A Tentative Study on Cyber language

Shu-Bo ZHAO

Jilin University of Finance and Economics, Changchun City, Jilin Province, China

59139588@qq.com

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Abstract: The rapid development of the Internet has brought a new world that is quick, convenient, and colorful to the current globe. It has also created a new culture, namely, cyber culture, which is now deeply influencing people’s lifestyle and changing their concept as well. A great number of people communicate frequently in this virtual world with a new form of language, which is defined as cyber language in this thesis. In recent years, disputes on cyber language take shape with both positive and negative attitude. This paper focuses on the classification and causes of cyber language.

Introduction

The 21st century is recognized as the information era as well as the e-times. Cyberspace is keeping an astonishing pace in affecting people’s daily life, producing a new style in language—cyber language. Cyber language stems from nature language, but differs from nature language, as well as keeping a close link with it.

Along with the development of the Internet, the vocabulary of network is gradually coming into vogue and people are beginning to pay attention to it. Because of its peculiar expressions, it has made a notable impact on traditional language. Because the majority of the netizens are young people, they are liable to accepting and using new things. They use new words and expressions not only on the Internet, but also in their real life.

In recent years, disputes on cyber language take shape with both positive and negative attitude. Nowadays, linguists are making increasingly rich research on cyber language with the widespread application of it. Some compile the cyber language dictionary, some study cyber language from the aspects of pragmatics and rhetoric. Some study it from the aspects of semiotics and cognitive psychology, while others study it from the relationship of cyberspace, cyber language and Chinese characters application. The research on cyber language will give strong momentum to our language research.

Definition of Cyber language

Due to its US origins, the Internet as a whole was a totally English medium. The language of English appears to be the most prevalent and common language on the Internet. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 80% of the Internet was in English, which was directly reflected and supported by a 1997 survey by Babel, a joint initiative of the Internet Society and Alis Technologies, the first major study of language distribution on the Internet. In addition, the statistics concerning global online populations provided by www.Cyberatlas.com proved that 70% of Internet users were native speakers of English or speakers taking English as the second or foreign language. (David Crystal, 2001:216) It is a widespread impression on people that the language of English is compulsory on the Internet, thus came out ‘netlish’ or ‘weblish’ referring to the language used on the Internet, for ‘-lish’ in the two words are both from the word ‘English’. However, as the Internet is an electronic medium, it offers a home for all languages. Any language, such as German, Japanese, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, etc., can be applied on the Internet given that their communities have a functioning computer technology and communications among users go well and efficiently.
In fact, this thesis applies the term ‘Cyber language’ to refer to the language used on the Internet. The term is an alternative to the three words-- ‘netlish’, ‘weblish’, ‘internet language’ mentioned above, or other commonly-used terms like ‘cyberspeak’, ‘electronic discourse’, ‘electronic language’, ‘interactive written discourse’, ‘computer-mediated communication’ (CMC), or other even more cumbersome locutions. Each item has a different implication, but cyber language has been given some popular currency---following the Orwellian introduction of Newspeak and Oldspeak in 1984, later developments introduction such as Doublespeak and Seaspeak, and media labels such as Royalspeak and Blairspeak. According to David Crystal, the term ‘cyber language’ is succinct and functional enough for studies. The author will focus on the use of the language in the five main situations available on the Internet, for the suffix ‘speak’ in cyber language here involves writing as well as talking, and has a receptive element, including ‘listening and reading’. Cyber language, according to the word-formation theory in English, is a new compound word formed from the two words ‘net’ and ‘speak’, referring to ‘the special language’ applied in the field of Internet. It is a newly-born word accompanying the advent of the new thing—Internet. Being a young subject, Cyber language is not yet widely accepted in the circle of linguistics and there is no linguistic definition concerning Cyber language. However, the new phenomenon has aroused many people’s interests and there occur many definitions about Cyber language.

**Classification of Cyber Language**

E-mail is the use of computer systems to transfer messages between users – now chiefly used to refer to messages sent between private mailboxes (as opposed to those posted to a chatgroup). Although it takes up only a relatively small domain of Internet ‘space’, by comparison with the billions of pages on the World Wide Web, it far exceeds the Web in terms of the number of daily individual transactions made. As John Naughton says, ‘The Net was built on electronic mail...It’s the oil which lubricates the system.’

Chat groups are continuous discussions on a particular topic, organized in ‘rooms’ at particular Internet sites, in which computer users interested in the topic can participate. There are two situations here, depending on whether the interaction takes place in real time (synchronous) or in postponed time (asynchronous). In a synchronous situation, a user enters a chat room and joins an ongoing conversation in real time, sending named contributions which are inserted into a permanently scrolling screen along with the contributions from other participants.

Virtual worlds are imaginary environments which people can enter to engage in text-based fantasy social interaction. From the early notion of a MUD (originally ‘multi-user dungeon’, a derivation from the 1970s role-playing adventure game ‘Dungeons players the opportunity to experience imaginary and vividly described environments in which they adopt new identities, explore fantasy worlds, engage in novel exploits, and use their guises to interact with other participants.

The World Wide Web is the full collection of all the computers linked to the Internet which hold documents that are mutually accessible through the use of a standard protocol (the HyperText Transfer Protocol, or HTTP), usually abbreviated to Web or W3 and, in site addresses, presented as the acronym www. The creator of the Web, computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee, has defined it as ‘the universe of network-accessible information, an embodiment of human knowledge’. It was devised in 1990 as a means of enabling high-energy physicists in different institutions to share information within their field, but it rapidly spread to other fields, and is now all-inclusive in subject-matter, and designed for multimedia interaction between computer users anywhere in the world.

This is a distinctive Web application which came into prominence in the early 2000s: blog is a shortened form of weblog. It takes the form of a personalized web page where the owner can post messages at intervals. Many blogs are personal diaries, ranging in length from brief notes to extended essays; many are on topics of general interest or concern, such as a hobby or political issue.
These situations are not entirely mutually exclusive. It is possible to find sites in which all elements are combined, or where one situation is used within another.

**Causes for the Development of Cyber Language**

Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with the culture in multiple and complex ways.

To begin with, the words people utter refer to common experience. They express facts, ideas or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share. Words also reflect their authors’ attitudes and beliefs, their points of view, which are also those of others. In both cases, language expresses cultural reality.

But members of a community or social group do not only express experience; they also create experience through language. They give meaning to it through the medium they choose to communicate with one another, such as speaking on the telephone or face-to-face, writing a letter or sending an e-mail message, reading newspaper or interpreting a graph or a chart. The way in which people use the spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to through a speaker’s tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures or facial expressions. Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, language embodies cultural reality.

Finally, language is a system of signs that is as having a cultural value for itself. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture. Thus we can say that language symbolizes cultural reality.

Since language expresses cultural reality, embodies cultural reality, and symbolizes cultural reality, the causes of Cyber language as language variant can be summarized as follows: the social causes for these variations, i.e., the presupposition or external cause of them are China’s actively having economic, technical and cultural interchanges with foreign countries and the development and popularization of computers and the Internet. The internal cause is that the entire value system of the generation is undergoing major transformation, but they haven’t found a new organized value system to replace the old one. Under such conditions, their psychology of laziness, defiance, their sensitiveness to novelty and their keenness on fad cause them to neglect the standard language and to let off their discontent and show their unconventional characters in the unorthodox language.

Language, as an important carrier of human emotions, crystallizes the history and sediments the culture. No doubt, the information era will certainly make a brand new form of language which is concise, brief, simple and somehow humorous. Cyber language represents a certain culture- cyber culture. The imaginative and creative Net speak has undoubtedly brought fresh elements to our traditional language. As a user of this varied language and a learner on linguistics, the author considers that whether cyber language, being a language variety, should be called ‘trash’ or not is still too early, we should keep an optimistic and positive view on it.

**References**


