

An Ecolinguistic Approach to Epidemic Rumor Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Since the covid-19 pandemic started in early 2020, epidemic rumors become more serious, which can influence people's life and destroy the Atmosphere of public opinion. From the perspective of ecolinguistic, this research aims to study the Covid-19 epidemic rumor, taking some online typical epidemic rumors as examples, and studies the discourse characteristics of the online epidemic rumors through the content of the epidemic rumor information. The main purpose of this study is to improve people's ability to distinguish the epidemic rumors.

Keywords: *Ecolinguistic, Epidemic, Rumor, Discourse.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the internet, the number of Chinese netizen has reached a very high level, up to almost 964 million until December in 2020. The continuing growth of internet users provides the soil for the spreading of all kinds of rumors. Since January of 2020, the Covid-19 virus is epidemic in the world, accompanying with the various epidemic rumors in the internet or online. Recently, various new media (e.g., DouYin, KuaiShou) appear a lot, the internet has become an important medium for spreading rumors.

At the beginning of the new year, the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, followed by various online rumors about the epidemic, resolutely resisting rumors, not spreading rumors, not believing in rumors, not spreading rumors, become a hot topic of concern to the media and the people. The incident of "Wuhan handling 8 people who released false information" caused heated discussions, and the focus of people's attention was whether the information released by these eight "rumourers" was really a rumor or not. This incident has made people pay more attention to online rumors, and at the same time, it has further challenged the government and other relevant departments to dispel rumors. At the beginning of the epidemic, the increasing number of infected people put the public in an extremely sensitive and anxious atmosphere. It is of great academic and practical significance to study the discourse mechanism of these typical rumors.

At present, there have been some studies on Covid-19 rumors, but few use ecolinguistic view to do research.

Ecolinguistics studies the language system and pragmatic application from an ecological perspective, that is, the balance between language and ecology. Internet epidemic rumor discourse is a direct manifestation of breaking this balance and belongs to the category of disharmony discourse research. Ecolinguistics has no fixed theory, but all texts can be analyzed ecologically, of course including epidemic rumor discourse.

2. THE RELATED STUDIES ON RUMORS

The research on Internet rumors mainly involves the fields of communication, law, sociology, public relations, psychology, and discourse analysis linguistics. The rumor theories of these different disciplines have some reference significance for the research of Internet rumors. As one kind of rumors, epidemic rumors do not deviate from the basic connotation of rumors, but the main carriers of current spread are the Internet and various new medias. The research on Internet rumors mainly includes the following aspects:

2.1. Analysis on the Psychological and Sociological Reasons of Internet Rumors

The topic of online rumors is regarded as an academic issue and the research began with psychology. Carl Gustav Jung's psychological analysis and Leon

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory are preliminary studies of rumors in the field of psychology [1].

Through various experiments, American scholars define rumors as information that has appeared in the society, but has not been spread formally, also not has been officially confirmed or refuted. In the aspect of rumor psychology, Allport and Postman (2003) clarify the psychology of rumor from the perspective of social psychology [2]. French scholar Morin and American scholar Shibutani considered rumor as one social phenomenon [3].

Another French scholar, Cap Ferret paid attention to the important factor of the "source" of rumors and studied rumors from a sociological perspective. From the perspective of social psychology, DiFonzo and Podia investigated the whole process of "spreading rumors-spreading rumors-refuting rumors" in detail and objectively [4]. Domestic sociologists mainly analyze the social psychological factors implied in the generation and dissemination mechanism of Internet rumors, such as Guo Xiaolan (2015)'s "Social Psychology Research on Internet Rumors in Contemporary China" [5], Jiang Shenghong (2013)'s "Internet Rumor Response and Public Opinion Guidance" [6], Zhou Yuqiong (2012)'s "Research on Internet Rumors in Contemporary Chinese Society" [7].

In summary, both psychologists and sociologists believe that rumors are a naturally existing objective phenomenon, and both pay attention to the objectivity of rumors but ignore the subjective factors such as attitudes, opinions, and beliefs implicit in rumors.

2.2. Analysis on Internet Rumors from the Perspective of News Dissemination

Kattenberg's research analyzes the rumors found in the APP software commonly used in foreign mobile phones [8]; Powers' research shows that there are two sides to Internet rumors, and selects five Internet rumors with relatively bad influence in foreign countries for specific analysis[9]. Domestic scholars often study the characteristics of the spread of online rumors from the perspective of news dissemination, the transmission path, and the technical means to eliminate online rumors, such as Peng Lan (2012)'s "Introduction to Internet Communication"[10], Guo Qingguang (2011)'s "Communication Course"[11], etc. They started various studies from the characteristics of online media, especially trying to add power interference mechanisms to the process of spreading rumors.

2.3. Quantitative Research on Internet Rumors

Natural science researchers represented by mathematics and physics have gradually begun to study online rumors. They use complex network theory to

carry out quantitative research, which is different from psychology, sociology, and journalism. Quantitative research through the establishment of mathematical models for rumor spreading originated in the 1960s, among which the most representative ones are the DK model proposed by mathematicians Daley and Kendal [12], Maki and Thompson proposed the MT model [13].

In short, judging from the existing research results at home and abroad, the integration between disciplines is not enough. Few scholars really pay attention to the language itself of online rumors from the perspective of linguistics. Based on the research of Professor Arran Stubbe (2015) [14], this study attempts to provide a new interpretation of online rumors from the perspective of ecolinguistics, so as to help people better understand and pay attention to the cognitive dissemination and recognition mechanism of online rumors. In addition, ecological linguistics is to criticize the language forms that destroy the ecology (Internet rumors and discourse are also one of them), which helps us find the balance that stimulates the protection of the language ecology of human beings.

3. DATA AND RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study selects a number of typical online epidemic rumors in the fight against new Covid-19 in 2020 for discourse analysis from the perspective of ecolinguistics. And it refers to the cognitive communication analysis data of many online rumors cases, and use the "process-event analysis method" to conduct systematic data analysis to make it more objective and scientific.

This topic is based on the research of other disciplines, mainly from the perspective of ecolinguistics, and draws on Laswell's "5W" model, namely Who (who), Says What (saying what), In Which Channel (through What channel), To Whom (to whom), and With What Effect (what effect) [15], follow the research idea of "propose problems-analyze problems-solve problems", after reviewing the relevant literature and first-hand materials collected in the early stage, this study sorts out and does research, comprehensively and systematically analyzes the various elements of online rumors dissemination in WeChat and other environments in public health events such as the Covid-19 epidemic, and focuses on the cognitive dissemination mechanism of online rumors spread through new media such as WeChat and DouYin.

This study analyzes targeted measures in the entire process of dissemination of online rumors in public health events such as the new Covid-19 epidemic, including the main body of the dissemination of online rumors, transmission paths, dissemination motivations, and dissemination content. At the same time, it draws on relevant foreign research experience from ecolinguistics, and combines it with the research and analysis of

Internet rumors in public health events such as the new crown pneumonia epidemic in China.

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

Ecolinguistics is interdisciplinary in nature and characteristics, and it is not limited to a certain subject. The research of relational ecolinguistics mainly discusses the relationship with other disciplines. Ecolinguistics has a connection with metaphor. The ecolinguistics of the Haugen (1970) model is metaphorical [16], comparing the relationship between language and speech community to the relationship between living things and the natural environment [17].

Discourse analysis of eco-criticism is a good way for this study. It focuses on the consciousness and behaviors in the ecosystem that are not conducive to the ecological environment and the harmonious coexistence of various organisms. For example, Internet epidemic rumors are the destructive language activities of mankind to nature. The harmonious discourse analysis is the specific one, which was proposed by Huang Guowen (2016) is a research path to explore the discourse analysis of ecocriticism [18]. Harmonious discourse analysis highlights the harmony of discourse in a specific cultural context, that is, the harmony between the language system and the natural ecosystem (p71). Eco-criticism discourse analysis mainly involves ecological discourse. Harmonious discourse analysis focuses on looking at problems from the perspective of “improved” and “constructive”, and emphasizes the meaning of “choice” and “relationship” in the ecosystem. The research methods of ecolinguistics represented by ecocriticism discourse analysis are text analysis and corpus analysis. This study uses a lot of present epidemic rumor discourses as text and corpus analysis, and gets the following results.

4.1. The Main Types and Characteristics of online

The rumors in public health events, such as the new Covid-19 epidemic rumors, appear a lot. To study online rumors, we must first understand its types, analyze the differences and connections between the types of online rumors and other types of rumors, and then start from the types of online rumors, explore the common characteristics of various types of rumors, and analyze these characteristics and the strengths and weaknesses of various online platforms. Finally, it should connect the links between features.

4.2. An Analysis of the Cognitive Motivation of online Rumors

From the perspective of ecolinguistics, in public health events such as the new Covid-19 epidemic rumors are explored. Internet rumors are generated either

because of “the truth is unknown” or because some people have “ulterior motives”. The internet rumors we encountered all reflected the news of internet rumors. In addition to news, online rumors are also social. This study further explores the basic characteristics of online rumors and analyzes the social psychological mechanism behind online rumors through the analysis of various online rumors that appeared in public health events, such as the new Covid-19 epidemic.

4.3. The Evolution and Diffusion Mechanism of Internet Rumor Discourse

From the view of ecolinguistics, through the empirical research and data collation of many typical cases of network rumors spreading, this study analyzes the stages and key nodes of the evolution and spread of network rumors, and further understands the spreading laws and spreading mechanisms of network rumors, and formulate specific and accurate good governance strategies on this basis, for reference by government departments.

Through combing and researching the literature and first-hand materials related to online rumors and discourses collected in the previous period, comprehensively and systematically analyze the spread of online rumors in public health events, such as the new Covid-19 epidemic in new media environments, e. g., WeChat, DouYin, and KuaiShou. Each element of the research focuses on the cognitive dissemination mechanism of online rumors disseminated through these new media. At the same time, it analyzes targeted measures during the entire process of dissemination of online rumors in public health events such as the new Covid-19 epidemic, including the main body of the dissemination of online rumors, transmission paths, dissemination motives, and dissemination content.

5. CONCLUSION

The new Covid-19 epidemic is a major public health emergency, which poses a major challenge to our country’s medical and health system and also has a major impact on our country’s economy and society. The various online rumors and discourses that appeared in this epidemic are also particularly noticeable, and they are worthy of our cognitive recognition and research from all angles. The research of this study has certain reference value and theoretical reference value for the research of language monitoring and system construction serving national governance, and the research of language civilization construction in the new era.

All in all, this research will play a certain auxiliary role in further promoting the research of public opinion response and governance in major public health emergencies. In extraordinary times, it is even more necessary to abide by the law, remain rational, and do a

good job of protection. We will resolutely investigate and deal with illegal acts such as fabricating, spreading rumors, spreading rumors on the Internet, disturbing public order, and so on. Creating and spreading rumors in WeChat groups can mislead netizens, causing adverse social effects, and disrupt social order, which are strictly forbidden.

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