Cyber Language Life Based on Pragmatic Construction Indicators of a Moderately Prosperous Society

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Abstract: In the digital age, cyber language is appearing in people’s language life. In the process of constructing the language ecological environment of a moderately prosperous society, the construction of pragmatic competence is very important. As a language variant, cyber language belongs to social dialect, which has its own characteristics, pragmatic value and underlying logic. The Internet is not a place outside the law, and the life of cyber language also has the problem of public opinion monitoring. We should purify the network environment and actively construct the cyber pragmatic competence so as to provide assistance and support for building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. The study of the life of cyber language based on the pragmatic construction indicators of a moderately prosperous society can expand the research field of pragmatics and provide a perspective and reference for constructing pragmatic construction indicators of a moderately prosperous society.

Keywords: A moderately prosperous society; Pragmatic construction; Cyber language; Public opinion monitoring; Perspective

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1. Introduction

Language involves all aspects of social life, concerns the national economy and people’s livelihood and the lifeline of the country, and affects all social strata and all walks of life. It is unavoidable and exists everywhere. Therefore, it has become a new goal of language work in the new era to grasp the linguistic features comprehensively and accurately and build a harmonious language ecological environment.

In June 2004, “National Language Resources Monitoring and Research Center” came into being and officially established its first branch center---Print Media Language Branch, which has gradually formed an effective mechanism for real-time monitoring and research of China’s language life. On this basis, the effective mechanism of standardized guidance is implemented. It is an inevitable trend for the monitoring and research of national language resources to strengthen the theoretical exploration and applied research.

In the information-based society, the network, known as the “Fourth Media”, has been quietly changing people’s life and working style. Network media has been integrated with language. The former provides a platform for the enrichment and development of the latter, while the latter provides a tool and carrier for the effective spread of the former.

This paper attempts to study cyber language life based on the pragmatic construction indicators of a moderately prosperous society.

2. Pragmatic Construction of a Moderately Prosperous Society

“Xiao Kang” first appeared in Daya · Minlao of The book of Songs, and was described as a social model in The Book of Rites · Liyun. A moderately prosperous society is the social ideal of ancient thinkers, which reflects the people’s longing and pursuit for a rich life and the ample well being. In the late 1970s, Comrade Deng Xiaoping put forward the strategic conception of “a moderately prosperous society” when planning the blueprint of China’s economic and social development. The Sixteenth and Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China has greatly promoted the construction of a moderately prosperous society. The Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed “building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way”, while the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly put forward the goals and requirements of “building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way”. These are two major strategic plans in the process of building a moderately prosperous society.

A moderately prosperous society includes material civilization and spiritual
civilization. It is a society where the country is prosperous and the people are at peace, common affluence is realized and progress is made in an all-round way. In 2008, National Statistics Institute issued *The Statistical Monitoring Plan for Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in an All-round Way*, which proposed an indicator system with 23 items in six aspects: economic development, social harmony, quality of life, democracy and legal system, culture and education, resources and environment. In 2013, according to the new requirements put forward by the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, National Statistics Institute compiled and published *The Statistical Monitoring Indicator System for Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in an All-round Way*. The indicator system includes 39 indicators in five aspects: economic development, democracy and legal system, cultural construction, people’s life, resources and environment, which is an important reference for measuring the degree of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way.

Language is the constituent element and distinctive symbol of culture, the most important communication tool and information carrier of human beings, and the driving force of historical development and social progress. It involves economy, social development, cultural prosperity, national unity, improvement of national quality and all-round development of human beings, historical and cultural heritage and great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which is an integrant part of the powerful cultural country. Therefore, in order to build a moderately prosperous society and realize the Chinese dream, we must pay attention to language, especially pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence construction, short for pragmatic construction, includes many indicators, all of which are based on pragmatic competence.

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability of the user to use language effectively to achieve a certain purpose in a specific situation. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability of how to use a certain language to achieve communicative purposes. In communication, we should fully consider the context and background knowledge, and use the potential language ability and knowledge. Mr. He Ziran pointed out that no matter what the difference is, pragmatic competence can be interpreted as the ability to use language for proper communication, which can be simplified into two aspects: expression and understanding. In order to make the language in the proper way, language users must learn to use the language flexibly and reasonably according to the specific context, social and cultural factors; in order to enhance the understanding of language, the language receiver must understand the general patterns and principles of language communication, as well as the multilayered discourse meaning. Different contexts lead to different pragmatic strategies. To be able to choose the most suitable pragmatic strategy is the embodiment of pragmatic competence. Taguchi summed up three key factors for the effective cultivation of pragmatic
competence: the real context, the use of functional language and interaction. [3] Mo Aiping and other scholars pointed out the premise of cultivating pragmatic competence from the opposite side, “Without imitation, learning, memory and communication, there will be no output, and the cultivation and development of pragmatic competence will be impossible.” [4] Imitation, learning, memory and communication are all inputs. Without input, there will be no output!

3. Cyber Language

Cyber language refers to the language used by netizens in online communication and common words used in online chat rooms and BBS. [5] “Generally speaking, As a written language, cyber language bears the colloquial style.” [6] It includes myriad combinations of Chinese and English letters, punctuation, symbols, phonetic alphabet, pictures and characters. Cook believes that the principle of saving effort has entailed the use of abbreviations, letter words and symbols, through which people may increase efficiency and spend the least effort to obtain the greatest cognitive effect. [7]

Today, cyber language has increasingly become an essential part of people’s online activities, such as online news, real-time communication, search engines, emails, online games, blogs, personal space and BBS.

David Crystal, renowned British linguist, even believes the development of the Internet will bring “revolutionary” changes to the evolution of languages. [8] As a communication tool in cyber context, cyber language manifests many features: The first is novelty, namely something people have never seen or heard before. For example, Chinese phrase “美眉 [měi méi]” (means “beauty”) is used in online communication to refer to “妹妹 [mèi mèi]” (means “girl/sister”). Chinese phrase “水饺 [shuǐ jiǎo]” (means “dumplings”) is used to imply “睡觉 [shuì jiào]” (means “sleep”). The second is flexibility, namely something that has flexible forms and various styles. For instance, “3k3” is short for “Thanks”, and “g2g” is short for “got to go”. The third one is brevity, namely something concise and straightforward. For example, Chinese phrase “酱紫 [jiàng zǐ]” is short for “这样子 [zhè yàng zǐ]” (means “I see”), and “CU” is short for “See you”. The fourth one is practicality, namely something practical and purposeful. For example, the Chinese word “当 [dāng]” is used to imply the English word “download”. The number “1314 [yī sān yī sì]” is used to imply “一生一世 [yī shēng yī shì]” (means “forever”). The fifth is the fun element, namely something fresh, alive and humorous. For instance, the Chinese phrase “驴友 [lǘ yǒu]” is used to replace “旅友 [lǚ yǒu]” (means “travel pal”), and “稀饭 [xī fàn]” (means “porridge”) is used to replace “喜欢 [xǐ huān]” (means “like”). The sixth is the down-to-earth element, namely something stressing equal communication without condescension. For instance, the Chinese phrase “菌男 [jùn nán]” is used to replace “俊男 [jùn nán]“ (means “handsome man”),
and the mixed phrase “小case” is used to mean “a piece of cake”. The last one is the vividness, namely something expressive and graphic. The examples include the Chinese word “囧” (means “awkward”) and a smiling face “O(^_^)O”. The stylistic features of cyber language conform to the rule of mass communication and fit netizens’ cognition.

There is a positive side of cyber language: With vitality and novelty, it has enriched language expressions, facilitated daily communication, stimulated our cultural life, and satisfied people’s special needs. As a result, we should draw upon its advantages and get rid of its flaws with an open mind. We should take advantage of the cyber language that receives the wide acceptance of the netizens to spread Chinese traditional virtues and positive influence of a new era. On the one hand, it is very hard to forbid the use of cyber language. On the other, there is no need to go against it.

Judging by the law of language evolution, new words and expressions will emerge as the society advances. CHEN Zhong noted that “Using the continuity between old and new concepts to create new concepts is an effective way for humans to expand knowledge”. Some new words and expressions will engage in people’s daily communication and become a part of general languages. There will certainly be some cyber languages which are more standardized, representative of the characteristics of the times, time tested. They may be absorbed into the common language. It is very easy to coin new words in Chinese, especially when you use single character and single syllable to do so. Besides, Chinese language is very inclusive and can easily absorb borrowed words.

Cyber language belongs to social dialects. In order to gain some identity in the virtual online speech community, netizens have regarded the proficient use of online catchphrases as a basic social skill. Cyber language has improved the participation of netizens in social public events and its response speed.

There is a negative side of cyber language as well, for it has some flaws and drawbacks. For instance, many uses of cyber language are pan-entertainment without standards and elegant style. Some are vulgar, filthy, full of language violence, and some imply content that violates public order, good customs or even goes against the law. These flaws and disadvantages will cause language pollution and need to be regulated and governed.

The influence posed by cyber language on traditional languages is inevitable. However, there is no need for us to treat it like a damaging flood or beast. As a new variant of language, cyber language is closely connected to the development of society. Each generation has its own learning style and life style. It is Cameron’s belief that people’s language behavior is different, for they belong to different behavior groups and perform different activities. Most people are ordinary workers, so it’s understandably acceptable for them to choose a simple online
language that can express ideas. Cyber language has its own characteristics and pragmatic value. It is used by specific groups of people and reflects the communicator’s pragmatic competence.

4. The Examples of the Underlying Logic of Chinese Cyber Language

We explored the underlying logic of the two types of Chinese cyber language below:

(1) Chinese cyber homophonic words

“砖家” is an internet homophonic catchword, which is often used to describe someone who is ignorant, boastful and pretends to be an academic authority, or a fake expert whose acting and speaking obviously violate social common sense and has no sense of shame. Homophony refers to the ingenious connection of harmonic word symbols with signified meanings under a broader concept by taking advantage of the condition that language symbols have the same or similar sounds. This method highlights the connection of pronunciation and the association of semantics.

WANG Dechun pointed out that “the homophonic words in rhetoric whose superficial meaning and essential meaning are separated from each other, result in a large amount of potential information, and the receiver has to think through association in order to capture the subsequent meaning under the surface”. Both of them emphasized the role and significance of association in Chinese cyber homophonic words. It can be said that there would be no homophonic Chinese cyber homophonic words without association. The emergence and development of homophonic Chinese cyber homophonic words are inseparable from the netizens, especially young netizens, who is against traditions, seek novelty and change, and emphasize individuality, recognition, efficiency, conciseness, interest and vividness.

ZHANG Yunhui said, “Most of the words in the cyber words belong to the genotype transmission of memes. That is, they have the same content and different forms.” For example, the number “88” is the homophonic expression of “bye-bye”. Homophonic words formed by combining Chinese characters, letters, numbers and symbols according to the characteristics of homophonic or similar sounds, mainly belong to the same content spreading in different shapes.

“The economic principle of language use means that people always try to find the balance between the best effect and the most convenient means, and people always tend to pursue the maximization of benefits and the minimization of expenses.” Therefore, “the basis for the existence of a language symbol lies in its unique value of its own system, otherwise, it will become superfluous.”

There are many vulgar expressions in cyber language, which are related to the anonymity and lack of confronting during online communication. To a certain
extent, it is more polite to use homophones. For example, in addition to expressing “他妈的” (means “fuck/damn”) with abbreviation of the acronym “TMDD”, netizens also use the homonym of English word “mud” to express it, which is tactful and implicit, thus maintaining the face of both parties in communication. Just as MAO Xinggeng said, “We should try to express the meaning or emotion as tactfully and implicitly as possible, instead of telling each other bluntly”, so as to “leave a little distance” between yourself and the listener or reader, and the listener or reader can easily accept the thoughts and feelings expressed by yourself.”[17]

British linguist Leech pointed out that “the more direct, the less polite; the more indirect, the more polite.”[18]

However, sometimes the more direct pragmatic strategy is to narrow the social distance between the two parties. In this regard, this article will not repeat it for the time being.

(2) Quasi-suffix

The appearance of new words, such as “～客”, “～帝”, “～党”, “～族”, “～奴” and “～二代”, are not only the inheritance of language, but also the development of language. These new words have not only preserved the old form of Chinese, but also added fresh content to it, making the new words more vibrant and more characteristic of the information age. We might as well take the Chinese internet word “帝” as an example to discuss the related problems of cyber language in depth below.

Apparently, the Chinese internet word “帝” (means “emperor”) has developed into quasi-suffix. It possesses specific grammatical features and functions. At the same time, its grammaticalization process embodies the meme theory. Explaining and analyzing the structure of “X帝” can help deepen people’s understanding of this popular Chinese internet word.


Han Dian’s interpretation of “帝” is: Firstly, it is used by religious people or myths to refer to the creator and master of the universe. For example, “上～玉皇大～”); secondly, it refers to Monarch. For example, “～王”, “～皇～”, “～称～”, “～制”. Obviously, the word “帝”, which is popular all over the country nowadays, refers to people or things that have special skills, abilities or influences.
in a certain era, region and field, and can also refer to people or things who are keen on doing something or have remarkable characteristics in a certain aspect. “X帝” implies to proclaim someone emperor in a certain field, and it also means talented people or extraordinary things. This fully reflects the vulgar consciousness and values of respecting emperors, valuing royalty and being proud of playing up to people of power and influence.

Although “帝” has generated new meanings, which exceeds the two meanings in Han Dian, its new online meaning is closely related to dictionaries’ interpretation. In fact, there is a transitional situation between them. For example, Li Yu is good at writing Ci (a form of ancient Chinese poems), and according to netizens, he should be called “词帝” (Emperor of Ci), and he was indeed the monarch of the Southern Tang Dynasty in the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. In other words, he was indeed “the Emperor who devoted himself to poetry”. By the same token, the title of “Emperor of Art through the Ages” in Zhao Ji, Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty also has a wonderful pun.

We can further examine the process and characteristics of the generalization of the meaning of “帝”. Different from “词帝”, the “影帝” is not “a monarch who is addicted to movies”. On the other hand, it is different from the current Internet meaning. It only refers to the best leading actor who wins “The Academy Award”, but does not include the best leading actress who is known as the “影后”. This is obviously affected by the “emperor” and “queen”. It can be seen that the “帝” in the “影帝” still retains the shadow of the “monarch”, but also pays attention to some of the external characteristics of the monarch. But the “X帝” has eliminated these conditions, emphasizing only its ability or influence. Therefore, netizens say “画帝 (Painting Emperor)”, but there is no “画后 (Painting Queen)” corresponding to it. Here, “帝” has been transferred, generalized, and even vanished. It produces new metaphorical meaning and further enlarges the scope of linguistic meaning. On this basis, “帝” also shows analogies and productivity.

In fact, this kind of transfer, generalization, and even disappearance has already happened, but not as obvious as now. Caesar, for example, lived at the end of the Roman republic. Although he ruled as a dictator, he also adopted a republican system, with the presence of the Senate, the organization of state power, and the Democratic official position, the civil protection official. The ruling system, unlike the imperial system, had a considerable democratic component. Therefore, Caesar was not the emperor of ancient Rome, and he never called himself emperor. However, people still call him “Caesar big emperor”. Obviously, this does not conform to the historical facts and reflects the generalization and vanity of “emperor”. Sometimes the word “Caesar” itself is blurred, as in “Murdoch: Media Caesar” or “Fashion Caesar Bernard Arnold”.

It is interesting to note that Chinese like expressing respect for a person
having high status or a lot of influence. For example, “the ‘Peter the Great’ was translated into “彼得大帝””. What is more, Guan Yu was not the supreme ruler, but was called “Emperor Guan” by later generations. This blurring indicates people’s reverence for Sir Guan.

It can be seen that in the process of grammaticalization, “帝” began to be loosely attached to material words and become a quasi-suffix. According to CHEN Guanglei, “the so-called quasi-suffix is a morpheme similar to the suffix, which is less ambiguous than the meaning of affixes and less real than the meaning of roots. It is a morpheme that is half real and half ambiguous, and has a wide range of combining surfaces in compound words. Perhaps it can be said that it is an affix that has not yet completed the grammaticalization of the final transformation.”

For example, “~者” “~员” “~汉” and so on. In recent years, a lot of suffixes have evolved or are evolving, such as “~党” “~族” “~奴” “~二代”, etc.. The word “帝” is also one of them. The emergence of new suffixes reflects the rapid development of social life as well as people’s meticulous and deepening observation and understanding of social phenomena.

As a quasi-suffix (namely the morpheme similar to the suffix), “王” can also be used to highlight the high degree, such as “题王” “标王” “超长待机王” and so on. However, compared with it, “帝” can better meet the needs of young people’s unconventional personality. In modern Chinese, “帝” is no longer an independent word, that is, it must be combined with other morphemes to express the meaning, such as “上帝” “天帝” “皇帝” “帝都” “帝王”, etc.. Defamiliarization can be achieved by using this morpheme, which usually cannot be used as a word by itself. At the same time, according to Li Mingjie, the “resonance and echo” caused by catchwords among the public is a kind of emotional identification and infection. In addition, from the perspective of historical connotation, “帝” is more unique and authoritative than “王”. For example, the Ming emperor Zhu Qiyu, who ascended to the throne after his brother, Emperor Yingzong, was captured, was killed by the restored Emperor Yingzong and was eventually buried at Yuquan Mountain in the western suburbs of Beijing as a “王” rather than a “帝”.

The diachronic evolution of language confirms Sapir’s assertion that “its form survives longer than its conceptual content”. That is, there is a general imbalance between language form and meaning in the evolution process, and language form always lags behind the change of language meaning. However, the meaning of the source word still controls or influences the meaning of new words. That is to say, new words carry more or less the birthmark of their source words. This also shows the dialectical relationship between replication and variation.

As far as part of speech is concerned, “X帝” is a nominal phrase. It is an attribute-head structure. That is, “帝” is the head or center, and before it is the modified ingredient. The modifier is usually used as a noun (e.g., “段子帝”),
a verb (e.g., “表演帝”), an adjective (e.g., “淡定帝”), or an alphabetic word (e.g., “PS帝”). Sometimes, in order to make the meaning of letter words more obvious, people will modify “帝” by “first letter + related morpheme”, such as “p图帝”. From the perspective of grammatical function, “X帝” is generally used as a subject (e.g., “自尊帝比犀利哥更潮”), object (e.g., “李开复新书开售现场惊现求婚帝”), and can also be used as an attributive (e.g., “章鱼帝纪念雕塑亮相”). Among them, the object includes the verb object and the prepositional object, the latter such as “凤姐向80后求婚帝公开求婚”. Of course, “帝” is also occasionally used as an adjective, such as, “他是’帝中帝’——好帝啊！”

The structure of “X帝” reflects the disyllabic character of Chinese. Sometimes we add “of” or “big” before “帝” such as “the Manolo Blahnik legend of the ‘Emperor of High Heels’”. Of course, in addition to congruent syllables, “big” also means degree of emphasis, as in “传奇英雄——访‘拉力大帝’勒布”。

The cognitive principle of grammaticalized, “new wine in old bottles”, reflects the problem of meme and meme variants. If we study “帝” from the perspective of meme, we can clearly see its origin, development and the process of grammaticalization. Blackmore pointed out that when an idea or a pattern of information appears, it is not considered a meme until someone else copies it or spreads it repeatedly. Only when this kind of thinking or information mode can be spread and copied can it be memetic. The spread and popularity of “X帝” is the result of imitation and replication, so it belongs to meme. It can be seen from the above that grammaticalization is a process of meme replication and transmission, as well as a process of meme mutation.

In fact, the underlying logic of cyber language is very complex, and there will be different underlying logic for different categories. We are merely showing some examples here.

5. Public Opinion Monitoring in Cyber Language Life

The concealment of the communicative subject’s identity and the arbitrariness of information exchange on the Internet can easily lead to ugliness and violence in human nature, which can easily lead to language anomie and moral anomie of many audiences, especially teenagers, and have a strong impact on the dissemination of traditional morality and language norms.

The emerging media has accelerated the process of social “off authority”, the grass root class has more discourse power, and the cyber language life presents the trend of “postmodernism” and “subculture”.

Cyber language challenges norms through semantic and pragmatic vagueness. On the one hand, it broadens people’s freedom in language choice. On the other hand, it shows netizens’ biased and missing bantering criticism on the traditional
real language system, as well as their subversion and power dissipation of traditional discourse. [25]

People will use cyber language to express their interests. With the continuous improvement of the awareness of language rights, netizens are not only the recipients of information, but also the senders of information and even the opinion leaders. In this case, we should pay attention to “language public opinions”

Wang Laihua defines public opinion as follows: “public opinion refers to the social and political attitude of the people as the subject towards the state administrator as the object, which is generated and held in a certain social space around the occurrence, development and change of intermediary social matters.”

Liu Yi’s definition of online public opinions is: “in short, online public opinion is the synthesis of various emotions, attitudes and opinions expressed and disseminated through the Internet.” [27]

As a new interdisciplinary research field, language public opinion involves communication, linguistics, Chinese information processing, computer network and other disciplines. It is an important perspective for linguistic research to “return to the society and serve the society”, an important reference for improving language policy and language planning, and a basis of public sentiment for the study of language issues. Therefore, the State Language Commission has regarded “language public opinion monitoring and research” as an important aspect of language life; In 2009, the Institute of language application of the Ministry of education set up the language public opinion research center, trying to gradually change the management mode of language policy from “propaganda” to “interaction”.

Cyber language may contain bad political and psychological factors. In order to make the cyber language environment clearer and build a harmonious language life, we need to start from the following three aspects:

First, collect information and strengthen supervision. Public opinion information from the Internet has the characteristics of high efficiency, timeliness and easy collection. We can dynamically track the changing trend of public opinion by obtaining continuous information. On the Internet, we need to search for real and effective information from false information and redundant information. For static pages, you can grab them by using general theme crawler; For dynamic web pages, we need to develop a special collection program.

We can filter information by matching keywords of news title, the theme of news comment, forum theme and blog title, etc. Of course, this requires a pre-prepared keyword list. The keyword table can be compiled manually by analyzing the existing cyber language, and can also be obtained automatically by statistical method through the program.

To ensure the collection of valuable information, we need to eliminate the false
and retain the true, eliminate the coarse and extract the fine, carefully screen and examine, and select representative information sources.

Secondly, implement effective management and strengthen the construction of network morality. The state should promote network civilization; every netizen should have a deep understanding of their rights and obligations in the virtual space, abide by the network rules and maintain the network order, strive to internalize the network norms into lofty moral standards, and finally find a balance between freedom and responsibility, so as to realize the freedom of all netizens.

Thirdly, it should be included in the scope of legal system. The law is used to regulate the rights and obligations of each subject. We should make the network law the guarantee of cyber language management, so as to better restrict and regulate the speech acts of Internet users on the Internet.

6. Conclusion

This paper deals with sociology, journalism and linguistics, especially pragmatics, a branch of linguistics. This kind of interdisciplinary, interdisciplin ary and transdisciplinary knowledge fusion research is also called deep approach or deep perspective. It is true that language plays an important role in building a moderately prosperous society. Pragmatic competence is an important symbol of a country’s soft power, which can enhance cultural confidence and social civilization.

“Context directly affects people’s understanding and use of discourse,” Jin Dingyuan said. The Internet itself is the context. We should deeply study how people use cyber language to communicate in the network context, and actively build cyber pragmatic competence, so as to provide help and support for building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way.

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