Research on College Campus Catchwords from Perspective of Language Variation

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Abstract. The paper introduces language variations and then sums up the linguistic variations of college campus catchwords in pronunciation, words, sentence structures and styles and eventually analyzes the causes of their usage in order to better understand of college campus catchwords.

Introduction

College campus catchwords refer to a category of vocabulary that is popular with university students on campus during a specific period of time, which reflect the life and psychology of college students and manifests a kind of special language variation. The research of college campus catchwords can deepen the understanding of college students, a particular and significant group, and assist the college students in identifying with their identity. The paper sums up the linguistic variations of college campus catchwords in pronunciation, words, sentence structures and styles and analyzes the causes of their usage in order to better understand of college campus catchwords.

Language Variation

Language variation among speakers or groups of speakers is a major research issue in sociolinguistics. The variation may be manifested in the aspects of pronunciation, diction, or even preferences for particular grammatical patterns. William Labov defines language variables as “a class of variants which are ordered along a continuous dimension and whose position is determined by an independent linguistic or extra-linguistic variable. Variable refers to a language item, which is in the actual use of the words in the situation. Language item can refer to a unit, which can be certain combinations of pronunciation or aggregation rules of pronunciation; the meaning of words and certain combinations of meanings or aggregation rules of meaning; the morpheme of the combination of pronunciation and meaning or a word; and the grammatical category or grammar means, or grammar rules.” [1]

Categorization of Language Variation. Language can be categorized into three categories based on different criteria. The first classification is from the causes of the language variation formation, which attempts to find out the causes of variation. From this angle, language variation can be divided into internal variation resulting from the change of certain components in language structures and external variation arising from social factors such as diversity of language users. The second is from the emergence level of language variation, which intends to demonstrate the manifestation of language variation in different linguistic levels. According to the criteria, language variation can be classified as systematic variation manifesting the shifts of the whole language system, distribution variation demonstrating the level in which language variation happens and realization variation referring to the same language system embodying in the variation of different speakers or the actual words of the same speaker. And the last is from the functions that language variation plays in social language, which tries to understand the different roles of these variations in human society. From the perspective, language variation can be divided into the speech community indicators and the style markers.

Campus Catchwords

Catchword can be defined as the words which are spread rapidly for a period of time in a certain range in a certain time. [2] It directly and truly reflects the changes of the social history and
people’s life for it is closely related to the major events and phenomena of the present times as well as every aspect of people’s life. Its fast spread is dependent on the culture that they are deep-rooted in for the culture generating catchwords can especially touch on what is special and controversial in a specific period. Catchwords, a new variety of language, will not only break the traditional rules of spelling and punctuation, but also offer people a new medium choice.

Campus catchwords are the current widely-used words, phrases and sentences popular with undergraduates during their university time, and it involves every aspect of campus life, such as entertainment, learning, fashion, friendship, internships, part-time jobs, etc. College students are so inclined to be sensitive to novelty that they are ready to embrace new things. Eventually, campus catchwords are widely adopted by university students, which will make university students special as a group. In other words, university students can be characterized by the campus catchwords.

**University Campus Catchword Variations in Linguistic Aspects.** “There is no language that cannot be influenced by society to produce various kinds of variations.”[3] Linguistic Variations of University Campus Catchwords are manifested in four aspects: pronunciation, words, sentence structures and styles. When it comes to the variations in the level of pronunciation, campus catchwords demonstrate the following three features: the frequent use of word repetition, homophones and partial tones. Word repetition, repetition of the first Chinese character in one word, can demonstrate the pretending in innocence to achieve the effect of humor such as “dongdong” referring to things. Homophones, words similar in pronunciation but different in meanings, are adopted in campus catchwords to avoid the embarrassment of directly expressing something offensive and express what speakers want to convey in an indirect humorous way. For example, “Dinosaur” with the newly-acquired derogatory meanings is used to depict the common-looking persons. Partial tone means that a part of the words are replaced with the other Chinese characters of the similar sound but the whole meanings of the words are not changed at all. For example, “Ke ai” is pronounced as “Ke Nai” and “Tong Xue” as “Tong Xie” but the former and the latter in each group mean the same. The kind of variation demonstrates students’ creativity.

As for the variation in the level of words, campus catchwords are totally different from their original meanings and they are packed with special humorous elements. Clipping is a method to form new words by the mere application of the first and last characters of a phrase and the newly-formed words by the means is contrary to the original phrase that the new words are derived from, thus achieving an ironic and humorous effects. For example, “talent” is clipped from “an inborn dumb man”. Besides, words are borrowed and created to form catchwords such as “ken die”, which means unexpected and fraudulent. In addition, abbreviations are easy to understand in the specific context, for example “MM” refers to girls, “BF” boyfriends. Internet and game words have also become campus catchwords, too, such as “thunder” means frighten or shock.

As for sentence structures, simplified sentences are created by omitting verbs or auxiliary verbs and turn to non-standard formation between subject and predicate, which is preferred by university students for its simplicity, efficiency. For example, “I fule U” means that “I really admire you” And exclamatory and questioning sentences are adopted to reinforce communicative effects. Besides, sentence with the integration of Chinese and English are widely adopted on campus, which takes the form of mixing Chinese and English words like “Happy xia” meaning have fun, or forming sentences with the Chinese characters under the guidance of English grammar like “people mountain people sea” meaning numerous people packed in one place. In addition, imitation of famous saying, poems, etc. is another feature of campus words to loosen up and have fun. For example, “Where there is meat, there is me” is created by imitating “Where there is a will, there is a way”, which vividly depicts me as a carnivore in an indirect and humorous way.

As for style variation, humor is one of its prominent qualities of campus catchwords, which enable college students to harmonize their mutual relationships, relieve their various pressures and enjoy themselves. For example, “Tao Yan”, which literally means disgusting, is the short form of “so cute that it is still appealing despite the witnessing for thousands of times. Informality is another feature of campus catchwords for the informal style can strengthen the intimacy among university students, relieve students of their various pressures and create a harmonious, relaxing campus
atmosphere. Moreover, campus catchwords appear simple for the fast-paced tense college life. In addition, novelty is also a typical feature of style variation, which is the personality of university students reflected in the language they use. For example, “Te Kun Sheng”, which originally means the extremely disadvantaged students, refers to the students too tired to sleep frequently in class. “Bare exam” means the exam without the previous notice.

**Reasons for Undergraduates to Use Campus Catchwords.** There are many reasons why undergraduates adopt catchwords. Firstly, undergraduates use campus catchwords to identify with other undergraduates and get accepted in the group of college students. If they adopt catchwords in their daily lives, others will befriend them for they are more likely to be considered as members of the group. Owing to this, it is safe to say that catchwords, phrases, even sentences are the “markers”, which shows different social status and professions of people. Therefore, in order to manifest their unique identity as college students, undergraduates are willing to embrace catch words to show their individualities and their uniqueness.

Another reason for college students to use campus catchwords is that the application of catch words can promote communication with others. If one college student use the campus catchwords, then he or she is easy to be accepted as one member of the group he or she intends to communicate with and what he or she says can be more easily transmitted. Moreover, comparatively simple and short in formation as they are, the catch words are so expressive that they can communicate large amount of information effectively and efficiently. Besides, college students apply campus catchwords to convey some offensive issues in an indirect euphemistic humorous way, which will greatly decrease the conflicts between students and assist in establishing a good interpersonal relationship to benefit mutual communications.

Mass media, such as TV, internet, magazines and movies, is another factor which facilitates the usage of catch words by college students. For example, “Happy Camp”, a popular TV program on Hunan Satellite Channel, publicizes numerous catchwords over and over so that the college students watching the program can acquire the catchwords immediately and later on instantly apply them to their daily lives to show that they are in instead of out. Even advertising on TV can influence college students’ usage of catchwords. To illustrate, the advertisement of Adidas, “Nothing is impossible” is often echoed by college students, and it has even become their motto to inspire and motivate to strive for their ideals. Meanwhile, college students have more time at their own disposal compared to high-school students, so they can spare more time surfing on the internet, reading fashion magazines, and seeing their favorite movies. In that case, the classic words and expressions on the internet, fashion magazines and movies, have been a hit on campus. For example, “Don’t have a crush on me for I’m a legend” on the internet is instantly widespread on campus. And it is worth noticing that the transmission speed of information through internet is time-saving and efficient, so the catchwords on the internet can be witnessed by the considerable number of college students in a short time, which will greatly promote the usage of campus catchwords by college students.

The development of culture and economy also plays a significant role in the usage of campus catchwords by college students. With the prosperity of culture, people have become more tolerate of abnormal expressions, even pursued the novel expressions to manifest their trendiness and their openness to new things. The situation was unimaginable four or five decades ago for the deviation from the normal was considered as the rebel of tradition and the pursuit of liberalism. And additionally, the development of economy strengthens Chinese cross-cultural exchange with other countries, which can broaden college student’s eyesight and reform their personality to embrace something new.

All the previously-mentioned factors influencing campus catchword usage are external ones, and the characteristics of catchwords can also influence factors, which are considered as internal factors. According to Saussure, university campus catchwords belong to the external linguistics. [4] The campus catchwords are usually catchy, expressive, humorous and thought-provoking, which caters for college students’ personality and their needs. It is no wonder that catchwords can easily catch the attention of college students.
Conclusion

College catchwords, as language variation, demonstrate their specialties in the aspect of pronunciation, words, sentence structures and styles. College students use campus catchwords for their very expression of their psychology and life, for their satisfaction of their needs to be accepted, for their reflection of the economic and social development and for their simplicity, efficiency and euphemism. The research on it can help people achieve a better understanding of it.

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References