

A Study of Chinese-English Codeswitching in Netspeak Through the Adaptation Theory

Yurong Huang

Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, 102600

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Abstract. This article aims to explore the Chinese-English codeswitching in netspeak with the help of the Adaptation Theory put forward by Verschueren. Based on the research and analysis, it is found that the Chinese-English codeswitching in netspeak mainly adapts to the linguistic reality, the social conventions as well as the psychological motivations, which will be discussed one by one in this paper.

1. Introduction

In literature, great efforts have been made to explore the functions or the motivations of codeswitching in bilingual communications. And the essence of these researches is to answer the question of why people switch codes in their communication. Gumperz (1982)[1] has pointed out six functions and reasons of codeswitching: quotations, addressee specifications, interjections, reiteration, message qualification, personalization versus objectivization. This typology of functions opens up the possibility of exploring codeswitching functions directly and is followed up by many other researchers. Based on other researchers' approaches or study results, Appeal and Muysken (1987)[2] put forward taxonomy of five functions of codeswitching generalized as referential function, directive function, expressive function, phatic function and meta-linguistic function.

It seems that how to analyze the functions and reasons of codeswitching depends on different research focus and the context in which the codeswitching occurs. As far as the Chinese-English codeswitching is concerned, Verschueren's[3] adaptation theory is a more appropriate theory to explain it. In his theory, Verschueren claims that language use is a process of language choice which demands different degree of consciousness. This choice can be made at any language level, phonetically, phonologically, morphologically, syntactically and so on. And he explores the reasons why people can switch the codes. According to his discussion, language users switch codes in order to adapt to the linguistic reality, the social conventions and the psychological motivations. Belonging to one kind of codeswitching, Chinese-English codeswitching is also without exception. The following is the detailed explanations of why the codeswitching is applied in netspeak.

2. Chinese-English codeswitching as adaptation to the linguistic reality

In terms of Chinese-English codeswitching, adaptation to linguistic reality refers to the adaptation to the linguistic existence and linguistic properties of Chinese and English respectively. This is also a very important reason of why Chinese-English codeswitching is applied in netspeak.

2.1 Adaptation to the linguistic existence of Chinese and English

It is obvious that every language or language variety possesses some different and specific linguistic existence with which other languages do not share. As a result, the lexical gap between the two languages involved could be filled by the exertion of codeswitching. By reason of dissimilar geographical positions, natural environment, culture and social practice and the like, the linguistic existence of Chinese and English that are applied to express their objective respectively can not be

in complete agreement. In the situation when the linguistic existence is possessed uniquely by either Chinese or English, the utilization of them is a helpful strategy to be adopted by the language users. The following is an example:

一名服务人员发誓亲眼看到一位来自捷克的乐队成员把包括钢琴和架子鼓在内的全套家伙搬进了套房；几天前，还有 1 斤的 Almas 鱼子酱，2 根特立尼达雪茄和 4 瓶 Krug 顶级香槟被一位来自南方的保险商人一次性买走。。。。。。

(<http://blog.renren.com/share/228570221/16021137329>)

In this example, the English words “Almas” and “Krug” are inserted into the Chinese discourse. It is for the purpose of adapting to the linguistic conventions since there are no their equivalents in Chinese.

2.2 Adaptation to the linguistic features of Chinese and English

Linguistically speaking, different languages or language varieties can express the same meaning. However, because of the difference in geography, culture or other factors, each language maintains some specific features. Adaptation to the linguistic features of Chinese and English embraces the token of the Chinese-English codeswitchings that are caused by the dissimilarities in the semantic features possessed by the Chinese and English expressions. Semantic features here consist of the semantic coverage or the subtlety that a particular Chinese or English expression contains. When people communicate online, they are probably aware of the subtlety that an English or Chinese expression could convey compared with its counterpart or functional equivalent in the other language or language varieties. With this linguistic features in mind, they often apply the Chinese-English codeswitching in netspeak as a realization of their adaptation to the linguistic reality. For example:

在 Boston 这个小镇，每天都会有各种各样的 party，你会看到有人每天沉迷于社交场合吃喝玩乐声色犬马不求上进，偶尔听到这群人各种毁三观的故事；也会看到有过着苦逼的人 PHD 或者 Post-doc 生活有时候还被嘲笑为“nerdy”；

(<http://blog.renren.com/share/449275890/16057929722>)

The English word “party” is widely used among young people. In English, this word mainly refers to a social event which is often held in someone’s home where people enjoy themselves by dancing, drinking, singing, talking and eating etc. People who are familiar with the western culture will easily realize that a party is a normal social activity for westerners and that it can be held for various purposes with the main theme of entertainment or fun. The counterpart of “party” in Chinese is “聚会” which is defined in a more formal sense and somewhat different from its meaning in English. In Chinese, “聚会” is often a more formal occasion where people get together for a specific purpose. Besides “聚会”, other Chinese expressions are “聚一聚” or “聚聚” which are all verbal phrases. The differentiation between “聚聚” and “party” is that the former focuses more on eating, thus when we hear someone says “今晚聚聚吧”, in the first place it probably implies that they will have a meal together tonight. The speaker in the above example obviously adapts to the linguistic reality, especially the linguistic gaps between the English word “party” and the Chinese word “聚聚”, by adopting the Chinese-English codeswitching for more appropriate linguistic choices.

3. Chinese-English codeswitching as adaptation to the social conventions

Language is the production of society and reflection of culture. It cannot dissociate from real social life and exist in isolation. Economic, political, geographical, social, psychological and cultural factors interact frequently to act on language. When people use language, their words or speeches can express their value system, culture heritage, and moral norms. Thus, languages become the mirror of a society or community. Just as Trudgill (1982:5)[4] remarks: “Language as a

social phenomenon is closely tied up with the social structure and the value systems of the society”. Codeswitching, as a common phenomenon of language use, is also in agreement with the above-mentioned general rules. And being one kind of codeswitching, the Chinese-English codeswitching is not exceptional.

In this paper, the Chinese-English codeswitching as adaptation to the social conventions chiefly refers to the instances of codeswitching as results of the language users’ recognition of social conventions among which culture is one of the most indispensable ingredients. There is a close relationship between culture and language. Language is the precondition of the existence of culture and the symbolic representation of culture. It is influenced and shaped by culture. And at the same time, language carries the key information of culture and facilitates the spread of culture. Languages themselves cannot be fully understood unless in the context of culture in which they are inextricably embedded.

China is a nation with a history of thousands of years, and she keeps her own social conventions, which successfully distinguishes herself from other cultures. Chinese culture is deeply influenced by Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. With their influence, Chinese people have cultivated the general ideas of the society and life. We know what to speak and how to speak in certain context or discourse. With these concepts in mind, when people communicate online, they also pay attention to the cultural difference. They make use of the cultural difference to realize the cultural solidarity, that is, to adopt some concepts in one culture and then to interject them to the native culture. For example:

本人前段时间注册了一个号称，中国大型、严肃、婚恋交友网站——“世纪佳缘”。然后有人给写信，我看该男子长的挺标致的资料写的也很详细，然后就互留了 qq 号码，可是一直没在线就没聊，然后前几天他上线了居然上来就问我：“One-night stand 吗？”我当时就懵了怎么还有人在上面找这个，是我太保守了还是大家太 open 了，这尺度我实在接受不了啊~~~~
(<http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-47-1268874-1.shtml>)

In this example, “One-night stand” and “open” are inserted into the Chinese course. The Chinese-English codeswitching is used here possibly because “One-night stand” can be translated into “一夜情” in Chinese, which is a controversial topic among Chinese and can not be accepted by us. So the codeswitching here is to adapt the social conventions.

4. Chinese-English codeswitching as adaptation to the psychological motivations

One of the properties of linguistic adaptation is its consciousness. It is without doubt that some cases of adaptations are in a higher degree of consciousness, while others are made in a comparatively lower degree of consciousness. The degree of consciousness is somewhat related to the speakers’ communicative intentions or their psychological motivations.

The psychological motivations in this paper refer to the language users’ motives or intentions behind their application of Chinese-English codeswitching in netspeak. The speakers’ psychological motivations is their communicative purpose, which influence their code choice and communicative strategy. In other words, what the speakers conveys relates to what and how they do it. In the codeswitching, the adaptation to the psychological motivations is also the adaptation to the communication purpose.

In netspeak, netizens apply codeswitching for different communicative strategies, adapting to various intentions, realizing kinds of communicative purposes, which is rather complicated, as the following analysis shows.

有个人刚学外语，这天在街上走，不小心踩了一个老外的脚，那人急忙说：“I’m sorry.”老外也礼貌的说了句：“I’m sorry too.”那人一听，急忙说了句：“I’m sorry three.”老外一听傻了，问：“What are you sorry for?”那人无奈的说：“I’m sorry five.”

(<http://www.kaixin001.com/records/127966811/1411673877458310.html>)

In this example, the Chinese-English codeswitching is used here as the strategy of humor gaining. Besides this strategy, netizens use codeswitching as other strategies, including foreign flavor gaining strategy, emphasis strategy, discriminating strategy, explanation strategy, authenticity-keeping strategy, convenience strategy, decoration strategy and the like, to keep the communication smooth.

5.Summary

To sum up, the application of Chinese-English codeswitching in netspeak is to adapt to the linguistic reality of Chinese and English, especially the linguistic existence and the linguistic features, to the social conventions, and to the psychological motivations. The adaptation is one of the reasons why more and more netizens apply English when they communicate online.

References

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