

Analysis of Fans' Cyberwords From the Perspective of Memetics

YANG Liuxiang^[a]; ZHAO Yushan^{[a]*}

^[a]School of Foreign Languages, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

With the development of internet, network is more and more important in people's daily life. Among the huge network user groups, fans as a unique group gradually come to people's vision, meanwhile cyberwords used by fans group also becomes one of the research topics of scholars. As far as memetics is concerned, language itself is a kind of meme, and memes also reside in language. From this point, linguistic memes are widely spread among fans group. In this paper, five types of fans' cyberwords and their functions are analyzed from the perspective of memetics, and specific phenomena which influence the generation and spread of linguistic memes are also explored.

Key words: Netizens; Fans' cyberwords; Linguistic memes; Context

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INTRODUCTION

With the development of information technology and the popularization of mobile Internet, network plays an increasingly important role in life. According to the data released by Quest Mobile, the number of mobile Internet users already reached 1.138 billion until March of 2019. The large size of netizens in the internet community,

the virtuality, immediacy, openness, extensiveness, and popularity of the communication on the Internet determine that the network language is bound to differ from the everyday language. Among these netizens, a group of active users are the fan group. Because the majority people of this group are female, they are also known as the "fan-girls". On August 18, 2019, the Express Commentary of XINWEN LIANBO also mentioned this group in its commentary of *The Mainstream Public Opinions of Stopping the Riot and Disrupting*: These days, fan-girls together with the netizens in the Diba forum, and even the overseas Chinese students, every sincerely patriotic Chinese is backing up our Hong Kong compatriots with various actions.

In recent years, cyberwords has been viewed as one of the hot study topics by many scholars in the field of communication study, psychology, sociology, semiotics, marketing, and so on. At the same time, with the number of fans increasing greatly, the network language of fan groups also has gradually gained the attention of many scholars. Most of those papers have analyzed fans' cyberwords from the perspective of linguistics and communication study. This paper will discuss fans' cyberwords under the guidance of memetics, and specific phenomena together with the factors influencing the generation and spread of linguistic memes will also be analyzed.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term meme is originally produced by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* in 1976, referring to cultural factors that can be propagated by imitation. Language itself is a kind of meme, and there are all kinds of memes in language itself, thus there is a saying of "linguistic memes"(Yang, 2014, pp.20-24). It can be seen that cyberwords in fans community can be recognized as memes. Heylighen (1998) argues that the

successful replication of the memes requires four stages: assimilation, memory, expression, and dissemination (He, 2008, pp.68-73). In other words, memes enter the minds of others, are preserved in their memory, and then are expressed and spread by others. The characteristics of deviation, selectivity, and retentivity of memes are the essential reasons why memes can be successfully replicated (Blackmore, 1999). These four stages and three characteristics are also applicable for linguistic memes.

As a special group of netizens, fan groups can continue to be subdivided according to many standards. Different kinds of fans stand for different identities. Therefore, for the research of fans cyberwords, identity has become an important issue. The identity theory believes that self-concept is produced by the interaction of various roles undertaken by individuals in social life, and each identity is based on individuals. Blumer believes that symbolic interaction is the continuous process of meaning understanding and role play between individuals and groups (Qing, 2015, p.10).

2. CYBERWORDS AND FANS' CYBERWORDS

Cyberwords usually have flexible form and simple structure in sentence, leading to their facile propagation in numerous netizens. Fans' cyberwords are featured with these characteristics, meanwhile, they are also distinct due to their special user group. Both of them need to be introduced clearly.

2.1 Cyberwords

Cyberwords itself is also a word produced because of the internet. At first it refers to the computer language of the network, and also refers to the everyday language used on the network with different characteristics (Yu, 2001, p.2). Professor David Crystal believes that cyberwords is a kind of language mostly based on text input and produced on the Internet and from all kinds of communication media on it (Crystal, 2001, pp.8-10). After integrating various viewpoints, this paper will develop on the basis of the following concept: cyberwords is a kind of language that is different from everyday language, and it is used by netizens when they communicate on the Internet.

As for the causes of network language, many scholars have conducted research. Ma Xuemei, Wang Juan and others published the *Questionnaire on College Students' motivations to use cyberwords* and found out that for college students, their main motivations to use cyberwords are: venting emotions, showing personality, expressing desires, and fast communication, conformity, social contact desires, and language modification (Ma & Wang, 2018, pp.201-203). Fan Ming and Zhao Leping believe that: "Imitation and herd mentality bring about the prevalence of cyberwords. Friend affiliation and group identification contribute to the continuous popularization of cyberwords. These kinds of phenomena have influenced

cyberwords' spreading" (Fan & Zhao, 2016, pp.53-57).

Regardless of their characteristics, they are generally concise, vivid, and easy to spread. Several cyberwords are listed and explained in the following paragraph to show the typical characteristics.

"Send you a sea-view room leaving yourself to dig the sea". Obviously nobody would dig a sea to get a sea-view room. This cyberwords has played the role of ridicule, humor and expressed the feelings of helplessness. Another example: "Have you accepted ninety years compulsory education?" Originated from nine years of compulsory education in China, this expression has played a role in exaggerating the excellence of others, and it is also humorous. Examples like "excellent (youxiu)", "we live in one world, but why are you so excellent (youxiu)", and "Chen Duxiu (the same word with xiu in youxiu), sit down", all show the language deviation of cyberwords. These words mean that others are distinctive and excellent, but with a humorous mood. It is shown that netizens can produce different and mutually related expressions of the same meaning when they communicate on the internet.

2.2 Fans' Cyber Words

There are four reasons why fan groups emerge and form new cultural circles: the rapid development of social media, group identification, psychological factors, and the increase of women's power of consumption (Jiang, 2019, pp.51-53). After a long period of communication among fans, they will form "own language". These "language" have different sources, usages and emotional connotations. They allow experienced fans to immediately identify each other's identity as well as the context. In the fan community, the common language of the fans has become a sign of identifying "self" and distinguishing "others." The interaction between stars and fans, fans and fans is actually the result of establishing consensus and getting meaning from each other through symbols, and then further exchange of meaning (Qing, 2015, p.28). It can be shown that the rise of the fans' cyberwords is inextricably linked to its identity confirmation and differentiation.

3. LINGUISTIC MEMES ANALYSIS

Due to the fast update speed and special user group of fans' cyberwords, the corpus in this paper will be selected from words with fixed meaning and typical new ones that are used in social network sites including Sina Weibo, Douban, Post Bar and Zhihu. Five typical groups of fans' cyberwords are listed below and explained in detail. And the analysis will develop according to the characteristics of memes, and then possible influencing factors of memes generation and utilization are explored at the same time.

3.1 Cyberwords of Fans Group Division

In the table below, all of these fans' cyberwords originate from the word "fan". According to different standpoints

for their idols, different groups have generated different words related with “fan” to describe their own identities, as shown in the table above. This shows the characteristics of deviation of memes. These cyberwords have spread widely and been used frequently in the fan community. In addition to this, they already have fixed and clear-cut meanings. According to the four stages of the memetics, they are already categorized into the strong linguistic

memes since they have completed the fourth stage for a long time. Fans use these linguistic memes to refer to their identities and distinguish from others. For example, for fans who treat their idol like their son and look forward to witnessing his every progress and seeing his smiling happy face, they can use mommy-fan for self-reference, which leads themselves to the “mommy-fan” group and differs themselves from other groups like “girl-friend-fan” group.

Linguistic memes	Explanation	Linguistic memes	Explanation
Mommy-fan (妈妈粉)	Used by fans who are older than their idols and who care and love them like a mom.	Dedicated-fan (唯粉)	Used by fans who are dedicated to only one member in a star group.
Gf-fan (女友粉)	Short for girl-friend-fan. Used by female fans who dream to marry a man like their idols.	All-fan (团粉)	Used by fans who love all members in a star group.
Cp-fan (Cp粉)	Used by fans who enjoy imagining two stars as lovers.	Career-fan (事业粉)	Used by fans who give most care to the career development of their idols.
Passerby (路人)	Used by people who only know a star but have no special feelings for a star, neither loving nor hating.	X-anti (某某黑)	Used by people who hate and insult a star on the internet.

All of these fans' cyberwords originate from the word “fan”. According to different standpoints for their idols, different groups have generated different words related with “fan” to describe their own identities, as shown in the table above. This shows the characteristics of deviation of memes. These cyberwords have spread widely and been used frequently in the fan community. In addition to this, they already have fixed and clear-cut meanings. According to the four stages of the memetics, they are already categorized into the strong linguistic memes since they have completed the fourth stage for a long time. Fans use these linguistic memes to refer to their identities and distinguish from others. For example, for fans who treat their idol like their son and look forward to witnessing his every progress and seeing his smiling happy face, they can use mommy-fan for self-reference, which leads themselves to the “mommy-fan” group and differs themselves from other groups like “girl-friend-fan” group.

community is shown in the table above, but in a context when passerby's feeling is cared too much, fans will add an adjective “noble” before it, using “noble passerby” to mock the people who watch the scene of bustle together with the people who care irrelevant passerby too much.

- a. I am only a passerby, but I think this idol is really nice. (我只是个路人, 但我觉得这个爱豆真的不错。) --self-reference with an effect of objective tone;
- b. He is just a passer-by, so we do not have to talk nonsense with him. (他只是个路人, 没必要跟他废话。) --other-reference;
- c. How dare we offend this noble passerby! (这高贵的路人我们哪儿敢得罪啊!) --other-reference with an effect of mocking tone.

It should be pointed out that context plays an important role when fans use cyberwords. Take the word “passerby” as an example. Its common meaning in the fan

From this part, the conclusion can be drawn that fans' cyberwords can be practically taken as memes to be analyzed. When these memes strongly show one's identity and are used frequently and widely, they are strong linguistic memes and they have strong vitality. Besides, context affects the use of memes, and memes have different meanings in different context.

Cyberwords of Salutation

Linguistic memes	Explanation	Linguistic memes	Explanation
Zhengzhu (正主)	Idols for fans group.	Benming (本命)	Used by fans to refer to their favorite star in the whole entertainment circle.
Popularities (流量)	Idols who are extremely popular.	Swing fan (墙头)	Fans who have not much feelings about a star like other fans but still show interest.
Drama queen (戏精)	People who always try to gain attention by all kinds of ways, applicable for both fans and idols.	Rival group (对家)	Used by fans to refer to the fan group whose idol competes with theirs.
Professional fans (脂粉/职粉)	People who take fans as a profession and a source of income.	Hired supporters/trolls (水军/黑子)	People who are paid to support or insult a star.

These cyberwords act as salutation in fans group, and they are generated to confirm and distinguish one's identity. For example, when two fans of an idol use “benming” and “swing fan” respectively, they complete the identity confirmation, that is, they both belong to the general fan group of this idol. But the two memes express different degrees of obsession with this idol. Thus when using them, these two people also distinguish their own

identity from each other: the first group is extremely obsessed with this idol, while the other is only a little interested in this idol. At the same time, the group repeat using “benming” to strengthen and verify their obsession, leading to this meme more popular. The “swing fan” group is larger in size, thus it is easy for this meme to get more opportunity to be used, which is another way to help it become popular.

3.2 Cyberwords Applicable to Limited Groups

Linguistic memes	Explanation	Linguistic memes	Explanation
You are llllb. (你lllb了)	Llllb is short for “lay back”, which means knowing something too late. L can be repeated for several times to emphasize.	Hongxiu beats you. (你红秀了)	Another deviated meme to express the same meaning above. Hongxiu is an electronic journal which publishes articles and photos about stars. Its server crashed in its very first publishing, resulting in fans’ delayed rushing to purchase.
You are a bar code. (你条形码了)	Llllb looks like a bar code, so fans use this deviated meme to express the same meaning as “lay back”.	Modeng beats you. (你摩登了)	Another new meme to express the same meaning above.

Due to extremely fast communication and news spreading together with intensive information on the internet nowadays, netizens (especially fans) often miss the very latest news if they move their attention from the internet for even a little while. In such cases, fans tend to use the linguistic memes above, all of which mean knowing something too late. These cyberwords originated from the phrase “lay back”. This again shows the characteristics of deviation of memes. “Llllb” is short for “lay back”. “A bar code” is generated during fans’ communication because of the appearance of “llllb”. On the basis of the original meaning of “llllb”, the last two memes are produced by mixing with hot events and specific context. The first two linguistic memes are used more frequently than the last two, which are only effectively spread within the group in which fans are aware of Hongxiu and Modeng. When the last two linguistic memes are used, fans complete identification verification: they are concerned about the issues of Hongxiu and Modeng. However, as these two issues gradually faded out of sight, these two linguistic memes: “Hongxiu/Modeng beats you” slowly lost the frequency of utilization since their value of verifying fans’ identity has decreased and even disappeared.

From this part the conclusion can be drawn that memes are broadly characterized with deviation. In fans group, when new memes are generated, fans usually combine existing memes with new hot events, and the memes that are easily used and can express concisely and vividly would be retained. Memes which are generated from specific events are only applicable to people who are aware of them. When these events lost attention, corresponding weak memes will gradually be abandoned too.

3.4 Cyberwords of Commonly Used Abbreviations

Linguistic memes	Explanation	Linguistic memes	Explanation
Zqsg (真情实感)	Short for Chinese phrase “zhen qing shi gan”, which means fans devote sincere feelings to their idols.	Xswl (笑死我了)	Short for Chinese phrase “xiao si wo le”, which means laugh to death because of funny things.
Blx 玻璃心	Short for Chinese phrase “bo li xin” (glass-made heart), which means fans with a heart easy to be broken.	Xfxy (腥风血雨)	Short for Chinese phrase “xing feng xue yu”, which means chaotic scenes on the internet (usually when two fan groups fight with each other on the internet).
Bp (白嫖)	Short for Chinese phrase “bai piao”, which means fans never consume for their idols.		

One of the common phenomena in fan groups on the Internet is that they frequently use abbreviations. Non-fan netizens are confused often by this phenomenon. But there are several reasons for it. Firstly, they use abbreviations

3.3 Cyberwords for Praise and Criticism

In the table below, These cyberwords are all generated for the purpose of praising and criticizing a star. They are usually used in a context where the passers-by are listening. Fans use the praise memes to brainwash passers-by that their own idol is perfect and they belittle a star to brainwash passers-by that he is without a single redeeming feature. People with different standpoints choose different kinds of cyberwords. This shows the characteristic of selectivity of memes. Besides, these cyberwords are all featured to be exaggerated, which is in line with the cyberwords’ characteristics. The conclusion can be drawn that fans tend to choose exaggerated words and sentences to praise or belittle a star.

Linguistic memes	Explanation
Kneel to one’s sound (开口跪)	Generally used to praise someone sings beautifully (meaning could change according to context).
Stunned again and again (一见惊鸿再见倾城)	Used to compliment that a star is stunning for a long time.
His appearance, talent and personality conquer me one by one. (始于颜值陷于才华终于人品)	Used to praise a perfect star who are excellent in appearance, talent and also personality.
Throat kissed by the God (上帝吻过的嗓子)	Used to praise a star who has a beautiful voice.
Treasure boy (宝藏男孩)	Used to refer to a star who is precious like treasure and can bring fans happiness.
Blood-sucker (吸血)	Used to refer to stars who try to gain attention by getting close to others who are more famous.
Unknown even to the earth’s core (糊穿地心)	Used to mock a star who are not famous.
Not in line with his character set (人设崩塌)	Used to refer to a star who does something that conters what is believed by the public.

to be concise so as to communicate efficiently. Secondly, they use abbreviations to avoid discomfort caused by sensitive words in the complete phrase, such as “piao” in “bai piao”, which means going whoring. Thirdly,

fans use abbreviations to distinguish themselves from non-fan netizens to avoid being judged by irrelevant people. Fourthly, they use abbreviations to verify their group identification, and they can recognize each other immediately on the internet. The conclusion can be drawn that for many reasons, fans usually choose memes like abbreviations that are hard to understand by irrelevant people.

CONCLUSION

Fans as a special but large-size group in netizens, their cyberwords deserve to be researched more. In this paper, typical fans' cyberwords (five groups) are selected from the internet, and are taken as memes to be analyzed. Several conclusions have been drawn. Fans' cyberwords can be practically analyzed with memetics. Fans tend to use memes with fixed meanings for a long time, and these memes can effectively verify their own identity and distinguish themselves from others, thus such wide repetition strengthens these memes thereupon. The selectivity of memes is shown when different fans choose different memes in different context. In the context of praising or criticizing a star, fans tend to use memes which are exaggerated. Fans can generate new memes by combing existing memes with new events. These memes are limitedly applicable to those who are aware of the events. But some of these new memes will become weak

memes and even be abandoned when the events fade away, new memes' value of verifying someone's identity disappears and few people use these memes any more. Fans tend to use linguistic memes like abbreviations that are hard to understand by irrelevant people.

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