



A Brief Analysis of the Internet Buzzword "XX is basic, XX is not"

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Abstract. "XX is basic, XX is not" initially originated from the fashion discourse on short video platforms. Later, it quickly deviated from its original context in online dissemination and evolved into an expression template that can be reused across different scenarios. This article provides a general analysis of its dissemination path, semantic expansion, grammatical structure, pragmatic function, and reasons for its popularity. The study suggests that the widespread popularity of this expression is not only related to its internal characteristics such as fixed form, flexible substitution, and language economy, but also closely related to the needs of experience sharing, emotional expression, and entertainment dissemination in the online environment.

Keywords: Internet slang; construction; semantic extension; pragmatic function

1 Introduction

Internet buzzwords are an important manifestation of language innovation in the Internet era, recording the expression habits of netizens and reflecting the social psychology and communication mechanisms of a specific period. In recent years, short video platforms have continuously generated new expressions with strong template characteristics, among which "XX is basic, XX is not basic" has rapidly spread due to its strong replicability, distinct rhythm, and flexible evaluative colors.

This expression originally comes from the experience summary of Tiktok fashion blogger @Zhang Qi JIEJI on "how to make basic styles look chic". Initially, the main idea was that when one part of the overall look is relatively ordinary, the other part should have a sense of design, in order to create visual contrast. With the promotion of short videos, hashtags, and platform imitation mechanisms, this sentence structure has gradually moved away from the field of clothing and evolved into a general expression that can be used for sharing life experiences, product reviews, humorous ridicule, and even emotional roasts.

Over the past three years, the study of internet buzzwords has continuously garnered attention, with related achievements primarily focusing on two aspects: one is to start with case studies, such as the analysis of the semantic connotation, syntactic features,

and pragmatic functions of specific buzzwords like "city不city"[1]; the other is to explore the semantic mechanisms and interactive effects of specific expressions by combining construction grammar and discourse function [2]. Meanwhile, related research has also reviewed the methodological foundation of construction grammar research, pointing out that construction research should emphasize empirical corpora, frequency effects, and the complementary integration of multiple methods [3]. Furthermore, foreign scholars have also discussed formal rhetorical devices from the perspective of construction grammar, arguing that rhetorical devices should be further incorporated into construction grammar research [4]. Overall, research in the past three years has placed more emphasis on the dynamic generation, semantic generalization, and interactive functions of internet buzzwords, but there is still relatively little specialized research on the emerging template expression "XX is basic, XX is not basic".

Therefore, this article focuses on discussing the dissemination process, linguistic characteristics, and reasons for popularity of this catchphrase, in order to present its process of construction and generalization.

2 Dissemination and Expansion

Internet buzzwords are linguistic phenomena that emerge and spread widely in the online communication environment, often exhibiting distinct characteristics of the times, sociality, and innovativeness. They not only reflect the expression habits of netizens but also mirror the socio-cultural psychology and group interaction needs of a specific period[5].

"XX is basic, XX is not basic" was initially mainly active in the context of fashion dressing, with users imitating and reproducing around this sentence. Due to its obvious catchy nature, this expression is easily repeated orally, quoted in writing, and dubbed in videos, thus quickly breaking through the limitations of the circle and entering a broader network communication scenario.

In the process of dissemination, the semantic scope of "XX" has continuously expanded. It is no longer limited to clothing elements such as "upper body, lower body, underwear, outerwear", but can be replaced by various attribute dimensions such as "price, function, attitude, plot, method, time". As a result, this catchphrase has evolved from a single dressing formula into a "universal expression template" covering multiple fields such as life, learning, entertainment, and roasting, widely appearing in people's daily communication, achieving an expansion from the original dressing context to a cross-scene expression template.

3 Language Feature Analysis

Semantically, this buzzword firstly carries a clear original meaning. The original meaning of this buzzword mainly revolves around the contrast of "clothing style attributes". It can be understood as "in dressing, if one clothing element is basic, the corresponding element should be non-basic, achieving a sense of layering and sophistication in the overall look through style contrast". Essentially, it summarizes the dressing principle

of avoiding a pile of basic styles and overly complicated combinations. For example: "Want to make your commuting outfit not monotonous? Remember to keep the top basic and the bottom non-basic - a white shirt paired with a slit skirt, simple yet elegant."

In the process of secondary dissemination, users imitated and transformed the original expression, expanding from clothing matching to more abstract attribute expression. The semantics of "XX basic, XX not basic" gradually began to deviate, first from normal clothing decoration to abstract and funny clothing decoration, such as pairing with "upper body basic, lower body not basic" BGM, deliberately making their own fancy clothes eye-catching, and then extending from "clothing elements" to "multi-dimensional attributes of things", forming a universal semantic framework. At this point, the semantic generalization of "basic" is "features with universality, generality, and regularity"; 'Unbounded' corresponds to 'characteristics with specificity, differentiation, and extremism'; As a variable, 'XX' can refer to any aspect of a thing, such as 'function, price, material, attitude, effect, etc.'. But the extended meaning of this popular phrase can be divided into positive and negative meanings.

Firstly, the extended meaning of praise emphasizes the complementarity between "basic attributes" and "non basic attributes", highlighting the advantages and values of things. For example, this laptop has basic configuration (suitable for daily office work), but lacks portability (weighing only 1kg), making it particularly suitable for people who frequently travel. "

Another meaning of the extended meaning of praise is to continue using the phrase 'the upper body is basic, the lower body is not basic'. In some official communication contexts, this sentence structure is also borrowed to enhance the contrast and novelty of the object. For example, the video released by the official Beihai Fleet Tiktok shows that the new fleet not only represents the basic hull of the "basic model", but also represents the configuration of the "non basic model".

The semantics here highlight the "practical value" or "unique advantages" of things through the contrast between "basic" and "non basic", with a clear positive evaluation color.

The second is the extended meaning of derogatory meaning. Through the contrast between "basic attribute" and "non basic attribute", it reveals the defects, irrationality or negative characteristics of things, and expresses dissatisfaction, roast or sarcasm. At this point, "basic" often refers to "low-quality, perfunctory, and unexpected conventional states", while "non basic" refers to "terrible, extreme, or unreasonable states beyond the norm". The semantics mainly reinforce negative cognition through comparison. For example, the sentence 'salary foundation, work attitude is not foundation.' expresses dissatisfaction with low salary by comparing 'salary' with 'work attitude'; Here, the opposition between "basic" and "non basic" is no longer the complement of "routine and innovation", but the superposition of "low quality routine and extreme negative". Through semantic contrast, negative evaluation is strengthened, and it becomes an important language tool for the public to vent their dissatisfaction and carry out social roast. The phenomenon of expanding from primitive contexts to diverse evaluative contexts also reflects the characteristics of semantic variation and functional recombination of internet slang in social use.

From a grammatical perspective, the expression "XX is basic, XX is not basic" possesses the dual characteristics of "fixity" and "flexibility". It maintains the stability of the sentence structure while providing space for substitution and expansion in different contexts, mainly manifested in three aspects: sentence type, sentence pattern, and grammatical function. Firstly, in terms of sentence type, this expression is typically used as a declarative sentence. When it is used to objectively describe attribute differences between things or convey a certain empirical method, it often presents a relatively gentle tone without obvious emotional coloring, and a period is generally used at the end of the sentence. For example, "Breakfast is basic, dinner is not basic. Eating steamed buns for breakfast saves time, and you can cook two more dishes for dinner to supplement nutrition," is a typical empirical statement. Secondly, in terms of sentence pattern structure, "XX is basic, XX is not basic" is a compound sentence consisting of two predicate-subject clauses, forming a contrast and logical reinforcement relationship through the word "就". The preceding "XX is basic" serves as the topic, while the following "XX is not basic" provides supplementary explanation for the preceding sentence. Whether expressing positive or negative meaning, the core lies in highlighting attribute differences through the contrast between "basic" and "not basic". Here, "basic" is used as an adjective in the sentence to indicate "having basic attributes", and the subject in the subsequent clause is often omitted, relying on "就" to complete logical connection, which overall conforms to the Chinese expression tendency of "topic-explanation". Finally, in terms of grammatical function, this expression mainly has two usages. One is the usage as an independent sentence, which does not form structural relationships with other syntactic components, but independently undertakes the function of expressing opinions, suggestions, evaluations, or roasts. This is the most common form in online communication, often directly serving as titles, bullet comments, or comments, such as the title "Upper body is basic, lower body is not basic" in "Xiaohongshu". The other is the usage as the subject or object, but the frequency of occurrence is relatively low, usually seen in contexts where the popular internet phrase itself is discussed, summarized, or analyzed, such as "'XX is basic, XX is not basic' is currently very popular, and many bloggers use it to share life tips." Such expressions no longer simply undertake the function of evaluation, but become linguistic objects that are discussed and quoted.

The pragmatic function of the phrase "XX is basic, XX is not basic" is highly dependent on the specific context, and its expressive effect varies with different scenarios. Based on the semantic color and the difference in public psychological expectations, it can be roughly divided into two categories: "expected context" and "unexpected context". Firstly, in the expected context, this expression usually carries a positive or neutral meaning, mainly used for experience sharing, practical guidance, and positive evaluation. At this time, the contrast between "basic" and "not basic" reflects the complementary relationship between "ordinary and optimized", "conventional and highlight", which is in line with the public cognitive logic. For example, "This park has basic facilities, but the greening is not basic, making it suitable for walking and relaxing." Through the contrast between ordinary facilities and prominent greening, it concisely summarizes the characteristics of the park and achieves efficient information transmission. Secondly, in the unexpected context, this expression carries a more derogatory

tone, and its pragmatic function shifts to humor, negative roast, and ironic criticism. At this time, the contrast between "basic" and "not basic" often breaks conventional cognition, creating emotional effects through contrast. For example, "My roommate's alarm clock has a basic ringtone, but it rings at an untimely hour, which is not basic." This utilizes the contrast between "ordinary ringtone" and "ringing too early" to humorously express the troubles in life. Such usage usually conveys dissatisfaction with a light or humorous tone, reducing the aggressiveness of direct criticism while also enhancing the fun and dissemination of language.

4 Reasons for Popularity

Firstly, the phrase "XX is basic, XX is not basic" has a stable and clear structural framework, which is an important reason for its widespread dissemination. In this sentence pattern, "basic" and "not basic" form a sharp contrast, and the word "just" reinforces the logical relationship between the two. Users do not need to change the overall structure; they can quickly adapt it to different scenarios by simply replacing the content of "XX". For example, from "the upper body is basic, the lower body is not basic" in the field of fashion, to "the service is basic, the charge is not basic" in consumer roasts, the same expression framework is retained, greatly reducing the learning and usage threshold.

Secondly, this expression adheres to the principle of economy in online language. The entire sentence structure typically consists of only about ten characters, featuring a concise structure and distinct rhythm, devoid of complex modifiers. Yet, it can swiftly establish a strong contrast and convey the core attitude. This characteristic of "short sentences with high information content" is highly suitable for fast-paced online communication scenarios such as short video titles, bullet comments, and comment sections, making it easier to remember, replicate, and disseminate.

Thirdly, this expression possesses strong semantic flexibility and interest. "Basic" and "not basic" can take on various evaluative tones such as positive, neutral, or negative in different contexts, making it suitable for both experience sharing and humorous ridicule and emotional roasting. This flexibility broadens the scope of application of the expression and enhances the entertainment value and interactivity of language, making users more willing to imitate and recreate.

Fourthly, the expression "XX is basic, XX is not" satisfies the need for "experience compression" in online communication. Against the backdrop of accelerating information dissemination, users are more inclined to quickly acquire and share experiences through concise templates. This expression can condense complex experience summaries into a short sentence with a contrasting nature, making it not only a linguistic form but also gradually evolving into a practical and instrumental online expression template.

Fifthly, this expression caters to the emotional catharsis needs in contemporary online communication. Especially for young people, when facing work pressure, consumption issues, and life troubles, a light and humorous expression is more easily accepted. The use of "XX is basic, XX is not" in a derogatory context not only expresses dissatisfaction and roast, but also mitigates the aggressiveness of direct criticism

through a mocking tone. Therefore, it is more in line with the entertainment and emotional dissemination characteristics of online social interaction, and it is easier to form group resonance.

5 Conclusion

Overall, the expression 'XX is basic, XX is not basic' originates from the experience summary in the field of fashion, and has gradually been formalized and templated in the process of online dissemination, with significant expansion in semantic, grammatical, and pragmatic functions. It can not only be used for clothing suggestions, but also widely used in many scenes such as life experience sharing, product evaluation, humorous roast and emotional expression, reflecting a strong cross context communication ability. Its popularity reflects not only the pursuit of simplicity, flexibility, efficiency, and fun in online language, but also the practical needs of contemporary netizens in experience sharing, identity interaction, and emotional expression.

An examination of this catchphrase reveals that internet catchphrases are not merely "novel expressions" but rather discourse resources that continuously reproduce meaning within specific communication contexts. Moderate and accurate analysis of them aids us in better understanding the innovative mechanisms of contemporary Chinese in the online environment and its socio-cultural motivations.

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