

# *A Study of Code-mixing in Netspeak: from the Perspective of the Meme Theory*

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**Abstract:** According to memetics, meme is the basic transmission unit of human ideas, culture language and behavior. The Meme Theory is a new theory based on Darwin's theory of evolution and used to explain the law of cultural evolution. From the perspective of memetics this paper analyzes the phenomenon of code. Analyzing the reasons for the production and existence of memes from the perspective of pragmatics of memetics, in order to deepen the research on the formation and evolution mechanism of internet language. Memetics is a new theory based on Darwin's theory of evolution, used to explain the laws of cultural evolution. Memes are the basic units of human thought, concepts, culture, language, and behavior transmission. With the increasing frequency of economic, cultural, and political exchanges and interactions among countries, the connections between different language communities have become closer. As a natural product of social development and human civilization language is also constantly evolving and updating. The Internet not only provides a virtual community for netizens to make information exchange more convenient but also has a great impact on our language. In this way "netspeak" came into being. The so-called "network language" refers to the language used by people in web pages, e-mails online chat rooms or online forums. Due to the richness and randomness of network language we can find a large number of code-mixing in Chinese and English phenomena in network communication.

## **1. Introduction**

As society, technology and openness continue to grow, our languages are constantly being renewed and integrated. Over the past few decades, the entire planet has been transformed into a community, and international communication has further intensified, with foreign languages entering our society and having a huge impact on native languages. The Internet has not only provided a virtual platform-based language community for Internet users to exchange information more easily, but it has also had a huge impact on our language and daily communication. As a result, cyberspeak has emerged, which refers to the language used by people on the web, in emails, online chat rooms or social media. The huge user base of the Internet has given the language a richness and randomness, so we can find a lot of code-mixing in online communication. The presence of Chinese, English and other foreign languages in daily communication seems to be an inevitable social phenomenon. Starting from the 1980s, the phenomenon of mixed use of English appeared in Chinese society, especially in Chinese cities. Today, English is widely used in China and can be found everywhere.

For example:

- (1) a. 5G 时代
- b. C位
- c. 打call

Internet buzzwords above have become one of the well-known Internet buzzwords. These buzzwords are the result of the mixture of English and Chinese codes and the study of these words and phrases can promote the in-depth exploration of this field. At the same time, these Internet phrases are closely related to our life, and the analysis of this phenomenon can deepen our understanding and attention to language regulate daily language, and promote the good development of Internet language. In this paper, we will study the phenomenon of code-mixing in Internet language from the perspective of modality theory, analyze the causes and effects of English-Chinese mixed Internet buzzwords and the reasons for their popularity in order to deepen the research on the formation and evolution mechanism of Internet language.

## 2. Code-mixing in online language from the perspective of memetics

Dawkins first introduced the term "modus ponens" in his book *The Selfish Gene*<sup>[2]</sup>. Modalism is a new theory based on Darwin's theory of evolution to explain the laws of cultural evolution interpreting the universal connections between things and the evolutionary laws of cultural inheritance from an ephemeral and coeval perspective. Romaine suggests that code-mixing refers to "the coexistence of components from different grammatical systems or subsystems under the same part of speech" <sup>[11]</sup>. Matras points out that some scholars consider code-mixing to refer to the phenomenon of linguistic mixing in phrases or discourse; others consider code-mixing to refer to unique linguistic structures resulting from linguistic mixing that do not occur in the discourse of only one language speaker; and still others refer to the different kinds of linguistic mixing collectively as code-mixing<sup>[9]</sup>. In contrast, Muysken uses code-mixing to refer to the phenomenon of lexical items or grammatical features from two different languages appearing in the same sentence<sup>[10]</sup>.

In today's society, where the Internet has become an important vehicle for communication between people around the world, Internet language has become a new area of research in bilingual studies. Crystal points out that online language has its own unique characteristics, including pictorial, spelling, grammatical, lexical and conversational features. He argues that online language has a variety of lexical and syntactic possibilities, with unique sentence structures, word order and inflexion patterns; that online diction has its own characteristics; and that the organisation of online conversations is variable and unique<sup>[5]</sup>. According to the meme theory, it is the basic units of transmission of human ideas, culture, language and behavior. A meme code is a discernible variant of a certain language involving a specific geographical social, class functional allocation or a series of choices for a specific context and can be a language a dialect, a corpora or a domain<sup>[3]</sup>. Code-mixing as a more general linguistic phenomenon, reflects the law of linguistic and cultural evolution and is a modality that keeps reproducing and spreading<sup>[12]</sup>. The English-Chinese hybrid Internet buzzwords are the result of code-mixing. Code-switching and code-mixing (code-switching v.s. code-mixing) are two similar but different phenomena. Usually code-switching refers to any transition between languages during a conversation whether at the word sentence, or paragraph level. Code-mixing on the other hand is the conversion of two languages at the word level, i.e. a word in a sentence is another language<sup>[7]</sup>. The mixed English-Chinese Internet buzzwords are all word-level transitions, so this is a code-mixing phenomenon. This paper applies the basic viewpoint of pragmatics modality theory and regards the phenomenon of language mixing in online languages as the result of modality reproduction and transmission.

## 2.1 The Generation of Middle English Code Mixing from a Modalistic Perspective

In addition, Muysken developed a typology-based model of code-mixing, including three methods of mixing: insertion, alternation and reduplication lexicalisation. Insertion refers to the insertion of lexical items or entire linguistic components from one language into the structure of another language, and is restricted to the grammar of the parent language<sup>[9]</sup>. Alternation refers to the alternation of two relatively independent linguistic structures in the absence of the parent language, and the blending of function words is a typical example of alternation. He discusses the phenomenon of borrowing and code-mixing, i.e. intra-lexical mixing, and classifies this phenomenon as relexicalisation. Moreover, he mentions that loanwords are closely related to code-mixing<sup>[9]</sup>. Auer, on the other hand, argues that there is no need for a grammatical rule or constraint on the phenomenon of code-mixing that is independent of the two languages involved<sup>[1]</sup>. Many forms of code-mixing in the video are formed on the basis of education and knowledge transfer, and are reproduced as modalities by continuous transmission. For example:

- (2) a. 这两个方案我觉得都ok
- b. 节目嘉宾太搞笑了吧hhhhhh
- c. 直接让人芭比Q了
- d. 我可真是有点栓Q

In example a., the mixed English is a direct application of English vocabulary acquired during learning. It is not only an innovative form of usage but also avoids the complicated and lengthy expressions in Chinese when expressing approval and other attitudes. For example b., the letters "h" are a set of onomatopoeic words that express laughter "ha" or "heh". The onomatopoeic symbol of "heh" is used here to express the unstoppable laughter. The second is the process of language use, that is, in the process of continuous repetition addition subtraction and transformation contribute to the mixing of codes. In terms of example c., it is the harmonic sound of the English word barbecue, which originally means barbecue. On the Internet it means "game over". Ba bi Q =barbecue=barbecue=cremation=game over. So a person says this netspeak to express a very shocked and powerless feeling third the process of communication and exchange contributes to the mixing of language codes. Language is a dynamic process of development an important reason is that it is constantly used, in the process of communication and communication is constantly copied and circulated. As society develops, communication is not limited to the group of speakers of the language, but increasingly cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication emerges. These language modalities are unconsciously reproduced and transmitted during communication. In example d., the word "shuan Q" is the Chinese harmonization of "thank you", which means gratitude. The word originated from a self-taught English blogger on the Tik Tok short video platform because once when he said "thank you", which became a modality of language code mixing, and later evolved to mean speechless, depressed or self-loathing. It has since evolved to mean speechless depressed or self-loathing.

## 2.2 Replication and Propagation of Middle English Code Mixing in a Meme Perspective

The mixture of language codes not only shows diversity in the types of language but also does not stick to one form in the way of mixing, reflecting a strong reproduction and transmission. The first is repetition the direct application of words and phrases from another language code in communication<sup>[7]</sup>. This can be divided into the use of complete words and the use of abbreviated words. For example:

- (3) a. You know, 现在的形势就是这样
- b. 这是我们的 CEO, 这是我们的 CFO, 这是我们的 COO
- c. 妙 book 言
- d. 假期 ing

The first example mixes words directly with Chinese. In order to avoid some inconvenient reasons, the English word is used directly as a transition word. And the second example is a mixture of abbreviations directly with Chinese and the letters CEO, CFO and COO are the mixture of abbreviated forms of English words and Chinese. The second is analogy. The first one is homophonic mixture like the third example where “book” seems to be a direct application of the word in the sentence, but in fact it is borrowed from its pronunciation to replace the Chinese word that pronounces these sounds to form a code-mixing phenomenon, and the meaning of the mixed code-mixing has nothing to do with the meaning to be expressed. The second type is the isomorphic analogy that imitates the language structure of mixed codes. In example d., “ing” is a grammatical suffix, which is usually added after the word to indicate that the action is going on.

### **2.3 Characteristics of Middle English Code Mixing from a Memetics Perspective**

The rhetorical effect is good in the process of code-mixing, and it enriches the rhetorical pattern while achieving its own reproduction and dissemination. For example the phrase “2022 welcome to Beijing” is used in the context of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games so it is not only fashionable to greet people in English but also has the effect of drawing closer to the audience. The second is nesting which is a rhetorical effect of nesting between different languages to fill in the missing words and reflect the context. For some foreign words, people often directly insert the foreign words into the discourse or choose more economical abbreviations than translating them into a lengthy expression that fits the native language. This is to fill the vacancies in the native language and to achieve the best results with less effort and economy in expression. For example, “LV” is more economical than “Louis Vuitton”.

## **3. The Linguistic Function of English Code Mixing in Internet Buzzwords**

Middle English code mixing has become an important linguistic phenomenon in modern life, embodying a wealth of linguistic functions with both positive effects and certain negative impacts.

### **3.1 Positive effects**

One is economy, and the Cooperative Principle of H.P. Grice mentions the principle of clarity and avoidance of obscurity when providing information<sup>[6]</sup>. In linguistic communication concise expressions are more accurate and clearer in expressing and conveying information. The mixture of language codes especially the mixture of Chinese and English reflects the economy of expression in communication. For example, “P” is more economical than “Photoshop”. Second, politeness. While avoiding presumptuousness, the mixed language code avoids some inappropriate expressions, which is in line with the Chinese communication characteristics. For example, “GG” means “mess it up”, which has a derogatory meaning, and using the Internet buzzword to express it reflects euphemism and relative politeness. Thirdly, it is witty. Mixing language codes can create a light-hearted and humorous atmosphere and increase the ratings of the program to a certain extent. For example, “Ladies and xiang qin men” uses a mixture of Chinese and English codes to simulate an award speech, reflecting liveliness and humor. Fourth, expressiveness. The mixture of language codes has strong expressiveness which can close the language distance and has good expression effect. For example, “buff” is a term used in the game so direct quotation can close the language distance with the audience playing this game and get the audience’s sense of identity and affection. This can increase the click rate and influence.

### **3.2 Negative effects**

First, there are defects in usage. Although code-mixing is very convenient in expression, it

sometimes creates difficulties for cognition and destroys the principle of language economy<sup>[9]</sup>. On the one hand, people who are not familiar with foreign languages or Internet phrases tend to be confused just like industry hackneyed words. On the other hand, some expressions can produce different cognitive interpretations. For example, "DDL" and "po" are internet terms that mean "deadline" and "upload" respectively. If you don't know the internet language, you can't understand it. Second, the impact on the purity of the language. The mixture of Chinese and English codes, to a certain extent, destroys the purity of the language especially the mixture of foreign words and Chinese. Although the mixture of some words responds to the language reality and fills the word defects many words exist in Chinese words and the direct application of foreign words sometimes affects the expressions and structure of Chinese which seems a bit redundant. For example, "lei com-mie-plain a" ("lei" and "mie" are Cantonese words meaning "you" and "what") means "What are you complaining about?" The mixture of Cantonese and English is redundant. Bodomo introduces a new code-mixing phenomenon, the newly created Cantonese pinyin word, which uses English as the base language and inserts Cantonese or pinyinised Cantonese into an English sentence<sup>[4]</sup>. This phoneticisation does not need to be very standard in the creation of words, and such words can be created in a variety of forms. This code-mixing phenomenon is therefore different from traditional Cantonese-English code-mixing, and more and more such new words are being coined by Internet users in everyday online communication <sup>[4]</sup>. Will the proliferation of code-mixing in everyday life reproduce "Yanggingbang" or constitute a new hybrid language similar to Creole? These are all things to be thought about.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study analyzes the phenomenon of code-mixing between Chinese and English in contemporary internet slang from the perspective of memetics, and briefly discusses its pragmatic functions. From the perspective of memetics, the emergence of code-mixing is due to education and knowledge transmission, constantly used in people's communication and interaction, and generated and replicated through repetition and analogy, with the rhetorical effect of being fashionable and embedded. It has pragmatic functions of economy, politeness, humor, expressiveness, and fashion, but inevitably impacts the purity of Chinese, causing cognitive difficulties and exposing the flaws of economy.

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