

A Sociolinguistics and Social Psychology Analysis of the Network Buzzwords "Nonsense Literature"

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Abstract: “Nonsense literature” is a special linguistic phenomenon, applicable to the occasion where the conversations do not contain any useful information. It is good at using rhetorical methods such as repetition, variation in collocation, irony, puns, calque, superposition, conversion, ambiguity, and imitation, which seem to be meaningless but can express the speaker’s intention and make the conversation more interesting. It is also suitable for satirizing phenomena that have no substance. It contains strong emotions. It is humorous, ironic, and has a sense of intimacy. The causes are not only influenced by social culture and social psychology, but also by internal linguistic factors.

1. Introduction

“Nonsense literature” is an online language that has suddenly become popular on the Internet recently [1]. It is a special linguistic phenomenon. Once it was created, its “nonsense style” began to be popular on various social occasions. Its prosperity is not only the result of the creativity of the language but also because of the social culture and social psychology, which are worth exploring. There have been discussions of “nonsense literature” in academic circles, but they focus on a superficial analysis of the phenomenon of “nonsense literature”, without an in-depth analysis of the deeper cultural and psychological causes behind it, not to mention the analysis combined with sociolinguistics and social psychology. This paper not only integrates sociolinguistics and social psychology but also tries to conclude the grammatical features of “nonsense literature” from the perspective of rhetoric. At the same time, according to its semantic and pragmatic features, the paper combines the factors including the usage occasions, people, social culture, and psychology. It is found that the “nonsense literature” is much more positive than negative in its usage, which is original [2].

The article focuses on the linguistic phenomenon of “nonsense literature”, and studies the grammar, pragmatic features, cultural causes, and psychological causes. The linguistic samples were mainly from popular Internet terms, and the choice of language was also intervened. The review data were obtained from the Internet, and there were about 1,960,000 search results for related Internet terms on search engines. The selection criteria were mainly to select the terms that were frequently used, widely disseminated, and used by a large number of people. The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between the causes and development of this particular linguistic phenomenon and its vitality and to determine whether the Internet buzzword “nonsense

literature” has real vitality [3].

The study found that “nonsense literature” has developed rapidly from being used mainly in occasions where speeches are nonsense and meaningless to chatting and interaction that can be used to enliven the atmosphere and relieve embarrassment and stress [4]. It is good at using rhetorical methods such as repetition, variation in collocation, irony, puns, calque, superposition, conversion, ambiguity, and imitation, which seem to be meaningless but can express the speaker’s intention and make the conversation more interesting. It is also suitable for satirizing phenomena that have no substance. It has strong emotions.

The analysis of its grammar and pragmatics shows that the popularity of this linguistic phenomenon comes from the creativity of the language, and it is also possible that the similarity of the social environment and the psychological expression of human intentions in the current era has led to the strong vitality [5]. The conclusion can be the reference for the study of the linguistic use and causes of Internet buzzwords. However, given the strong creativity of “nonsense literature”, which can always be imitated. It is impossible to achieve exhaustive statistics, and the language cases selected can only be the typical phenomena of “nonsense literature” at present, which has certain limitations.

2. The origin of Nonsense Literature

Nonsense literature, which seems to be a kind of online literature, is a sort of network language created by netizens. The language is presented in the course of human interaction, so it is social.

“Nonsense literature” applies to situations where words seem to be spoken without any useful information, and where the speaker in a given social context often conveys a message that is incoherent, unintelligible, ambiguous, and vague. The clever twist is that nonsense literature is not fixed. Instead, it flexibly applies the syntactic features of the internal structure of the sentence. By making use of the syntactic changes, word replacement, and other ways to form a discourse with similar intention but different forms, nonsense language can attract the attention of the listeners who will not treat it as boring [6]. While the speaker can skillfully express their attitude by saying “nonsense” without making people feel offended and even find it humorous.

With the rise of “nonsense literature”, the “nonsense style” with its unique style began to be used in various social situations. It is popular among secondary school students, and then it quickly expands to teachers, doctors, white-collar workers, and other groups. It is used in an extensive range, from the empty talk at the beginning to the interaction in which it can liven up the atmosphere, and reduce tension and stress. Therefore, “nonsense literature” shows great potential.

The rapid popularity of “nonsense literature” on the Internet is largely due to the creativity of language. Chomsky (2006) points out that “linguistic creativity is the creativity of language, which refers to the potential of speakers to create new sentences and paragraphs, that is to create grammatically correct sentences by mastering the rules of language [7].”

As online language develops, “nonsense literature” is created by netizens according to the grammatical rules, which is why it can be popular for such a long time. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the grammatical features, pragmatic functions, and cultural psychological causes of “nonsense literature” from the perspective of sociolinguistics.

3. The Grammatical Features of “Nonsense Literature”

“Nonsense literature” mainly consists of two clauses with irregular sentence elements. The first part of the sentence usually starts with a statement of fact, and the second part either repeats the same content or expresses the opposite of the previous sentence, to increase the impact of the language. “Nonsense literature” is also good at using rhetorical forms like repetition, variation in

collocation, irony, puns, calque, superposition, conversion, ambiguity, and imitation to enhance the intention of expression [8]. The material can be derived from famous quotes and epigrams, but it can also imitate its style. The so-called imitation refers to the imitation of ready-made chapters and sentences, which can be melted into the language. The following are some common types of imitations of “nonsense literature”.

The first one is “word repetition”. Repetition is a rhetorical technique that intentionally makes sentences or words appear repeatedly according to the need for expression. The following are some examples.

(1) what you said is what i heard. (xiaoxiang morning herald, 29th sep, 2021)

(2) the last time i heard such speechless words was the last. (six tone, 29th sep, 2021)

Example (1) indicates that the interlocutor is talking nonsense, and example (2) indicates that what the interlocutor says is uncomfortable and speechless.

The second one is “word avoidance”. To avoid the monotonous repetition of words, the technique of variation in collocation chooses synonyms to replace them. In “nonsense literature”, it means that the second half of the sentence uses words with similar or identical meanings to the first half of the sentence to express nonsense.

(3) i can’t say they are the same, but they are identical. (sina.com, 19th feb, 2021)

(4) i can’t say it has nothing to do with it, but they are completely unrelated. (people’s information, 24th feb, 2021)

Example (3) and (4) seem to be negative and then affirmative, which seems to be a transition, but in fact, it still expresses the same meaning. That is to say, it is the same as nonsense.

The third one is “antonym substitution”. That is, the second half of the sentence uses words with the opposite meaning of the first half of the sentence to express the nonsense.

(5) i will always remember your kindness before i forget it. (bilibili, 10th aug, 2021)

(6) they were not together before they are together. (bilibili, 10th aug, 2021)

The expressions in examples (5) and (6) seem to be contradictory, but in fact, both the first and second half of the sentence explains the same thing.

The fourth one is “quantity conversion”. It is applied to the phrase with quantitative units to perform equivalent conversions. That means the second half of the sentence uses the quantity corresponding to the first half of the sentence to express the nonsense.

(7) a day without seeing is like 24 hours apart. (sohu, 23th sep, 2021)

(8) for ten years, death and life were drawn apart so that two people miss each other. For five years, death and life were drawn apart so that only one person misses the other one. (zhihu, 12th sep, 2021)

The fifth one is “sentence change”. That is, the two parts of the sentences have similar structures, and the second half of the sentence only changes the sentence patterns to express the nonsense.

(9) the waves behind drive on those before, while the waves before are driven by those behinds. (sohu, 23th sep, 2021)

(10) a spring breeze and the south bank are covered with green. The south bank is changed into green by the breeze.

Examples (9) and (10) use a passive sentence in the second half of the sentence. The subjects and objects are switched, but the meaning remains the same, and the content is repeated.

4. Pragmatic Function of “Nonsense Literature”

It is worth noting that the form of “nonsense literature” is not unprecedented. Lu Xun once wrote in “Autumn Night”, “I can two trees outside the wall of my back garden, one is a jujube tree and the other is also a jujube tree.” It seems to be nonsense, but by introducing the two trees repeatedly, it

can highlight the monotonous and lonely mood, whereas the sentence “there are two jujube trees outside the wall” is far from achieving that effect.

Zhu ziqing said in his essay “on nonsense” that “taoism teaches people to ‘get the meaning and forget the words’. Since the words should be forgotten, they can be counted as nonsense. Buddhists tell people that the truth is ‘unspeakable’, and zen buddhism even points out that ‘opening the mouth will be wrong’, so all words are all nonsense in the end.” These statements sound somewhat philosophical and contain the golden mean.

The contemporary pioneer poet wu qing has also created “wu qing style” poems, such as “praise for the white clouds”: “the white clouds in the sky are so white / really, really white / very white / very very very white / extremely white / awfully white / deadly white/ ah.” The style of the poem will not be evaluated here, but the repeated use of adverbs of degree to indicate “clouds are white” throughout the poem seems ridiculous as well as makes some sense.

These examples show that “nonsense” is not always useless. Instead, it can sometimes emphasize feelings and express a profound meaning. It also proves that “nonsense” has existed for a long time and is not a new linguistic phenomenon [9]. It indicates that the rise, development, evolution, decline, or recovery of language has its own laws, and that language phenomena change with the development of society. Language is influenced by social factors, psychological factors, and the internal structures of language in the process of communication and thinking, thus causing the development of language.

The same is true for the change of network language, which can exist for a long time if it is vigorous enough, or fade away if it is declining, while it is also possible that the similarity of man’s expressive intention, social and psychological factors lead to the reappearance of similar linguistic phenomena at different times [10].

Among all the network buzzwords, “nonsense literature” seems to be worthless and meaningless, only applicable to flirtation or joking. If it is used appropriately, it can also express the speaker’s thoughts and accurately convey the speaker’s intention. It is not only for satirizing the phenomenon with no substance but also applicable to the mentality of “seeing through it while not speaking it out”, which has a sense of helplessness, showing strong emotional colors.

In this case, “nonsense literature” seems to be empty and repetitive, but the speaker uses this form to make it more subtle, to imply what he or she wants to say. This phenomenon is called “euphemism” in linguistics, which is a rhetorical method. In short, “nonsense literature”, with its unique linguistic form, shows distinctive pragmatic features in conversations, which are broadly reflected in the following three aspects.

First, it is “humorous”. The most basic pragmatic feature of “nonsense literature” is that it is interesting and humorous. It sounds nonsense at first, but there is no logical error if you think about it, such as “every breath for 60 seconds, and a minute has passed”, which is very suitable for easing the tensions and joking, so it is especially favored by the young people. Talking with witty words will not make people feel uncomfortable, and at the same time, they can subtly express the speaker’s views.

Secondly, it is “ironic”. If “irony, euphemism” and other rhetorical techniques with strong emotions are used in “nonsense literature”, they will naturally have a sense of irony, denial, mockery, with a strong ironic meaning. For example, the most frequently used phrase in “nonsense literature”, “What you said is what I heard.” is derived from the famous phrase “What you said is better than reading a book for ten years”, which is meant to praise others. However, after the re-creation of language, it becomes ironic, implying that the person’s words are meaningless. It seems to be praising but is denying and mocking, which applies to the occasion when someone cannot agree with other people’s opinions.

Thirdly, it has a “sense of intimacy”. He Ziran (1988) points out that “In conversational

cooperation, the speaker must say things under the accepted direction to make the conversation go smoothly and achieve common communication purposes" [11]. Some "nonsense literature" can not only greatly reduce the distance between the interlocutors, but also serve as a bridge of language communication, enhancing the sense of intimacy so that the conversation will not be awkward. Besides, it can help people establish a relationship with others through the conversation to obtain some kind of cooperation, or to maintain a further contact.

In short, "nonsense literature" is formally worthless and meaningless, and its "nonsense" has a negative impact, but if used in the right context, it can also achieve pragmatic effects.

5. Causes of the formation of "nonsense literature"

From a linguistic point of view, society and interpersonal communication are the external conditions for language evolution, and the interaction of factors in the language is the internal cause of language evolution. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Lei Hongbo (2009) points out that "the causes are mainly discussed from two areas: the influence of changes in social life, especially social contexts, and the influence of internal factors of the language" [12]. From the perspective of cultural linguistics, language contains culture, and culture is enriched and developed because of language. Language cannot exist without culture.

The linguist Sapir also believes that "there is a close relationship between language and culture". At the same time, social psychologist Jin Shenghua (2005) also tells us that "individuals and society interact. Under the influence of social situations, they will also have an impact on the internal psychology of individuals, which will further influence social interaction psychology, group psychology, and so on" [13]. The rise and prosperity of network language have its own rules, and "nonsense literature" is no exception. Therefore, exploring its causes from social, cultural, psychological, and internal language perspectives can help us better explain the changing and developing laws of language phenomena.

One reason is that it is influenced by the changes in social life, that is, the social context. Language, as the most important tool of human communication, is bound to keep pace with the development of society, and various changes in society will also promote the development of language changes. Therefore, when new things or new phenomena appear in society, the language also produces new words and new language accordingly. The Internet environment is relatively relaxed, with a wide variety of communication modes, and the efficient communication capabilities of new media make communication more convenient.

While people tend to use euphemisms under the pressure of a fast-paced life to avoid speaking words that would make the other party feel anxious, embarrassed, or ashamed, to relieve the discomfort caused by stress and express their opinions freely.

"nonsense literature" was thus applied to the students' essay descriptions and expository with the phenomenon of "repetition and repetition of words", such as the alteration of the famous aphorism "three people must have three people", making the use of "literature of nonsense" gradually expand, and not only pointing to negative effects, but also connotation began to generalize, becoming a euphemism formed by the speaker to avoid causing discomfort.

George Orwell once said, "what kind of life will lead to what kind of language, and that language will reinforce the initial causes, reinforcing the same result." It is clear that language, as a social phenomenon, is created to serve society, and that language not only arises with society but also develops with it. It is constantly improved and enriched to meet the increasingly complex social communication.

The second reason is that it is influenced by the cultural and psychological factors at a particular time. Language in the process of communication and thinking will also be affected by people's

psychology, which will inevitably cause a change of language. “Nonsense literature” is full of artistic charm, especially good at using celebrity aphorisms. It is both the heritage of traditional culture and an innovative breakthrough, conveying the cultural fashion of the new era. Today’s society is culturally open, and people are becoming more open-minded. They use language to reflect their values and behavior, so language has become a medium of expression, and the network language has a tendency to be popularized.

As young people are pursuing individuality, they are exposed to more information. The varied network environment and the lack of substance in short videos, movies, TV dramas, and network articles have intensified people’s disgust, but they do not want to criticize directly, so “nonsense literature” becomes a linguistic tool for people to amuse themselves and relieve their pressure. This self-centered expression is a witty communication and response, either flirtatious or derogatory. It is humorous and ironic, which is not only an attack on formalism but also a euphemism for people’s social anxiety. Especially under such a social situation, the inner psychology of the individual changes, which in turn affects the psychology of social interaction, and group psychology.

Liang Yanhua (2013) points out that “social culture focuses on politeness and decency to make the conversation go smoothly” [14], so people are more inclined to choose euphemisms to keep the ease and harmony of communication, so they prefer to use useful “nonsense” in specific occasions, times, and objects. And through this language phenomenon, we can also analyze the social style, people’s mentality, and moral concepts that it reflects, and language is the carrier of cultural dissemination and communication. Language and culture are interdependent and interactive.

The third reason is that it is influenced by the internal structure of the language. Language, as a symbolic system composed of phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar, has internal elements in a relationship of opposition and unity, showing a state of balance between each other. If a certain factor changes, other factors must also change accordingly to achieve balance, which causes language changes. In all linguistic phenomena, the internal factors of the language are dominant and decisive. Whatever changes occur in the language are determined by the interrelationship of the various internal factors of the language system.

Humboldt (1999) says: “The influence on language involved in its intrinsic form is largely demonstrated through the creativity of the language” [15]. The words used in “nonsense literature” are widely used. Because of its pragmatic features, “nonsense literature” can be seen in a certain context. Because of its grammatical features and imitation, “nonsense literature” can recreate. It is this creativity of language that allows “nonsense literature” to change with the external conditions, and to infinitely create and use the limited linguistic material, showing the powerful vitality of “nonsense literature” as a network language.

6. Conclusion

The language environment of “nonsense literature” is suitable for occasions when the speaker seems to speak without any useful information. It is a special kind of discourse created by netizens, which is presented in the process of human interaction and therefore is social in nature. “Nonsense literature” can quickly be popular on the Internet and has a strong vitality, which is because of the creativity of language. As new network languages emerge, “nonsense literature” is created by Internet users under the guidance of grammatical rules, so it is more enduring.

“Nonsense literature” mainly consists of two clauses with irregular sentence elements. The first part of the sentence usually starts with a statement of fact, and the second part either repeats the same content or expresses the opposite of the previous sentence, to increase the impact of the language. “Nonsense literature” is also good at using rhetorical forms like repetition, variation in collocation, irony, puns, calque, superposition, conversion, ambiguity, and imitation to enhance the

intention of expression. It not only makes the conversation more interesting but also satirizes the phenomenon with no substance. It is humorous, ironic, and has a sense of intimacy. Its formation is not only influenced by social culture and social psychology, but also by the internal factors of the language.

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