

# How Metaphor Strategies Work in Particular Internet Context Based on Grice's Non-natural Meaning Theory

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**Abstract.** The Internet's network communication mode has been strikingly different from more conventional forms ever since it was conceived. Memes, which can only be fully comprehended once a certain network group has assimilated people's views, are just one example of how network communication is spawning a new revolution in the meaning of language in particular senses. Furthermore, if people are uncomfortable using particular expressions online, other words will emerge to take their place. They could worry that they'll be bullied or harassed if they try to voice an alternative viewpoint. In this research, the author applies Grice's theory of non-natural meaning to analyse the potential impact of a few popular Chinese internet phrases and memes on the average Chinese person. It will be determined that the widespread use of non-natural meanings has a negative impact on the network environment and makes people playing more sentimental roles in passing along information. Because of this, a different method of network governance is required.

**Keywords:** Non-natural meaning; metaphor; pragmatics; Internet censorship; group polarization.

## 1. Introduction

The absence of efficient oversight leads most people to feel that offensive and immoral materials are more prevalent on the Internet than they actually are, and that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to completely remove them. Also, many people who don't care about prejudice have joined the network. Thus, it's possible for these consumers to develop a dependency on the subpar materials. The growth of the social economy in China has led some to argue that this is only natural. This perspective may be biased, and it is essential that it provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon. Since the demographics of Internet users are becoming increasingly diverse, several software companies and the government are attempting to regulate user behaviour by restricting users' unacceptable comments. Defamatory language, for instance, would be prohibited from publication. However, the issue of discretion that comes with such constraints will have an impact on the right to express oneself freely. On the other side, this paper will examine how giving discretion to the platform does not appear to have enhanced the online environment.

Some economists argue that more online squabbling contributes to a stronger "*flow economy*," which is an example of a recent development in the Chinese internet economy. In general, it is assumed that more conversation about a difficult topic would result in better earnings for the firm. According to Wang et al., facing immense profits, moral restriction seems not important anymore [1]. This paper will bring a new perspective, mainly about some memes or terms on the network that leads to bickering because they contain different non-natural meaning from which our common expressions. According to Piata, the implications of the network always have some ideas that can be understood only when people who see these contents share one culture. These contents always show a revolution to things when they are suddenly created in large numbers [2]. Netizens not only use memes to release emotion but also add certain meanings to carry their points or convey their opinions. To analyse the problems that existed on the network with these contents, Grice's theory can help from the perspective of the linguistic philosophy of metaphor, point out the reasons for the deterioration of the Chinese Internet environment from the perspective of the communication effect, and try to take the Chinese Internet as a case to provide suggestions on the management of public opinion environment. Obtaining reliable reference opinions means expanding the field of analytical philosophy practice. It also means that the Chinese Internet case provides public authorities or responsible commercial companies to provide solutions to the problems of Internet environment governance.

## 2. The Grice Theory

In modern academia, language is generally regarded as adhering to a set of sound system rules. Not only is the written language a part of this system, emojis and symbols, but even the expressions attached to communication can also be summarized into the language system and prepared for study. Therefore, the research field of language and the meaning of language is refined, and the related research is also highly complex. Linguistic philosophy is a metaphysical study of linguistic phenomena that mainly emphasizes the logical analysis of language based on mathematical rules.

Grice's theory of unnatural meaning aims to understand the meaning between the lines. Through this theory, Grice distinguishes the cognitive meaning from the actual meaning of verbal expressions [3]. It is not difficult to understand Grice's theory of unnatural meaning, and it does not even require mathematical logic to explain it:

An unnatural meaning occurs only when the speech is influenced by something other than the "original" meaning [3]. Grice made more complex and fancy interpretations of natural and unnatural meanings; his theory of contrived meanings essentially constrained the meaning of speech [3]. Grice's theory is not perfect and accurate from a mathematical perspective but it plays a foundation for the deep study of linguistic philosophy.

## 3. Case Selection Standard

Since it is impossible to fully analyse various memes on the Internet and the implied meanings contained in them, this paper is expected to classify several implied discourses widely spread on the Internet in China and analyse the subliminal meaning of each kind of discourse separately to form a conclusion at last.

According to the research by Wang, emotional comments are usually more likely to cause conflicts between this netizen group and different online groups in an already-formed netizen group [1]. As China's Internet forum service providers are often criticized for poor supervision, which leads to the overflow of harmful information to vulnerable groups. In recent years, forum service providers have been tightening the censorship of online comments at a visible speed. For example, they have launched a keyword capture system to determine whether comments need an annual review of the detected words before posting. However, as mentioned above, the human moderators of online forums do not care about some content that causes controversy and attacks certain groups. Many netizens believe this is to bring revenue to the platform. Therefore, this information on China's Internet needs to be more effectively regulated.

According to Agbo, politicians use metaphorical words in election campaigns to guide people to release emotions and take actions in line with their expectations [4]. Furthermore, it often happens in political activities that some people need help to grasp the words' unnatural meaning but only the literal meaning. Another group of people who successfully learn the strange sense of the words will have a different understanding of the words. People can argue over different interpretations of words.

Considering that this paper hopes to reach a conclusion that is beneficial to the regulation or the improvement of the Internet environment, this paper will select comments from two aspects to analyse the content. On the one hand, due to inappropriate supervision methods of Internet comments, netizens intentionally imply meaning in Internet comments, resulting in many emotional information flooding cases. On the other hand, there are cases in which Internet comments cause Internet conflicts because of the way their implications are ignored, misinterpreted, and exaggerated by one or both sides of the debate.

## 4. Case Study

### 4.1 Case 1: "Can't you do it, skinny Dog?"

Slender dog originally refers to a breed of Chinese rural dog, and this breed of the dog itself is not a low-aggression or weak breed. However, the descriptive term "skinny" cannot be understood directly in its natural sense of referring to a type of dog. In the Chinese context, referring to a person as a dog is usually derogatory. Therefore, when this sentence is said, its hidden unnatural meaning, especially the possible negative meaning, is worth studying. The popularity of this saying on the Internet in China comes from a video made by a video creator on the Tiktok platform. The video's main content is that the creator explains how to use this saying to make fun of men who are relatively thin, short, and have poor mental outlooks. Then, the video became popular on the Internet for some reason. When the female video maker says this in the video, her face is turned up, her eyes are narrowed, and the corners of her mouth are turned down defiantly. Secondly, this sentence is popular among people who love fitness on the Chinese Internet, so can further infer that it is said by its propagators at the general level of the Internet with the original sense of body discrimination and attack according to the meaning of teasing or satire?

According to Damanik et al. the intentional neglect of conversational characters in TV shows. He believes that when people need to express literal meaning, female characters are more inclined than male characters to use expressions that need to be understood through their unnatural meanings [5]. Male characters, on the other hand, tend to express "contempt" or "mockery" by deliberately speaking content unrelated to the main topic of discussion [5]; Sharifah's research reflects differences in the way men and women choose to speak to convey meaning. Given that a female creator speaks the words in this popular video, the interpretation of this paragraph from a male-gender perspective should be considered.

It's hard to deny that the dog has an almost natural pejorative connotation in its Chinese cultural context. Still, the fact that the meme is so widespread contradicts its pejorative connotation. This means that starting from the provocative tone of the original video producer who promoted the popularity of this meme, this meme has produced an unnatural meaning completely different from its natural essence. Through its certain sexual implication and combined with its inherent cultural background of the network circle, which dispels the insulting meaning it should have been considered to have. This "de-stigmatization" and the sexual innuendo of the meme will be key to the publicity of the online community of fitness enthusiasts among a public not aware of fitness culture.

According to Baldi, the purpose of many subliminal meanings is to persuade, and at the same time, successful persuasion means the unity of meaning in the production process. It is often to achieve some special discourse effect, enhance expressive force, ridicule, or humour [6]. These previous research results all mean that with the difference of perspective, network group, and the degree of understanding of discourse, the level of agreement and disagreement also changes. This may become an important cause of cyber disputes and even repeated arguments.

The popularity of the meme in the fitness fan community was such that it was widely circulated, representing an acknowledgment by the public that the insult was justified while simultaneously keeping away from the fitness fan community, thus creating a strong enough sense of exclusivity. Although the discourse does not admit its insult, its unnatural meaning has been wrapped in insult since it has been widely disseminated.

What leads people to accept this insulting connotation?

Since the expressions and actions of Internet celebrities in the original video, as well as the tone of this sentence when it is widely imitated on the Internet, there is a tendency to joke and tease it is also necessary to study the humorous elements of the implication. In combination with the conclusion, Piata further investigates this sense of humour: parody entertainment videos or materials that can reshape the meaning of subtexts and make them more humorous [2]. As a result, a popular meme on the Internet reduces its attack on a group or its unnatural meaning. When a meme is "parodied" on the Internet, some of its natural aggressiveness is dissipated. However, given the ubiquity of online

disputes, the loss of aggression may have allowed the meme to spread widely, but it does not mean that the common name meme reopen on the Internet will unify the meaning.

In addition to the masking of sexual innuendo mentioned above, the coordination of meanings should also be considered. Certain ways of expressing meaning within a given discourse order are dominant or mainstream, while others are marginal, oppositional, or "fungible". Thus, the paradox can be understood in this way: there is neither agreement nor conflict. The relationship between speech and meaning has both consistency and inconsistency. They will not be resolved on the Internet by their differences; instead, they can coexist. This coexistence is dangerous, however, because many of the subtexts in the meme's spread are misinterpreted, improperly conveyed, or "ingenerated," which is a major cause of online fights. Suppose only positive and negative meanings are separated. In that case, some people may interpret the meme as "encouraging men to exercise" or "taking advantage of the implication," as mentioned above. At the same time, others with the opposite ideology may be disgusted by the content or feel "excluded from a group." conflict arises when they challenge the meaning of the words.

#### **4.2 Case 2: "It must be technology and ruthless work."**

In Chinese, "technology and ruthless work" emphasize the importance of ruthless work and dedication in achieving success. It implies that technology alone is not enough, and that hard work and dedication are necessary to achieve desired results. It is also often used to motivate people to strive for excellence and to put in their best effort. This phrase became popular online after a series of videos by a Tiktok influencer discussed the dangers of food additives and the importance of "ruthless work". In the videos posted by Internet celebrities, dishes that people usually think need to be boiled or made with complex techniques are quickly made using simple raw materials and food additives, and their appearance is no different from that of common cognition. This sensory stimulation undoubtedly brings great shock to the audience. In addition, the popular blogger uses the title to call his actions "revealing" how some fast food or takeaway or prepared food is made and to "remind" everyone of the differences.

At the same time, after videos and the phrase "technology and ruthless work" became popular on the Internet, both Internet celebrities and memes have attracted criticism and support on the Internet, which partly has to do with the connotations they are given in online communication. Moreover, the government's official media outlets issued three criticisms of the meme:

- 1) The netizen's comments are irresponsible and cause little panic.
- 2) The meme demeans cheap and quality food.
- 3) It disrespects consumers who buy and enjoy such food.

There are not many cases of this kind of food being sold in the market because it needs to bear serious legal consequences. This meme is not funny, but it has been widely spread and harmed the public interest" [7]. When the official media put forward opinions, the event is usually regarded as having relatively great consequences and influences. So, is the meme true enough to cause irrational anxiety, provoke senseless online conflict, and even harm the food industry? This paper will provide an investigation from the perspective of these three criticisms. "It must be" is often seen as an emotive word. The original meaning of " must " is that you need to do something even if you don't want to, because of objective conditions, and here the meaning of "must" has been somewhat distorted.

In most of the online celebrity's videos, he can be seen giving an example of a price lower than the perceived market price in China, followed by a direct statement that "it must be technology and ruthless work." However, this example is often unreasonable and cannot cover the actual price of the raw materials. Consumers understand that this price cannot buy real food (for example: at the market price of 40 yuan per catty, a certain beef jerky might have gone through a series of processes such as processing, logistics, and warehousing, but its price has become 20 yuan per catty, which is completely unreasonable). This has led to public opinion questioning the bias of the Internet celebrity's video, which implies that low-price products are achieved through ruthless work and technology rather than by adding food additives. Such an inference is not groundless.

According to Goatly criticism of Grice's dialogue principle in his article, he believes that Grice's dialogue principle does not take into account the common sentence of asking questions by not answering directly in Eastern culture [8]. Instead, it answers the questioner's question through the implications of its sentences, such as "Do you want to eat a snack now?", which has its cultural basis for being understood or common in a certain culture [8]. Here, in public opinion, the question of the Internet celebrity denying low prices has a Chinese person saying, on its social basis, "cheap and not good goods".

Even if the Internet celebrity does not answer directly or answer the examples asked, he also gives partial or preconceived answers through the following "It must be technology and ruthless life". However, suppose the "technology and ruthless work" is not studied. In that case, it is challenging to tell whether he's giving a positive or negative response here, whether he's trying to convey a positive low price or something else.

The meaning of "ruthless work" is worth considering, this word in the Chinese context can be easily interpreted as various subliminal meanings. In the opinion of the celebrity's critics, the meme was an expression of anxiety or sarcasm. It must be noted that the celebrity did not begin to "reveal" what he thought was the process of making cheap food when he uttered the phrase, so if viewers accepted that the words had a satirical undertone. The implication, then, is more directly aimed at the cheap food in the case of the Internet celebrity described in the beginning rather than the fake food in the video [7]. From this point of view, there is a sense of debasement of low-priced food. And extended to the level of public communication, there is a part of the Internet users to food additives completely negative phenomenon.

Apparently, there is more implied about the word technology in the phrase "technology and ruthless work." However, when the subtext of the influencer's meme imposes negative anxiety on the public, it creates a negative subtext here, which, while not changing the public's positive perception of the word "technology" in any other context, may have an effect from the standpoint of food additives [3]. In other words, the regular connotation of the word "technology" contradicts the subtext of the statement. According to the previous analysis, it prevails, leading to public anxiety. In light of Del Vicario et al., the scientific report concluded that the more active netizens are, the more likely they are to spread negative emotions in their comments [10]. This would cause group polarization, and this anxiety may be exaggerated as a panic about food additives popular among Internet groups.

Based on the research conducted, it can be concluded that the phrase "technology and ruthless work" has caused a great deal of controversy and debate amongst netizens, as it implies that food additives are the only way to produce cheap food. It is likely that the phrase has been misinterpreted due to the hidden meanings and nuances that it carries. The phrase has been used to express negative emotions, leading to group polarization, and exaggerating the public's anxiety about food additives. The phrase was initially used by an internet celebrity to motivate others to strive for excellence and to put in their best effort, however, its use has become distorted, leading to an uneasy feeling amongst many users [4]. Furthermore, the phrase has been misunderstood due to its use of emotive language and cultural implications. This has caused the phrase to be misinterpreted, leading to online conflict and even repeated arguments.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Grice's theory of contrived meaning can be used to study the implications of various discourses on the Internet. In this case study, two popular memes in China, "Can't you do it, skinny Dog?" and "It must be technology and ruthless work", illustrate how the unnatural meanings of these discourses can be used to create tension and conflict between different online groups. It is found that the two memes had different implications, with the former being used to mock male body types and the latter implying a negative attitude toward cheap food. Both memes are popular due to their humorous elements and the coordination of meanings, but their implications can also lead to misunderstandings and cyber disputes. Therefore, it is important to properly regulate Internet

comments and content to ensure that Internet users are aware of the implications of their words and the potential consequences of such implications.

In order to make more long-term recommendations, Internet censors should pay special attention to some media content whose metaphorical meaning is not easy to be found. For example, appropriate suggestions can be made to the publishers for this content, and publishers should be required to make metaphors more straightforward and inform them of the possibility of misunderstanding and quarrels caused by communication. As for the metaphorical meaning of the content it censors, it should investigate whether the metaphorical meaning contains false content, and more accurately add warnings to such content to help people better distinguish online information, or correct inappropriate speech restrictions to avoid misleading. This study also has implications for pragmatics learners or enthusiasts of analytical philosophy, who may choose a career related to network management in the future, which is consistent with the consistent purpose of pragmatics research to bring about a better expression of discourse.

The shortcoming of this study is that it only analyses a few cases of Chinese Internet. Cases may lack representation of the Internet in other languages. In addition, different languages also have their metaphorical meanings, and different cultures also have their different cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, A more long-term study could be an interdisciplinary analysis of more Internet cases, for example, combining economic theories with studying the economic effects of such implication, or combining psychological theories to analyse more reasons for the spread of such implication. So as to propose practical and effective solutions to the Internet censorship system. A more comprehensive, universal and constructive conclusion can be drawn from the study of the different metaphorical transmission modes presented by the Internet in different language environments or the characteristics of its implication in cross-cultural communication. Further research would be useful for Internet practitioners to use and enhance their professional capabilities in order to reduce the negative impact of such content this paper studied without affecting freedom of expression.

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