



Study on the Characteristics of Short Video in Chinese Dialect and the Reasons for Its Popularity

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Abstract. With the continuous development of new media platforms, the categories of short video have become various. Recently, one of the most popular short video category is the short videos with all the actors speaking dialect. Due to the vigorously promoting Mandarin in the mainland China, the use and spread of dialects has been hindered. However, with help of the prevalence of the dialect short videos, many Chinese dialects go back to the public. The rise of dialect short video will become a new form of spreading Chinese dialect and local culture. Why the dialect short videos can gain such popularity today is a question worth exploring. Therefore, this paper analyses the creation characteristics of dialect short videos on several new media platforms. According to the results of the research, the authors believe that the main reason for its popularity are the search for identity of the dialect users, the strengthened perceptibility of videos through the defamiliarization effect and the enhanced cultural power of the masses in participatory culture.

Keywords: Dialect short videos · Identity · Participatory culture · Defamiliarization theory · Reasons analysis

1 Introduction

According to the 49th Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China released by the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), as of December 2021, the number of online video users in China reached 975 million, among which 934 million were users of short-video Apps or websites, accounting for 90.5% of the total Internet users [1]. With the rapid development of short video, dialect short video was born. The dialect short video refers to the short video using dialect as its main language, which has various forms, including dialect dubbing, songs, teaching, dialogue, sitcom and so on [2]. Taking TikTok as an example, as of June 20, 2022, the total views of short videos under

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the “dialect” tag on the platform reached 27.9 billion. The popular dialects including Cantonese, Sichuanese, dialect of northeast area and Henan dialect. Nowadays, Mandarin education is vigorously promoted and dialects are gradually declining. Because of the popularity of the dialect short videos, the distinctive regional cultures in China are vividly demonstrated, which help the audience feel the charm of dialect and stimulate the enthusiasm of content production of the ordinary and unprofessional people. Therefore, an in-depth study of dialect short video has great practical significance.

The following paper will be mainly divided into two parts. First is the analysis on the short video creation characteristics from three aspects: the narrative mode, the shooting perspective, and the language features. Subsequently, the main reasons for the popularity of dialect short videos will be discussed from the perspective of the identity of dialect users, the defamiliarization effect of the dialect short videos, and the enhancement of cultural power of masses in participatory culture.

2 The Creation Characteristics and Function of Dialect Short Video

2.1 Dramatic Narrative Methods

Conflict is the eye of Drama. Most dialect short videos with certain popularity are the dialect sitcoms. This kind of video takes specific dialect as the expression language and daily life as the expression content [3]. The “event” becomes “story” through intensifying conflicts and dramatic effects, and the characters’ personalities and psychological activities are reflected in the process of solving conflict. This kind of dramatic narration allows the dialect short video to quickly attract the audience’s attention and make them follow it. For example, the short video named *Jessica was blackmailed for selling fake goods, teaching the scheming male customer how to behave* on TikTok, creates three dramatic conflicts in just a minute and a half. At first, the female customer thinks that the lipstick bought in the exclusive shop is fake and argues with the saleswoman. Afterwards, the saleswoman questioned the lipstick is not purchased from this shop. In the end, the female customer confirmed that her boyfriend bought fake goods and quarrelled with him. The whole video uses Sichuan dialect, such as “shuailo” (“diu” in Madarin, means throw), “suanshazisuan” (“suanshenmesuan” in Madarin, means why should we let it go) and other words with strong life vitality. Amid the twists and turns of the dramatic effect, there is a sense of reality close to everyday life. The short videos tend to choose external conflicts because of its time-limit, usually three to five minutes, and straightforward way of expression, showing the conflicts between people and people intuitively, thus constantly stimulating the audience’s senses and making them feel cheerful.

2.2 Subjective Shooting Perspective

Different from the long shot and scenery shot in traditional videos, short videos mostly use the medium shot and close shot, which can effectively show the upper body language and facial expression of the characters, and help to reflect the posture and details of the characters [4]. The shooting angle of the dialect short videos is mostly the first-person

perspective, namely the point of view shot. The position of the camera is basically parallel to the subject. Such angle of shot reduces the visual distance and is conducive to strengthening the audience's sense of substitution. In addition, the dialect short video usually uses medium shot or close-up shot combining with mobile-side vertical screen viewing modes, which can strengthen the sense of face-to-face conversation, and better arouse the emotional resonance of the audience. For instance, a short video in Sichuan dialect titled *Relatives get together* during the Spring Festival released by the TikTok vlogger, Zheng Lifen er, uses the first-person perspective from the leading role "Xiao Fen". The shooting angle is basically parallel to the audience's eyes and makes full use of the middle shooting scale. Although the audience do not even see the outline of the house, they are able to capture the dialogue between the "mother" and the "relatives" and their expressions. As if the audience really feel the awkward situation of facing all kinds of tease from relatives at home every holiday, which prompted a collective response in the comments section: "Is that not my family?" and "This is exactly what happened to me."

2.3 Regional Language Features

Dialect short videos have obvious regional habits in terms of language, such as the high frequency of some local words or sentence patterns, and the pronunciation and intonation different from that of Mandarin. These regional characteristics are exactly the most prominent expression characteristics of dialect short videos. For example, in the short video released by Guozigege from Bilibili (a streaming video platform in China), *the Three Stooges* (an American comedy) is dubbed in Chongqing dialect, which includes many unique words and expressions, such as "Gaoyiha" ("shiyixia" in Madarin, means have a try), "Pangchou" ("henchou" in Madarin, means smell badly) and "langge" ("zenme" in Madarin, means why). Meanwhile, the audience spontaneously help explain the meaning of Chongqing dialect in the comment section and bullet screen, which invisibly spread the regional culture and the promote the dissemination of this short video.

What is more, the charm of dialect also lies in the expression of some words which would be more vivid through the dialect. For instance, video producer named Shu Zhong peach sister on TikTok uses the Sichuan dialect "Bashi" ("shushi" in Madarin, means comfortable) to express her comfort when she is eating some local cuisines, which illustrates that in some specific contexts, the use of dialect makes the emotional communication in short videos more accurate. In addition, the dialect also plays a different comic effect than Mandarin in short videos. For example, in the short video *Do Not Step on Tianjin Mushrooms* in Tianjin dialect, the uploader's unique intonation is as if he was speaking crosstalk, which is very humorous. Besides, the short video *When I Talk to My Dad* in dialects from all over China emphasizes the differences between Taiwan dialect, Jinzhou dialect and Tianjin dialect in order to achieve a dramatic effect with great contrast.

3 The Reasons for Dialect Short Videos' Popularity

3.1 Dialect Transmission Constructs Identity

The word “identity” originated from the Latin word *idem*, which means the same including the similarity and sameness of objective existence, pointing to the consistency of mental cognition and the resulting social relations [5]. Identity is an important concept in the culture study. Its basic meaning refers to the identity between an individual and a specific social culture [6]. The word always asks: Who am I? Where did I come from and where shall I go? Identity is not only individual, but also social [7]. For most people, identity is one of the most important factors affecting their language use. People's multiple identities construct a dynamic and constantly changing network. Language is characterized by communication, sharing and interaction. People can constantly weave and modify this network through language behavior. It can be said that any language behavior of people is the behavior of showing identity [8].

The modern society is a liquid society. People are separated from the close-knit geographical and kin social network and drift as isolated individuals in a world full of strangers. However, the dialect short videos emphasize the difference between the natives and the foreigners by using the dialect of a certain region, thus constructing a kind of cultural particularity. Dialect users watch or spread those dialect short videos to find people who speak the same or similar language to themselves, at the same time seek a sense of connection and belonging to a specific regional culture. In addition, dialect is also a symbol carrying the characteristics of local superiority.

Some dialects in the birthplace of celebrities, tourism areas and other prosperous areas are often more popular, such as Sichuan dialect, Cantonese. Native speakers are willing to popularize knowledge about these dialects to the public in the comment section or bullet screen, and in the process of sharing, they convey a sense of identity with pride, realizing the continuation and promotion of their original identity [8].

3.2 Defamiliarization Strengthen Perceptibility

In contrast to the dialect speaker's search for identity in the familiar mother tongue, the majority of the audience are outsiders of the dialects. Therefore, the defamiliarization effect brought by the dialect short videos may be an important factor to attract them. Defamiliarization is a theory put forward by the Russian writer Viktor Shklovsky in 1917. He believed that “the purpose of art is to provide the feeling of things as sight, not as recognition; The technique of art is the technique of making things strange, of blurring the form and increasing the difficulty and time of feeling” [9]. The precondition of artistic defamiliarization is the defamiliarization of language. Through the distortion and deformation of language, language can discard habitual meanings. Thus, the subject can get rid of the habitual perceptual experience, establish a new and strange relationship, bring the audience a novel feeling, and enhance their perceptibility [10].

Dialects are unique and different from the Mandarin, and the dialect short videos catch the eye of the audience with the help of this kind of strangeness. For example, the short video How to Integrate into Guangdong Dormitory Quickly released by a Bilibili uploader shows the different dialects and cultural characteristics of four roommates from

Fujian, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Guangdong provinces, although it is based on a rather everyday life scene Meet your new roommates. The use of dialect in this video not only conforms to some stereotypes of these regions, but also goes beyond the life experience of most people. The audience constantly wander around familiar topics and contents as well as unfamiliar languages and cultures, thus generating a strong sense of freshness and interest.

3.3 Enhanced Cultural Power of the Masses in Participatory Culture

The emergence of the short videos breaks through the original elite production barriers in the field of video media art, and makes the public participation become the main feature of its content production, laying the foundation for the carnival of short video consumption. American scholar Henry Jenkins proposed the concept of *participatory culture*, summarizing it as “a form of culture that invites fans and other consumers to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of new content” [11]. After entering the network era, participatory culture has broken through the specific “fan production” and “text re-creation based on mass culture production”, and become the mainstream mode of culture generation in the network society [12]. With the support of new media technology, grassroots users can actively participate in the process of short video creation, sharing and dissemination, and express their emotional appeals through this process. In fact, they have become the main force of the production of the dialect short videos. In addition, users’ feedback and interaction on a short video, such as commenting, reposting, tipping and communicating with the producers, will also provide emotional incentives and creative inspiration for the producers, thus promoting the secondary creation and content innovation and upgrading of the dialect short videos.

From the above production and interaction mechanism, the content production of the dialect short videos based on participatory culture has a positive impact on popularization and democratization. In this process, the cultural power of the masses is emphasized.

For a long time, Mandarin has occupied the position of mainstream culture, while the dialect speakers are often easily labelled as “poorly educated”, “rustic”, “vulgar” and so on. They are incompatible with the elite and urban culture. However, the popularity of the dialect short videos reflects the grassroots people’s resistance to marginalization and their struggle for the culture utterance right. Henry Jenkins also believes that “The meaning of the appropriated symbol lies not in its inherent meaning, but in the logic of its use to express resistance to the mainstream culture” [13]. The logic behind the participatory culture is also the resistance of subculture to the mainstream culture [14].

However, it should be made clear that the users of the dialect short videos are not equal to the subculture group. Instead, they are active in the mainstream and non-mainstream, whose behaviors should not be simply analyzed by the dualistic framework of “incorporation and resistance” but should be regarded as a relatively equal dialogue with mandarin, which represents the mainstream culture. In such a “dialogue”, dialect short videos follow mainstream values and actively show the general public the other side of stigmatization, which is the unique and attractive dialect culture. In the meanwhile, the mainstream culture is also getting closer to the dialect culture. People have a deeper understanding of local dialects and are more willing to use some dialect words in daily

life online and offline. This is not a contradiction or conflict, but harmonious coexistence and win-win.

4 Conclusion

Through the above research, this paper found that in the current booming short video market, the dialect short videos make up a large part because of its dramatic narrative methods, subjective shooting perspective and regional language features. Furthermore, the reasons for its popularity can be interpreted from different perspectives, including the search for identity of the dialect users, the strengthened perceptibility of videos through the defamiliarization effect and the enhanced cultural power of the masses in participatory culture.

However, the significance of the dialect short videos lies more in the spread of the cultures from different regions. Nowadays, the development of dialect gets into a dilemma. It is no doubt that the growth of the short videos has indeed provided new opportunities for the spread of dialects. Nevertheless, the production of the dialect short videos can lose its cultural value under the commercial logic and operation, which may lead to the vulgar content with the purpose to attract eyeballs and earn traffic. Thus, its own personality and creativity, as well as the cultural significance will be dispelled. Therefore, how to build a good dialect short video communication ecology, and how to promote the sustainable development of dialect culture still need to be investigated.

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