

Analysis of Quasi-affixes in Cyber Language from the Perspective of Memetics

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Abstract: In information age, people have gradually integrated into the new era of network culture. In the process of Chinese communication online, quasi-affixes, a new type of affix, are being generated correspondingly. They enrich netizens' life and boost the prosperity of Internet's culture. Created by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*, Memetics is a new theory to explain the law of cultural evolution based on Darwin's theory of evolution. Memes are the basic units of cultural information inheritance. The thesis intends to analyze the prevalent reasons of quasi-affixes in cyber language as well as their functions in daily communication and cultural transmission from the perspective of memetics by typical examples. To achieve it, the analysis will develop from three aspects, the form and meaning advantages of quasi-affixes and their roles playing in different scenarios. Finally, it will draw a conclusion.

Keywords: Quasi-affix, Cyber language, Memetics, Communication, Transmission.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to Quasi-affixes in Cyber Language

In information age, with the booming of various social platforms for daily communication, people have gradually integrated into the new era of network culture. Meanwhile, social changes are causing new problems, so people need to alter their thinking modes to explore new methods. However, the original language couldn't meet the need for expressing these novel thoughts, so novel network words came into being. In the process of communicating online, quasi-affixes, a new type of affix, are being generated correspondingly, such as "X-狗", "X-精", "X-控", "X-族", etc. They enrich netizens' life and boost the prosperity of Internet's culture.

1.2. Introduction to Memetics

Memetics is a new theory to explain the law of cultural evolution based on Darwin's theory of evolution. It was created by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*. It refers to the ideas that are imitated and disseminated among people in the cultural field and passed down from generation to generation. Meme refers to "cultural gene" and they are much like in morphology. Chinese scholar He Ziran translated it into "Moyin". In Chinese, "mo" means imitation, and "yin" indicates gene. Memes are the basic units of cultural information inheritance.

1.3. Research Objective

In China, the current Internet is rife with Internet words with quasi-affix. The thesis intends to analyze the emerging and prevalent reasons of quasi-affixes in cyber language as well as their functions in daily communication and cultural transmission from the perspective of memetics by typical examples.

The research questions will be analyzed from the perspective of memetics:

- 1) What are the emerging and prevalent reasons of quasi-affixes in cyber language?
- 2) What role does the quasi-affixes play in network

communication and cultural transmission?

The examples in the thesis are collected from messages, posts and tweets on some popular online platforms, including QQ, WeChat, Weibo, Zhihu and Little Red Book.

The thesis included five parts: introduction, literature review, theoretical foundation, main body and conclusion. In introduction, the quasi-affixes in network words and memetics are introduced briefly. In the literature review, the thesis will review the previous studies of memetics and quasi-affixes in cyber language. In the theoretical foundation, it will illustrate the theory of memes. In the main body, the thesis will analyze the quasi-affixes in cyber language from the perspective of memetics. The conclusion is presented as the last part.

2. Analysis of Quasi-affixes on the Basis of Memetics

Generally, memes are often compared to genes in biology. Although they are concepts in different disciplines, memes, as the basic unit of cultural replication and transmission, face the same survival pressure as genes, and also follow the principle of "natural selection, survival of the fittest" in biological evolution. Memes selectively retain some of them and eliminate others in the process of replication. The network quasi-affixes stand out from many cyber languages and develop into a strong meme. Their carriers possess unique advantages in form and meaning.

2.1. Form Advantages of Network Quasi-affixes

In form, network quasi-affix memes have features of simplicity, diversification and universality. Meanwhile, these characteristics enable them to gain high popularity and become competitive memes.

2.1.1. Simplicity

The most obvious and common feature of network quasi-affixes is simplicity. Speaker's ideas and feelings can be well conveyed by two or three characters.

Example 1:

人生苦短及时行乐, 我要做月光族。

(<https://m.weibo.cn/5685164385>)

“月光族” is called “moonlight clan” in English, referring to those who struggle to make both ends meet monthly.

Example 2:

两个“戏精”的日常

(<https://m.weibo.cn/5012207784>)

“戏精” means those who deliberately demonstrate themselves excessively to attract people’s attention. Similar to example 2, in network quasi-affixes, few simple words usually express rich meaning. Besides quasi-affixes, most network words are all concise in form but abundant in implication, which mainly results from the characteristics of Chinese and the fast pace in information era.

2.1.2. Diversification

The forms of network quasi-affix expression are diverse due to different objects of description and various context. On its basis, they can be divided into two categories.

2.1.2.1. Describing People

Example 1:

Employer A: 加油, 打工人!

Employer B: 打工人, 打工魂!

(a conversation in workplace)

In general, “打工人” refers to the group of laborers, and it is also used by workers to describe themselves. Network suffixation “X-人” is one of quasi-affixes describing one type of man.

Example 2:

加班狗遇上世界杯, 只能看回放了。

(a conversation in workplace)

“加班狗” means overtime workers. As an “overtime dog”, the speaker here has no choice but to work overtime, missing live broadcast of the game. In most cases, quasi-affix “X-狗” expresses a negative emotions.

Example 3:

三观跟着五官跑, 我的确是颜控。

(a conversation on campus)

“颜控” indicates those who overemphasize the appearance of people or objects, and if it’s pretty, they will show their great affection. Similarly, “手控” and “声控” refer to people who love someone’s good-looking hands and attractive voices respectively. Therefore, “X-控” is used to modify people who concentrate obsessively on a specific aspect of one person or thing.

2.1.2.2. Describing Objects or Phenomena

Example 1:

#世界杯随处可见中国元素# 不错子

(<https://m.weibo.cn/7746263102>)

“不错子” is a term often used to give something credit and recommend it. In this context, the netizen expressed his satisfaction with the fact that Chinese cultural elements are included in the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

Example 2:

周六疯狂补材料, 伤心子。

(a conversation on campus)

“伤心子” here means that the speaker feels sorrowful to what happened on him/her. In addition, quasi-affixes “X-子” has derived relevant expressions “绝绝子”, “伤心子” and “无语子”, but they convey different emotions based on various context.

Example 3:

您“被就业”了吗, 来人民网聊聊

(<https://mo.mbd.baidu.com/r>)

“被就业” generally refers to pseudo employment or nominal employment, which is to obtain employment for a certain purpose, or issue an employment certificate and issue a company seal on it. The character “被” equals passive meaning in English, and is added in front of most notional words. This grammar seems absurd, but it emphasizes user’s helplessness and dissatisfaction with certain events, which can be viewed as a kind of black humor in most cases.

In conclusion, quasi-affixes are common in the description of people, things, events and phenomena. To some extent, the variety of objects determines quasi-affix’s feature of diversification.

2.1.3. Universality

Affixes are the forms that are attached to words or word elements to modify meaning or relationships. Therefore, the network quasi-affix memes attribute the advantage of universality to affixes’ strong adhesiveness.

The most common quasi-affixes are monosyllabic morphemes referring to man, showing as “X-human morpheme”. With the rapid changes of society, people’s novel and multiple characteristics are presented by buzzwords, which embrace all kinds of characteristics. Moreover, its function of labeling and distinguishing a person or object also reflect the inclusiveness and universality of network quasi-affix memes.

Example 1:

#网友吐槽银行每月只上2天班#标题党, 唯恐天下不乱

(<https://m.weibo.cn/1880020622>)

“标题党”, “clickbait” in English, refers to the use of exaggerated headlines to attract people to click and view tweets, but the content is “gossip” with unofficial sources, or even seriously untrue information, in which way publishers earn online hits and high advertising fees.

“X-党” has expanded and generalized its original meaning of “party”, referring to more kinds of crowds. It includes: first, people who often do something, such as the hype party, lip synching party, copy party. Second, people who love or are keen on someone or something. Third, a group of people with certain common attributes.

Example 2:

单身狗也是狗, 可以不爱, 请别伤害

(<https://m.weibo.cn/6077645361>)

“单身狗”, “single” in English, specifically refers to people without a boyfriend or girlfriend. It has the meaning of self-deprecating and self-mocking from speakers.

Example 3:

中国“朋友圈”不断扩大, 为何西方媒体变身“柠檬精”?

(<https://m.weibo.cn/3173633817>)

“柠檬精” means someone who act inappropriately and express dissatisfaction because of being jealous of others. Like “X-党” and “X-人”, “X-精” refers to a group of people with same features, while it emphasizes degree much more. In various language environment, for example, “杠精” is the person who tends to gain pleasure by scoring off others or intentionally holds opposite opinions when arguing, and “猴精” is a metaphor for a smart and naughty man.

2.2. Meaning Advantages of Network Quasi-affixes

The implication of network words is meaningful and

thought-provoking. The meaning advantages of quasi-affixes can be studied from two aspects, practicability and sustainability.

2.2.1. Practicability

Cyber language is generated to meet growing needs of human production and life in modern society where the atmosphere of practicality and utilitarianism prevails. When social networking is all the rage, correspondingly, memes are being accepted, understood, used, spread, and self-copied. The network quasi-affix is born and popular in the network, which is naturally consistent with the demand for online communication. It is a refinement of specific events and their underlying emotional attitudes rather than an abstraction of a concept. It can be directly used by people to match and appropriately express the audience's views, attitudes and emotions without reprocessing.

Example:

如何应对企业“软裁员”，你怎能不知？

(<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p>)

“软裁员” indicates that some companies force employees to resign by some means in order to avoid paying economic compensation. Currently, in a global recession with pandemic, the unemployment problem is more prominent, in China, especially for some micro and small enterprises. When “软裁员” is mentioned, the resonance among employers affected by layoff with some invisible forms will be brought out, and people with similar experience will communicate on the term to express their emotions. Therefore, the meme “软裁员” will be discussed further in continuous replication, meanwhile, the involved quasi-affix “软-X” is widely recognized, so more related network quasi-affixes “软课程”，“软抱怨” and “软目标” appear and arouse reflections.

2.2.2. Sustainability

Quasi-affixes are created from certain social hot issues, so their sociality and characteristics of the times are prominent. Moreover, it is noteworthy that most of them are not faded but used repeatedly. It is due to their universal form and characteristics of advancing with times. They are products of times, while developing in the modern era. The above emphasize quasi-affix's feature of sustainable development.

Example:

A: 我这种无忧无虑的人，好想体验一下烦恼的滋味呀。

B: 这也太“凡尔赛”了吧！

(a natural conversation in daily life)

“凡尔赛”，“Versailles” in English, in 17th century France, it indicates a suburb of Paris, where the Palace of Versailles was built. In order to avoid the rebellion of local aristocratic forces, Louis XIV invited all the major nobles of the country to live in it. To some degree, it is a symbol of a token of luxury. Nowadays, in Chinese buzzwords, “凡尔赛” is a kind of behavior that someone shows off in a low profile or inadvertently show their sense of superiority to others, which is based the historical origin and updating its meaning.

It is the sustainability of network quasi-affix meme that makes it favored by netizens. During the process of social online interaction, the meme achieves self-replication and enrich itself with new contents.

2.3. Functions of Network Quasi-affix Memes

As the Internet increasingly prospers, network buzzwords have greater impact on present daily life, society and culture, which is fully embodied in online communication, social

phenomenon and cultural transmission. Furthermore, the functions of these strong memes are more significant due to imitations, copies and circulation.

2.3.1. Online Communication

In developed cyber environment, a large number of cyber neologisms are derived in frequent online exchanges. Instead, as competitive memes in cultural transmission, these new words including quasi-affixes play an important role in communication online, and their functions can be divided into three categories, the influence on identification, entertainment and emotions.

2.3.1.1. Facilitating Identification

Today's fast-pace life urges people to increase the efficiency in every aspect of life. Gradually, for emerging objects, people tend to label something around them. When it comes network quasi-affixes identifying different groups of people, “X-人”，“X-精”，“X-党”，“X-控” and “X-族” are its major forms of expression. If someone knows a person who needs to pay the balance for commodities after paying the deposit in "Double 11" shopping festival, he/she may be addressed “尾款人” directly. Meanwhile, the label will probably change into a stereotype. Although it makes identification easy, people's understanding of each other may not deep and comprehensive.

2.3.1.2. Meeting Entertainment

With the improvement of living standard, people are no longer satisfied with existing rich materials and pursue more spiritual values. The usages of cyber language can meet their needs, so the entertaining function of quasi-affix memes are presented. In 2022 buzzwords, “X-文学” raise concerns from a lot of netizens. Actually, it is not a kind of literature but a type of cyber language form, generally referring to certain social phenomenon.

“废话文学” on the Internet, refers to a little funny comments and videos without any useful information, and “废话” means nonsense in English. “If I breathe for one minute, 60 seconds will pass.” This sentence is a typical example of “废话文学”，and it resembles redundancy. “不被定义文学” refers to someone cannot be swayed by other's tongues, not defining themselves by others' judgments. However, most of network words are favored for entertainment aspect, being used to make fun of others or self-depreciate in some contexts.

2.3.1.3. Expressing Emotions

At the same time, the Internet serves as a platform for netizens to express themselves. Especially for those with loneliness and negative feelings from life's pressure, quasi-affix meme in network buzzwords is an indispensable tool for conveying emotions.

2.3.2. Social Phenomenon

As mentioned in the sustainability of quasi-affixes, they are derivatives of times, thus behind the diverse buzzwords are social events and phenomenon as well as people's psychological conditions. For the society, all of them are expected to pay more attention to.

“公考热” is a heat topic in China, which indicates that a growing number of Chinese aspire to join China's massive bureaucracy by highly challenging civil-service exams. The popularity of government jobs highlights the difficulties faced by China's labor market. Similarly, “X-热” is an embodiment of public demand trend for some respects, such as “国学热” “英语热” “读研热”，etc.

2.3.3. Cultural Transmission

Cyber language is a considerable carrier of the national external and cross-cultural communication. With the booming and the wide spread of network quasi-affix memes, Chinese traditional language is impacted, while in general, cultural transmission can be promoted. The language is the cultural cornerstone of a nation. With the improved integration of the network and real life, various network words make a great influence on cultural exchanges between different subjects.

First, network words including quasi-affixes promote the sustainable development of language. It is generally characterized by simplicity, rapidity, vividness, etc., which can not only meet the needs of online chat, but also arouse people's lively and fresh feelings. In addition, it also indirectly expands the breadth of cultural communication and enlarges the network vocabulary.

Second, the emergence of network language can better meet the expression desire of netizens. Language is an effective way of ideas and emotional expression, which is also personal cultural communication process under the backdrop of network language transmission, strengthening the effect of cultural communication. In specific life, netizens can use the network language to achieve cultural communication via online platform, like WeChat, microblog, forum, QQ and other ways.

Lastly, Chinese cyber buzzwords will boost intercultural infiltration to some extent. The occurrence of network words is based on Chinese traditional language, so their historical and trendy features will attract more foreign netizens through media tools, in which way Chinese culture will go further abroad. The function of network in cultural transmission is mainly manifested in three perspectives above.

3. Literature References

3.1. An Empirical Study of Memetics in the Teaching of College English Writing

Based on the theory of memetics, Zhu Honglei explored the characteristics of the teaching of English writing for college students. A total of 77 sophomores in our school were selected to participate in the empirical research. However, it paid little attention to the definition and functions of memetics itself. The importance of it was not presented a lot.

3.2. Visual Semantics of Memes: Interpreting Memetic Content and Form for Information Studies

We attempted to contextualize memetics for Information Studies by reinterpreting Internet Memetics. In doing so, we proposed a way to empirically study semantics of informational content. Early results showed that memetic ideas may be referenced as the shape of information across image collections. But the study did not make a persuasive argumentation with various situations.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Major Findings of the Study

As a special forms of network language, quasi-affixes have gained a great popularity among netizens. From the

perspective of memetics, which transit from biological evolution to cultural transmission, the reasons can be analyzed on the basis of comprehensive system.

With regard to emerging and prevalent reasons of quasi-affix in cyber language, it can be studied from its advantages in form and meaning. The features of simplicity, diversification and universality in appearance as well as its practicability and sustainability make it become a kind of competitive language meme in cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the powerful functions of quasi-affix memes are presented in daily communication, the embodiment of social phenomenon and cultural transmission.

4.2. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that the thesis provides a novel perspective of memetics to analyze the popular causes and functions of network language. Moreover, it takes quasi-affixes as examples, which is representative with extensive coverage and high frequency. The thesis will be added into novelty and objectivity.

4.3. Limitations of the Study

The limitations are shown in two aspects. First, in the analysis, the connection between memetics and network quasi-affixes is not very close. Second, some cited examples are not persuasive enough to support the arguments.

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