is said that Internet reading is a popular and fast-food reading. What we gain from it is visual comfort and superficial enjoyment, instead of learning by heart. Li Au view it as the synonym of "toilet literature", maybe it sounds extreme, but it indicates some negative effects of Internet reading.

3.2.3 It Gives Rise to Language Pollution and Language Violation, and Seriously Affects the Development of Internet Culture

The virtual characteristic of Internet communication makes netizens' identity, behavioral pattern and behavioral goal hidden and falsified, which provides considerable convenient for lies, irresponsible abuse, and false information, and is escaped from traditionally moral condemnation. The major serious problem is some language pollution and language violation, which usually makes the appearance on BBS and other Internet forums. Netizens constantly dispute with each other violently and carry on personal attack.

4. Conclusion

As the popularization of the computer use, Internet language leads the fashion of the language today. Internet language as an “uncommon” language, which created by the Chinese, English letters, numbers and even pictures, has already jump out from the virtual space and leap to the real life. Then, what should it be regarded as?

Firstly, since Internet language is seen as a language variety, we should consider it as a language phenomenon. From view point of the eventual function of communication facility, Internet language variety does function to communicate in the virtual community—this probably is the adjustment variety made by the Chinese language in order to meet the actual need for the Internet communication. The purpose of the language use is to express oneself or communicate with others. As long as we could achieve this purpose, it is reasonable to help the language go far as it does.

Secondly, the essential of the Internet inter-personal communication belongs to the oral language communication. Oral exchange is casual, individual, inter-acting and changeable, so is the Internet oral exchange. No matter what kind of style is adopted, it is good if the communication could go well—on misunderstanding, no embarrassment, no conflict—which also is the only purpose of communication. Based on this, which symbol applied to transfer information is not important; rather, what symbol does the communicators master is the most critical problem during their communication. If the communicators could understand each other with one language symbol, information between them naturally could be moved completely.

Therefore, it is reasonable for the existence of Internet language. Some of the Internet language is irregular or incorrect, while others are innovational or variational; thus, we should hold the inclusive attitude towards to it. Language is the most important tool for human’s communication, so we should follow the common rules of language regularities. However, for what we follow the language rules? The answer is undoubtedly to achieve successful communication instead of communication for regularity.

At the same time, it is necessary to point out that there indeed exist grammatical irregularities during the Internet language variation, which take some disadvantages to the development of Chinese and the adolescent education. This is the reason why there are so many people resist the emergence and overspreading of the Internet language, especially in the groups of young people.

It is evident that the development of the Internet language is an inevitable trend. Standing on the reasonable point, we should drive the scientific aspects into our further studying and living. For those disadvantages, we should learn to drop them so that our language could develop both healthy and advanced keeping pace with the time.

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