

## Research on Chinglish in the Internet Buzzwords from the Perspective of Sociolinguistics

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*The Internet buzzword containing a lot of Chinglish is a new form of language generated in the context of the rapid development and wide spread of the Internet. A large number of Internet buzzwords, which is different from the traditional media language, correspond with the trend of the time as well as meet the satisfaction of people's language demands. As an academic discipline, the main purpose of sociolinguistics is to study the relationship between people's language and the social condition. This paper will illustrate the Chinglish in the Internet buzzword from the perspective of sociolinguistics.*

**Keywords:** Chinglish, Internet buzzword, sociolinguistics

### Introduction

#### *Research Background*

With the rapid development of the Internet, communicating with each other online has become a kind of normality for many people. Chatting online means that people's use of language can be collected, calculated as well as analyzed, leading to the generation of the buzzword. The buzzword always refers to a word or phrase that becomes very popular for a period of time. As a character that can represent the current social condition, the buzzword has attracted more attention from the linguist, especially the sociolinguist. Due to the fact that the language use of people from different nations varies significantly, the buzzword always embodies social characters and reflects people's psychological condition in different nations. Buzzword with Chinese characteristics used by Chinese netizens is definitely tightly combined with China's society, leading to the appearance of some Chinglish buzzword expressions. At the meantime, the usage and wide spread of Chinese buzzword has become the most noticeable social phenomena. As a sub-field of linguistics, sociolinguistics aims to study the relation between language and society in which the users of language live. This paper aims to analyze the Chinglish phenomenon of the Internet buzzword based on the perspective of sociolinguistics.

#### *Significance of the Research*

With the development of science and technology, people used to communicate with each other online, giving birth to the Internet buzzword. The buzzword used

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by Chinese netizens carries Chinese characteristics which can also reflect the current condition of Chinese society. Through analyzing the semantic and linguistic of Chinese annual Internet buzzwords, people can recognize different periods of social presences as well as the current cultural types in society. With more progress achieved in the society, linguists initiate to realize the significance of analyzing annual buzzwords. Although a number of papers have been published in the general area of the relation between sociolinguistics and Internet buzzwords, little work has been carried out in search of the Chinglish phenomena in Internet buzzword from the perspective of sociolinguistics. Some scholars analyzed the relation between buzzword and sociolinguistics while others explored the reason why Internet buzzword always carries Chinglish phenomena. On the basis of existing literature data, this research paper carries out studies in an effort to explore Chinglish in Internet buzzword with the sociolinguistics theory.

The study can also help us to understand and know the changes of the society as well as a better prediction towards social and linguistic development in the future. Based on the analysis of the relations among these three factors, people can have a more comprehensive understanding of social and cultural life.

### *Organization of the Research*

The first section of this paper explains the brief introduction of this research background and the research significance. The second section composes of three parts. The first part illustrates the definition of buzzword and the Chinglish phenomena in the Internet buzzword. The following part demonstrates the definition and development of sociolinguistics. The third part is the research in exploring the Chinglish Internet buzzword from the perspective of sociolinguistics. The last section is the conclusion.

## **Research on Chinglish in the Internet Catchwords from the Perspective of Sociolinguistics**

### *Internet Buzzword*

#### Definition of the Internet Buzzword

Science and technology have made great strides over the past decade, Internet has become the most frequently used in people's daily life. As technology improves, people's language usage can be recorded, calculated and analyzed, giving the buzzword an opportunity to emerge. Although buzzword has attracted wide attention from sociolinguists, there is still no explicit definitions of it from the perspective of sociolinguistics. According to the dictionary, buzzword always refers to a word or phrase that has become popular especially relating to a certain subject or activity. The English linguist, David Crystal defined the network language in his book "Language and the Internet" (Crystal 2001). He indicates that the network language is a media that appears in the entire internet environment and reflects the unique appearance of the internet. However, Genyuan (2010)

argues that “network language” itself is a network line and it originally refers to the computer language in the internet, and also refers to the natural language that have their own characteristics in the internet usage (Genyuan 2010). Nowadays, it generally refers to the latter. Internet buzzwords are the expressions that are popular on the Internet, which is the most active part of the Internet language as well as a customary way of expression by netizens.

Generated from the society, buzzword is the reflection of some certain incidents in the society. As we all know, the emergence of buzzword is based on the current social condition, culture types as well as social changes. The accelerated development of technology gives buzzword an access to spread in a wider range, making it more prominent to illustrate the relation between society and buzzword. Aiming to explore the approach in which did the buzzword reflect the social condition, institutes and scholars initiated to summarize the annual Internet buzzword.

Since 2000, the Global Language Institute has started to use a computer program to track the frequency of English words used on thousands of media outlets, blogs and social media sites around the world to pick the top words each year. Merriam-Webster also selected the word of the year based on how often anonymous users look up words in the online dictionary. The UK’s Word of the Year was chosen by the Oxford University Press. By tracking changes in the use of words in the English, the Oxford English Dictionary and the Oxford American Dictionary selected the British and American buzzwords and the word of the year which were the perfect expression towards the condition of the year. In addition, CollinsDictionaries.com has chosen 12 words of the year, based on events of each month. Australia’s Macquarie Dictionary has also published its Australian version of the word of the year since 2006. In addition to its word of the year, the Macquarie Dictionary will also rank the selected words by subject category, including agriculture, art, politics, science and technology, Internet, sports, etc. The changes in Internet buzzword demonstrate social and cultural transformations.

#### The Current Situation of the Internet Buzzword

With the flourish of the Internet era, network buzzword has become popular in the society. In the Internet world, netizens hold different interpretations towards each social event, giving them impetus to accept, spread and even create new Internet buzzwords. Buzzwords are created based on netizens’ meaning interpretation, homophonics, abbreviations and mixture of Chinese and English. All these changes have made huge impacts in people’s daily language use.

When the buzzword emerged, it was arduous for people to summarize the logic and principle to constitute a buzzword. With the accumulation of buzzwords, linguists realized that semantics, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are the four main elements that constitute a buzzword and once one of these factors are altered, the original word’s meaning and function could be totally different, laying foundation for the creation of the network buzzword.

With more than 10 years’ development and changes of buzzword, a conclusion can be withdrawn: the created buzzword is closely related to entertaining atmosphere, which can be simple, fun and straightforward to reflect people’s

emotion, current social condition and people's attitude towards certain incidents. Considering the buzzword from the perspective of linguistics, a unified standard and norm does not exist to form the buzzword which can originate from the films, TV series and social incidents. Thanks to the arbitrary of buzzword's formation, it is hard for elder people to understand the buzzword's deep meaning, accept its unique formation and employ the buzzword in their daily language usage. Taking 蒜泥狠 as an example, which was a classic buzzword generated in 2010 and categorized into 2010 Annual Buzzword. This buzzword originated from the Chinese expression 算你狠, which was most frequently used in the northeast of China to express people's unwillingness towards their rivals while after being altered into 蒜泥狠, this expression was used by Chinese netizens to make sarcasm of the extreme high market price of garlic. All these buzzwords spread widely online, however, interpreting these expressions is challenging for elderly people who do not use the Internet. The communication gap between the youngster and the elder contributes to the gap in using buzzwords. All these aspects combined together formulate the complex current situation of Internet buzzword usage.

#### Chinglish in the Internet Buzzword

"Chinglish" is defined as "English with Chinese characteristics" because it stands as the mixture of half English and half Chinese, and is considered to be the "perfect combination" of Chinese grammar and English words. "Chinglish" is different from "Chinese English", which is usually manifested as the irregular expression methods of English learners when they express their thoughts due to the influence of thinking, culture and other factors. And "Chinese English" refers to the language with Chinese cultural connotation complementing to the world corpus which belongs to a part of the world language. The globalization has made great contributions in closely combining the world together, impelling people to learn other countries' language and will finally lead to the mixture between different languages. With the rapid development and wide application of Internet technology, the Internet buzzword goes viral among Chinese netizens, making Chinglish in the Internet buzzword a hot topic in language research discussed by linguists. The Chinglish originates from the social development, which can be understood, comprehended and accepted by people of all ages.

Chinglish, possessing a long history of language development, is a unique language form which can be firstly tracked back to Hong Kong in 1990s. When communicating with foreigners, local residents used to mix Chinese expressions with English words, such as the usage of *long time no see* as a greeting. Whenever two kinds of languages were mentioned, translation must exist as the bridge to connect these two languages and Chinglish's first appearance is in the process of translating Chinese words and phrases into English with Chinese original word order. Taking *mountain people mountain sea* as an example, this is a traditional Chinese expression 人山人海, which is used to describe the crowded people while the Chinglish expression arrange the English word according to the Chinese order. The following phrase of Chinglish is the appearance of network buzzwords. As the Internet technology develops, the utilization of the online software to

communicate has gained popularity, causing the surge of network Chinglish buzzwords, such as *you can you up* and *no zuo no die*. The second category is the combination of pinyin and English word formation, such as *gelivable* and *ungeilivable*. This kind of buzzword combines pinyin and affixes of English words together to express people's current psychological condition, state and nature.

### *Sociolinguistics*

#### The Background of Sociolinguistics

Compared with other linguistics research subjects, sociolinguistics is a relatively nascent subject with the history of over 40 years. According to Newmeyer (2004) the emergence and development of sociolinguistics are closely related to the social conditions after the World War II. When the war ended, many countries tried to make the recovery from the devastating damages by carrying out national liberation movements to reopen economy and rejuvenate the whole society. During the process of launching these activities, many scholars and national officials realized that it was a challenging work to determine national language after the establishment of the national regime based on the fact that almost all the people could speak more than two languages thanks to the colonial rule with the long period of time. At the same period of time, some ethnic minority groups dedicated to fight for their equal rights while the language had become the barrier in the communication process. The liberation movements also reinvigorate woman's thoughts, giving them more space to consider about their own social identities, giving linguists impetus to consider whether our language perpetuates the gender inequality. Integrated together, all these factors promoted the study of social language, such as African American vernacular English and Chicano Spanish, which can be regarded as the social context in which sociolinguistics comes into being. Newmeyer's view illustrates this problem from the perspective of national integration and the changes of the world pattern (Newmeyer 2004).

However, the debate about the first person proposing the term "sociolinguistics" is still up in the air. According to Le Page (1974), the term "sociolinguistics" first appeared in the second edition of Eugene Nida's 1949 classic "Morphology" in the appendix to the Oxford English Dictionary published in 1986 (Le Page 1974). As an academic discipline, sociolinguistics was first mentioned in Hudson's paper "Sociolinguistics in India" in 1939. Hudson mentioned that Currie published an article entitled "Projection of Sociolinguistics: the relationship of speech to social status" in 1952, which was drafted in 1949 and published in 1952 (Hudson 2000). Since then Currie has laboriously claimed that he has priority in the establishment of the term "sociolinguistics" with constant effort. The following scholars who have made enduring efforts in the development of this academic discipline should be American sociolinguists such as Fishman, Helms and Rabov.

#### The Definition of Sociolinguistics

As globalization improves by leaps and bounds, the communication among the countries is becoming more and more frequent, making language indispensable

in the communication process. Being a tool, language plays an essential role in the process of communication. Thanks to its significance, the enduring exploration towards the language has been made, leading to the emergence of many linguistics theories regarding the study of language variation and historical linguistics and sociolinguistics are two perspectives that are most used in the analysis of language variation. The study of linguistics from the perspective of historical development mainly follows the historical changes of language, which constantly changes according to the development of history, while the study of linguistics from the perspective of social context aims to put language into the overall social environment. Regarding linguistics from the perspective from social context, language generates and develops together with social development.

According to Holmes and Hudson (1999), sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between people and society. In the view of sociolinguists, language will lack its theoretical basis without being carried out in the social context. The question that perplexes sociolinguists the most is that why people's expression varies according to the changes in social context and they have endeavored to explain these phenomena. The traditional linguistics used to make the exploration of the language variation from the historical perspective, neglecting the sociality of language and the emergence of sociolinguistics has compensated the vacancy of the analysis of language usage in society.

Being a product in the process of social development, language is inseparable from the social context and due to the fact that people's communication rests entirely on the society, endowing the analysis of language variation in social context more prominence in linguistic study. Some linguists state that language change in social context as "incomplete changes" while the diachronic language change is "complete change" and claim that the complete change deserves more attention compared with uncomplete change. However, the fact is that the incomplete language change lays foundation for complete change and the development of uncomplete language change can stimulate the development of complete language change. The development of technology prompts the birth of new things and the word's definition is considered as one of the elementary subjects in the linguistic research. Regarding the relation between people and society, four kinds relations existing in the current linguistics research, the social structure affects and determines the language structure; the social structure affects and determines the social structure; there is no relationship between language and society; admitting the existence of relation between language and society while it is not the perfect time to analyze the relation.

### The Schools of Sociolinguistics

When it comes to the discussion of the academic schools of sociolinguistics, scholars are basically categorized into two schools: one is based on dichotomy classification, and is divided into macro sociolinguistics and micro sociolinguistics, and the other is based on the tripartite classification, which the baseline follows the chronic line of main school in the development of sociolinguistics, the development of sociolinguistics, it can be divided into the sociological school of language represented by Fishman, the school of discourse culture represented by Hymes and

the school of linguistic variation represented by Labov. This paper will illustrate the sociolinguistics schools based on the tripartite classification. Fishman, the pioneer of sociolinguistics, proposed the Sociological School of Language in his book *Sociology of Language*, who believed that the language could be divided into two categories, descriptive social language and dynamic social language (Fishman 1972). The sociology of descriptive language refers to the language that explains the language usage phenomenon of the social group which can be accepted by people in the social community. Dynamic sociology of language aims to explain and answer questions such as “what factors contribute to the changes in language use and behavior of social groups”. Fishman’s research covers the macro level of language division (including linguistic, ethnic, religious activities), language planning and vocabulary are included. As the representer of school of discourse culture, Hymes (1974) pioneered in enlarging the research field of discourse cultural communication (Hymes 1974). In his book, *Foundations of Sociolinguistics*, Hymes states that the main aim of the sociolinguistics is to analyze the language’s culture and communication function. According to Hymes (1974), the main research target of sociolinguistics is to illustrate human culture and people’s social communication phenomena rather than language itself. In the book, Hymes proposed three targets of sociolinguistics research, which are sociolinguistics deals with the social problems and language usage, sociolinguistics studies the linguistic reality in the social context, and sociolinguistics is also the linguistics formed in social communication. According to Hymes (1974), sociolinguistics focuses on the penetration between language forms and language social functions that produce different forms of expression of language in society. The main contribution of the school of linguistic variation represented by Labov is his research on the variation and quantification of Massa’s Vineyard and New York urban dialects with sociolinguistics methods.

#### *Research on Chinglish in the Internet Buzzwords from the Perspective of Sociolinguistics*

With the rapid development of Internet technology, the access towards the Internet becomes even more facilitate, making people more addicted to the Internet which gives the linguist opportunity to collect the language data which can be viewed as the basis to analyze people’s language behavior under different social context. Once being collected, the most frequently used words by netizens online can be obtained, among which the top ten words are defined as the annual buzzwords. All these words root in Chinese Internet environment and is utilized by Chinese netizens to demonstrate their opinion and attitude towards social current condition. As a subject primarily aiming to illuminate the relation between language and social condition, sociolinguistics should be employed in analyzing the Chinglish in the Internet buzzwords.

#### The Relation Between the Network Buzzword and the Society

Since 2003, China’s mainstream newspaper began to select the top ten buzzwords annually and authoritative language institutions will jointly release the

list of annual top ten buzzwords. Thanks to the media's attention, the widespread of buzzword has attracted social attention. Through the analysis of buzzword, the overall condition regarding the development of economy, politics and culture can be comprehended. The buzzword can be viewed as the most direct indicator which can embody the changes in economy, society and culture. Compared with other normal vocabulary, buzzwords can reflect the characteristics of the current cultural and social changes, making it essential to conduct research in buzzword. Taking 蒜泥狠、糖高宗 and 姜你军 as the example, all these three expressions are the alternation of 算你狠、唐高宗 and 将你一军, which are used to express the depressing attitude with the defiant tone towards their rivals. These three altered expressions generate from the surging market price of garlic, sugar and ginger, which raised the heat discussion among the Chinese netizens and a huge amount of people satirized that the price was too high to make the purchase of these vegetables. Bearing this sarcasm in mind, people innovated these expressions to reflect the social condition of 2010, which can be used as evidence for the latter generation to analyze the social condition at that period of time. Considering the buzzword summarized from the last year, the top ten to one are 人民至上、逆行者、飒、后浪、神兽、直播带货、双循环、打工人、内卷、凡尔赛文学 and the English translated version are *Put people and life first, heroes in harm's way, dashing, younger generation, godbeast, live streaming, dual-cycle economic model, dagongren (laborer), involution, Versailles literature* respectively. All these buzzwords epitomize the social condition in 2021, *put people and life first* was proposed in the speech of President Xi Jinping to combat the spread of the COVID-19 with joint efforts. The *heroes in harm's way* is the expression used by Premier Li Keqiang to show respect to those healthcare workers from across the nation to support epidemic control. The word *dashing* used to describe people that are lively and spirited and the Chinese netizens borrowed the word to represent the female who have made great contributions in combating the COVID-19. During the process of fighting against the epidemic, the younger Chinese generation showed their spirit and dedication by participating actively in the fight, giving the whole nation an access to re-identify the younger generation. The phrase *younger generation* is adopted by Chinese netizens to show their appreciation towards Chinese young people. The *godbeast* is the result of the epidemic, which is used to refer the children who could not go to school thanks to the epidemic, making their parents insane by spending nearly whole day at home. All these expressions above are the result of epidemic, which is the most direct reflection of the social condition at that period of time. By analyzing the definition of these expressions, people can have an overall understanding towards the social condition under the spread of COVID-19. *Versailles literature* is a kind of literature used to describe the behavior of mocking online with humblebrag. The most essential of this literature is that the celebrities often disguise their boasts as complaints or seemingly modest statements. Chinese netizens imitate the Versailles literature's typical expression so as to satirize the celebrities, which can unveil people's sarcasm towards the Versailles literature.

From the comparison between the network buzzword in 2010 and 2020, the relation between network buzzword and society can be easily recognized. With the



analysis of the buzzword in 2010, the current market condition with the surging price of vegetable can be comprehended by the latter generation while the analysis of the top ten network buzzwords can reveal the social condition under the spread of COVID-19, making following generation available to outline the general social condition and giving foreigners a better understanding towards the Chinese real social condition under the influence of the coronavirus. With the characteristic of reflecting the social condition, it is even more prominent to illustrate the Chinglish in the Internet buzzword from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

### The Reason of Chinglish's Emergence from the Perspective of Sociolinguistics The Internal Language Causes

In search for the reason of the Chinglish in the network buzzword, the internal language reason stands as a powerful contributor to the popularity of Chinglish on the Internet. From the linguistic perspective, many Chinese words and expressions have no equivalence in English, which will lead to the inaccurate translation. Concerning this linguistic gap between Chinese and English, Chinese netizens created some Chinglish expressions to give an accurate description about Chinese unique social condition, such as 作 and 给力 with no equivalence in English, promoting the emergence of *no zuo no die* and *geilivable*, which were used to picture Chinese social condition with a more accurate meaning. Chinese scholars also combined Chinese with English grammar, by adding the negative prefixes in front of the *geilivable* and change it into *negeilivable*, extending the meaning of this expression.

With the facilitate communication between the countries, people from different nations can exchange their ideas through the Internet, giving the Chinglish expression more access to transfer around the world. The language exchange between different language groups will produce the mutual influence and finally alter the expression's original meaning. Being spread to other English-speaking countries, the Chinglish expression gained popularity, making the expression lose its original language characteristics, which leads to the result that the application of the Chinglish become the more appropriate one to describe the social condition. As a Chinglish expression, *people mountain people sea* means that there are a lot of people in some place, very crowded, usually used to describe a big event or place which was used mostly by Chinese netizens while gained popularity in foreign countries and was included in the Oxford Dictionary. According to the statistics, the number of new Chinglish terms included in the Oxford Dictionary is 245, which counts more than 5% in the total number of new terms. In 2014, *you can you up* and *no can no bb* have been added into the Urban Dictionary, a satirical crowdsourced online dictionary of slang words and phrases. The popularity of Chinglish reveals that this unique expression has become a certain approach to observe the whole nation as well as demonstrates the increasing strength of China.

#### The sociocultural causes

The sociocultural changes also pose great impacts on the network buzzword. As the globalization develops in depth, the communication between countries has been linked closely, giving Chinese and English a more extensive application in

people's daily language use. With the increasing number of Chinese people learning English and more foreigners choose to learn Chinese, the integration of two languages has been realized, providing a favorable environment for Chinese netizens to create new network buzzwords.

The appearance of Internet buzzword is a phenomenon combined with linguistic and cultural characteristics. The generation and development of buzzword has been greatly influenced by social changes in political, economic and cultural aspects. The political element not only defines the nature of the buzzword but also renders the political characteristic to the buzzword, making it distinctive from other buzzwords. The last few years have witnessed the birth of the network buzzword with political traits such as *targeted poverty alleviation*, *Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei integration* and *the new norm* are three buzzwords summarized from 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. The linguistic variation diverts according to the changes in political aspect of the society, demonstrating the fact that the buzzword can reflect the political condition in the society. The economic aspect in the society can be regarded as the second sociocultural cause which contributes to the emergence of the Chinglish in Internet buzzword. As the economy develops, China has now become as the world's second largest economic power, which can greatly increase people's living standards. Through reform and opening up, China has gained more momentum in economic development, with which Chinese people have plenty time to experience lives in all rounds. The buzzword such as *the economic downturn*, *mass entrepreneurship* and *mobile payment* are the response to the rapid economic development as well as people's improving living standard. The cultural changes also make promotions to the emergence of buzzword. With the slack policies together with the development of Internet, the restriction for people to connect with people from other countries has alleviated. The language creation has been stimulated with the basis of the obscure boundary between country and the birth of new ideas and viewpoints. The cultural exchanges among countries have been deepened which give people passion to create new things, resulting the emergence of a large number of network buzzwords. The expression like *go die*, *online celebrity* and *MOOC* are the reflection of sociocultural condition.

## Conclusion

As the product of the social change, the function of Internet buzzword has both sides. On the one side, through the analysis of the Internet buzzword, the current social condition can be revealed. With the use of Internet buzzword, people's communication efficiency can be simplified. Being one of the main users of this Internet buzzword, teenagers who prefer to chase for fashion can build their culture confidence and realize their own national identities. With these exchanges in language, Chinese and English can gain improvements so as to strengthen the communication capability.

While on the other hand, the use of the Internet buzzword also has some shortcomings in the real application of language. The wide use of buzzword in

people's daily life may enlarge the language gap between the younger generation and the elder one. The Internet buzzwords often gain their roots from the Internet, which is unfamiliar for the Chinese elder generation. If teenagers apply the Internet buzzwords frequently in daily communication with their parents, Chinglish will impose negative impacts on the intergenerational communication. What's more, the buzzword is created by Chinese netizen with no formal shapes and most of these expressions are not being verified by the language institutions, enlightening people to be cautious when encountering the formal text. In addition, it is challenging for teenagers to make selection between formal expressions and Internet buzzwords.

Chinglish is an emerging language form generated under the background of the extensive application of Internet together with the deep linguistic and cultural integration of Chinese and English. The Internet buzzword reflects social condition which have not been examined and verified by formal linguistic organizations. With all these factors combined together, the Chinglish in the Internet buzzword should be treated dialectically. From the perspective of sociolinguistic, the emergence of Chinglish in the Internet buzzword has both advantage and disadvantage. Therefore, during the process of treating these expressions, more attention should be paid to distinguish the right approach by avoiding the weakness of the emerging language form so as to achieve a healthy and sustainable development.

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