

Verbal Aphasia: A Common Degradation of verbal expression among Post-90s

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ABSTRACT

This study comprehensively analyzes the causes of verbal aphasia, explain its manifestations, explore effective strategies to cope with it, and respond to existing research on verbal aphasia in a more formal manner. By using the grounded theory, this paper collects data through in-depth interviews. Through the stages of open coding, spindle coding and selective coding, a model of expression degradation and coping behavior was established. Both environmental factors and personal factors can cause the degradation of verbal expression, and each person has their own different measures to cope with their degradation of verbal expression.

KEYWORDS

Expression degradation; Verbal aphasia; Degradation of verbal expression; Grounded theory

1 Background, Objectives and Significance of the Study

In 2019, the Social Survey Center of *China Youth Daily* and wenjuan.com jointly conducted a questionnaire survey among 2,002 respondents, revealing that 76.5% of respondents felt their language was getting poorer. Since 2021, several media outlets, including *Guangming Daily* and *The Paper*, have published articles such as *Verbal Aphasia is Killing Expression* and *When 'Memes' Eat our Language*; in Douban, a group named "Alliance of People with Verbal Aphasia" was set up. In this context, "verbal aphasia" has gradually drawn attention.

Whether in daily face-to-face communication or relatively serious formal communication, many people frequently face a troubling dilemma of expression. When chatting with friends and not knowing how to express, people have no other choice but to say "you know what I mean, right." Even in important and formal occasions such as interviews, the only thing coming to the mind is but memes popular in online communities. When writing comments online, people's verbal expression can differ from what they have in mind, leading to misunderstanding by other netizens. Verbal aphasia is envelopes individuals' expression space like a lingering haze, driving us to wonder what on earth has happened for I used to be able to express in a well-organized and in-depth manner?

In public social media, memes seem to have become the only language, and online communication has become shallow and superficial. Valuable discussions of opinions are replied with memes, and space for rational dialogues has been squeezed and public opinions tend to be emotional and partial.

As the quality of online information lowers, social media are driven in a low-quality and vulgar direction. Due to expression degradation, traditional idioms and other literary expressions are being shelved, leading to a crisis of broken cultural inheritance. Poor language also hinders the creation of new culture, making it challenging for in-depth cultural works with connotations to be created.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze what causes verbal aphasia, explain its manifestations, and explore effective strategies to cope with it; it also tries to demonstrate that the popularity of "memes" in social media is not the only cause triggering verbal aphasia, on which basis it responds to existing research on verbal aphasia in a more formal manner.

The significance of this study is reflected in two aspects.

First, in terms of theoretical significance, this study fills the gap of existing theories in verbal aphasia, thus providing a strong support for the perfection of relevant theoretical systems. This study provides a more in-depth theoretical perspective and basis for further discussions on how to solve verbal aphasia.

Secondly, in terms of its practical significance, thus study provides a solution for the public to improve their language using ability, thus maintaining the richness and accuracy of language and culture, and enhancing the language literacy of the entire society.

2 Literature Review

2.1 What are verbal aphasia and degradation of verbal expression

Aphasia itself is a medical term that refers to the impairment or loss of speech communication ability caused by

acquired lesions or trauma in the language function area of the cerebral cortex^[1]. All existing research holds that verbal aphasia is not caused by pathological reasons, but due to the deterioration of verbal expression ability, which makes people unable to accurately express their thoughts^[2].

Baidu Encyclopedia emphasizes that those with aphasia will only “break down” when they need to express long content with complete logic and complexity. Yu Binbin, Ye Zhiwei and Zhang Guxiang pointed out in their paper that the premise was that due to the long-term influence of the Internet environment, people would actively or passively overuse popular Internet symbols for social activities on online social platforms or in social life, and become addicted to them, thus resulting in verbal aphasia^[3].

The author believes that verbal aphasia is a situation in which people’s verbal expression ability deteriorates due to a variety of reasons, making them unable to express themselves as accurately and coherently as before. Degradation of verbal expression emphasizes the contrast between the past and the present. This slide from a relatively high level of verbal expression to a lower level is a key feature of verbal aphasia. Its specific manifestations include poor content of expression, poor habits of expression and so on.

2.2 Directions of existing research and innovation points of research

Zhang Yunjun explained verbal aphasia with the media bias theory^[4]. Zhang Yinhu analyzed Internet memes and proposed that they were the main Internet cause of expression degradation^[5]. Liu Mingyang and Tang Liang discussed the mother tongue security crisis behind verbal aphasia from the perspective of technical philosophy^[6]. Liu Yuanjun and Chen Liyao not only discussed individual aphasia, but also raised many social problems it might cause. Cao Gaofei focused her attention of aphasia on vocational college students^[7].

However, there are still little research on verbal aphasia. No in-depth analysis has been conducted using the grounded theory. This study mainly uses the method of grounded theory to encode and analyze the manifestations, causes of degeneration and coping behaviors of verbal aphasia in order to draw conclusions.

Existing research on the causes of aphasia mainly focuses on the perspective of Internet memes, establishing a strong correlation between the development of the Internet, especially social media, and aphasia^[8].

But is this really the case? And is there anything else we can analyze from the social perspective and from the perspective of language needs?

This paper focuses on the post-90s, a group growing up under a special historical background. They were less influenced by the Internet when they were young, grew up with the Internet, and gradually became influenced by social media and have become the main users of social media today.

By analyzing this group of people who are influenced by the Internet and show distinct differences before and after such influence, this paper explores whether verbal aphasia is completely caused by the Internet and popular memes.

3 Research Design

3.1 Research methodology

This study mainly adopts the exploratory qualitative research method of the grounded theory. This approach, developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, seeks to explain and understand social phenomena. It maintains that it is an inductive bottom-up research process to extract concepts and construct ideas from daily life experience and social phenomena^[9].

3.2 Data collection

This study takes the post-90s as the core research subjects, and includes one post-80s and one post-00s, trying to find out whether there are significant differences between similar age groups.

In this study, semi-structured questionnaires were used to conduct in-depth interviews with individuals, which were a combination of online interviews and offline interviews, involving a total of 29 respondents. Interviews and analysis were mutually reinforcing in in-depth interviews. Therefore, after each interview, the researcher would sort out and analyze the interview data, constantly clarify the thoughts and adjust the interview questions until the obtained information was repeated^[9].

Both online and offline interviews were recorded, and text materials were collated simultaneously.

The researcher randomly selected two-thirds of the interview data for coding analysis and model construction, and the remaining one third of the interview records were used for saturation verification, as shown in the following figure. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1 Information of interviewees

Item	Indicator	Sample size	Percentage
Gender	Male	12	41
	Female	17	59
Age	Post-80s	1	3.5
	1990-1993	9	31
	1994-1996	8	27
	1996-1999	10	35
	Post-00s	1	3.5
Education	Associate college	4	14
	Undergraduate	8	27
	Master	13	45
	Doctor or above	4	14
Occupation	Student	4	14
	Teacher	5	17
	Employee	20	69

4 Coding Analysis Based on the Grounded Theory

4.1 Open coding

Open coding is the process of breaking up collected data, conceptualizing them, and then reassembling them in new ways. When coding, researchers should keep an open mind, try to suspend personal “biases” and the “established opinions” of the research community, and record all data as they appear. The author first broke up all the data, analyzed them word by word, discovered the initial concept, then clustered the initial concept into categories, and finally abstracted 16 sub-categories, as shown in the following table. See Table 2 for details.

Table 2 Open coding table (Only partly shown)

Category	Original sentences (Initial concept)
More oral needs	NSX: There are not many formal communications with clients (few formal communications in workplace)
Influence of social media	PHX: The communications I have are oral, whether in workplace or in my life (many oral communication scenarios) ZX: Browsing Tik Tok short videos, I receive too much fragmented information, failing to have systematic logic and have poorer ability of logical thinking now (fragmented information)
Less high-quality input	LKX: I absorb too few things every day and now I basically don't read (less input of high-quality content) LKX: It's related to words of the Internet. The same words repeat every day and when there are too much input, there is no output (frequent input of low-quality Internet content)
Less thinking	PHX: People around me use memes everyday, determined by my industry, you know. (low-quality content input by peers)
Less socializing	WYJ: I seldom think proactively, in some expression (less thinking) ZMB: I don't often communicate, and don't express in social media in a long time. (less online socializing)
Unable to express	PHX: I don't have a boyfriend and don't talk much with people except in workplace (less offline socializing) PHX: I can't think of better expressions and can only use memes, as if there is a fog in my mind (only able to use memes) FM: I don't know how to express (can't express) WYJ: I couldn't think and summarize clearly in a short time and surprise the interviewer (can't express clearly)
Poor expression content	NSX: What I have in mind is different from what I express, and I often repeat what I first expressed but still unable to hear the true intention (expression deviation) DXL: In the past, there were not much words but they were all useful, now words are with little value, talking just for the sake of talking (empty expression) ZX: Too much nonsense and repeated emphasis (verbose expression)
Poor expression habits	FM: I can only use the same words. Habits have been built for a long time and I always use some fixed words (fixed wording habits) DXL: It's reflected in linguistic fetishism in normal communication with people, usually using associated words in communication (linguistic fetishism)
Poor logic in expression	ZX: I can't express in a well-organized way and my expression is not with logic (no logic in talking)

4.2 Spindle coding

The main task of spindle coding is to discover and establish various connections between conceptual categories, to show the organic relationship between various parts of the data, and to develop main categories and sub-categories. See Table 3 for details.

Table 3 Spidle coding table

Main category	Sub-category	Connotation of category
Environmental factors	More oral needs	Little formal written communication in workplace and in daily life, using oral expression more
	Influence of social media	Fragmented information in social media and a lack of systematic logic
Personal factors	Less high-quality input	Less high-quality input, frequent low-quality input from the Internet and by peers
	Less thinking	Less thinking
	Less socializing	Less socializing online and offline
	Unable to express	Unable to express and can only think of memes
Degradation of verbal expression	Poor content of expression	Unclear expression, deviation between things in mind and words said, empty content of expression
	Poor expression habits	Verbose expression, fixed wording, linguistic fetishism
	Poor logic in expression	No logic in talking
	Thinking more slowly than talking	Words come faster than the mind
	Conscious practice	Practice in written or oral forms and practice in advance
Coping behavior	Reduce the influence of social media	Reduce fragmented input of social media
	Increase high-quality input	Reading or learning from others
	Think more	Thinking more and thinking before talking
	Return to paper-pen expression	Recording with paper and pen
	Socialize more	Having more online and offline socializing

4.3 Selective coding

Selective coding is the integration and refinement of the content formed by the spindle coding. It digs out the core category that can dominate other categories from the main category, and uses typical models to connect it with other category systems, analyze and verify the connection between them, and develop story lines to describe all contextual conditions and behavioral phenomena, thus forming a theoretical framework^[9]. The typical relational structure of the main category is as shown below. See Table 4 for details.

Table 4 Selective coding table

Typical structural relation	Connotation of structural relationship
Environmental factors → Degradation of verbal expression	More oral language needs and the influence of social media are the external environmental factors that lead to the phenomenon of expression degradation
Personal factors → Degradation of verbal expression	Less high-quality input, less thinking, and less socializing are internal personal factors that trigger the degradation of expression
Degradation of verbal expression-coping behavior	Each person has a different countermeasure to the degradation of their verbal expression

Based on the typical structure diagram, this study constructs and develops a new model to express the degradation phenomenon and coping behavior. See Picture 1 for details.

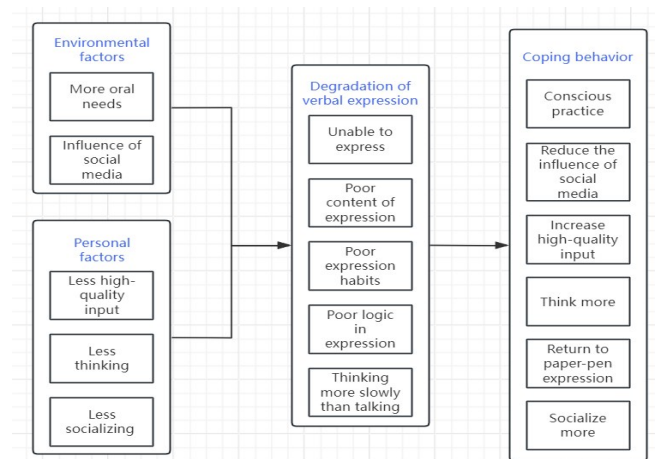


Figure 1 The new model to express the degradation phenomenon and coping behavior

5 Model Explanation and Research Conclusions

5.1 Verbal expression degradation as a result of environmental factors

There are two types of communication: formal communication and oral communication. Most of the formal communication is used in work and study. All post-90s have basically begun working, and many post-90s do not often use formal communication language at work, mostly using oral communication. According to the theory of memory trace decay by Aristotle and Thorndike, forgetting is the result of gradual decline due to the lack of reinforcement of memory traces, so that they finally fade^[10]. In the work that occupies most of the time of the post-90s generation, the formal verbal communication is not strengthened and gradually forgotten, resulting in the degradation of expression. LSY was the only post-90s respondent who felt she didn't suffer from a degraded expression. In her work, she needs to have formal communication with clients every day, thus maintaining a high level of language expression skills, which confirms the above conclusion from the opposite perspective.

5.2 Verbal expression degradation as a result of personal factors

Krashen put forward the supervision theory in 1985, in which the language input hypothesis holds that comprehensible input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition. In a natural language environment, learners acquire language naturally through a large amount of exposure to understandable language input that is slightly higher than their current language level. The optimal amount of language code input is $i+1$, where i is the learner's current language level and $+1$ is a language level slightly higher than the current level^[11]. This theory holds true for second language acquisition, so does it for native language use. A large number of $i-1$ language (popular memes) input caused by the Internet and peers, couple with a small number or even no $i+1$ language input, will naturally cause the decline of language expression ability.

Linguistics believes that language and thinking are interdependent and develop together. Abstract thinking ability promotes language development and guarantees the value of language existence. Without mental activity, language loses its value of existence^[12]. Due to fragmented social media information, or due to daily trifles, the post-90s have reduced deep thinking and abstract thinking activities, resulting in a decline in the ability to use language, resulting in verbal aphasia.

Many post-90s have less social contact because they are physically far away from their friends after beginning to work, or because they are too busy. Linguistics believes that language has two social functions, one is information transmission and the other is interpersonal interaction. The decrease in interpersonal interaction in turn affects the language, resulting in the degradation of expression.

5.3 Active response of those with degradation of verbal expression

Faced with the degradation of verbal expression, the post-90s generation has taken various measures to help themselves. Through conscious practice, reducing the influence of social media, increasing high-quality input, thinking more, returning to paper and pen, having more socializing, and many other ways, they try to restore their ability to express themselves.

As shown by the interview data, these measures are effective in some cases. For example, respondent ZX mentioned that before the open class, he clarified his thoughts by writing down with paper and pen, and practiced in advance, and achieved good results in the open class.

5.4 The relationship between verbal aphasia and "memes" in social media

Most of the existing papers have tried to argue that verbal aphasia is strongly related to "memes" on the Internet and social media. However, through in-depth interviews with the post-90s generation, we found that "memes" on social media are only one of the causes of verbal aphasia. Many people with verbal aphasia, even if not exposed to these "memes", have difficulty in using rich, precise and rich language to complete written or oral expression. For those who have a good command of the language, memes are merely an element that adds interest to their conversations, and will not lead them to the dilemma of verbal aphasia.

5 Conclusions

The post-90s have grown into an important force for social development, and their expression degradation has seriously affected the normal expression of individuals. If this problem were allowed to develop in the long run, it would

have a negative impact on the social media environment and cultural progress, so it should be paid attention to by all sectors.

Since the model proposed in this paper is based on exploratory research, its reliability and validity have not been tested by large-scale sample statistics. In future work, researchers still need to consider the use of quantitative methods to verify the relationship between variables in the model.

About the Author

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