A Study on the Network Catchphrases from the Perspective of Memetics

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Abstract—**Memetics is a new theory in linguistic research. It was put forward by Richard Dawkins in order to explain cultural evolutionism. Meme refers to imitation, replication and propagation, which plays an important role in language and cultural development. Memetics has already attracted many scholars' attentions and has become more and more popular. With the thriving of the internet, netizens make changes in word selection and sentence patterns, so that meme is suitable for potential hosts. Network language is replicated quickly and disseminated widely, which influences people's daily life. Therefore, the study of network catchphrase memes is valuable and meaningful. Memetics can explain cultural inheritance and language variation. It can also help people find the potential law of network language transmission. This thesis shows the characteristics of memes and network catchphrases respectively. Then the author analyzes the ways and factors of network catchphrases' dissemination from the perspective of memetics, and discusses factors that affect the dissemination of network catchphrase memes. Therefore, the study on network language, especially catchphrases, has theoretical significance and practical value.**

Index Terms—**memetics, network catchphrase memes, replication, dissemination**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Memetics is a novel theory deduced from Darwin's doctrine of evolution. Meme's reduplication and transmission depend on imitation. With the flourishing of internet, network catchphrases can be disseminated, replicated and entertained. The use of popular language becomes more and more universal. Meme provides a new perspective for the development of language. Internet catchphrases embody anthropogenic activities and reflect culture. Internet popular language is regarded as a basic unit of cyber language.

People can convey their opinions and express emotions on the internet by using network language. Once some social events happen, certain network language will appear. Network catchphrases have broad and narrow meaning. They are specific expressions and netizens circulate them on the internet after a long social practice. As a network communication tool and a carrier of culture diffusion, they are favoured and admired by many netizens.

B. Importance of the Study

Memetics reflects the imitation and duplication of information. Internet catchphrases are affected by memes. People express their views and feelings by means of them. The study on memetics explicates the prevalence and development of internet popular language. The analysis of network catchphrase memes' characteristics and the explanation of their popular causes are on the basis of memetics.

Internet catchphrase memes that are accepted diffusely can be described as strong meme. Internet popular language is a linguistic phenomenon that originates from society. Once network catchphrases are understood, approved and used by people in daily life, memes can be successful.

C. Significance of the Study

The purpose of this thesis aims to explain the inheritance and evolution of meme. The study on the internet catchphrases is of great value on theory and practice.

In recent years, many scholars study network popular language from different perspectives. But there is few research that study language from memetics. Memetics is important for explaining language and cultural phenomenon. Network language, a communication medium, is used widely in people's daily life nowadays. Meme plays an important role in the development of network language. Therefore, it is necessary to study network catchphrases.

D. The Definition of Meme

Meme can decide the dissemination of cultural information. The transmission relies on imitation. The function of meme is the same as gene in evolution. The difference between meme and gene lies in the way of transmission. Meme is extragenetic, but gene is inherited. For example, the type of meme is different, such as thoughts, slogans, fashion, mental cultivation and manufacture of buildings. However, there is a little gene's classification. The reproduction of meme is from one brain to another, while gene is bred between different bodies.

The core of meme is imitation. Things that are transmitted through imitating can be called meme. Meme refers to things like language, ideas, faith and manners. Any language unit can be meme because they are imitated and spread. A term can be popularized by replication, so can thought.

The imitation of meme includes strong meme and weak meme. Strong meme means far-ranging duplication with little hindrance, everlasting transmission and formidable vitality. However, weak meme refers to impotent force and fleeting propagation. Meme that exerts positive effects can become strong meme. Language of strong meme can be memorized and imitated easily. Strong meme undergoes four stages: assimilation, retention, expression and transmission.

Language meme is a kind of meme. It is a widespread unit including vocabulary, sentence and discourse, which can be copied. Network language is a special linguistic pattern coming from online communication. It is a new combination of script, picture and spelling that involves letters and punctuation. Users give it different meanings that represent specific connotations at different times and in certain contexts. Network language is flexible, changeable and innovative. Its development is closely related to meme.

E.   The Definition of Network Catchphrase

Network language is a variant used by a certain social community. It reflects cultural phenomenon. Netizens form special network language when they communicate on the internet, just like communicating in daily life. But because of unique langauge context, network language has its own features, such as brief and fashion. Using several words shows complicated meanings. It varies from time, showing vitality.

Network catchphrase is a kind of expression spread by netizens. It is the product of cultue and internet. Catchwords are a term spread and prevailed quickly and widely at a particular time and within a certain range. It appears at a high frequency at a certain stage. As a linguistic phenomenon, the widespread dissemination of catchphrases reflects social problems, phenomena and objects that arouse citizens' concern.

Among a considerable amount of information, some words are so energetic that may be transmitted for a long time, while others prevail for a short time. Network language is a new form of language because of the rapid development of internet. If a word is popular, it must be imitated, replicated and transmitted. It prevails by means of meme's power. Therefore, the popularity of catchphrases is a typical meme phenomenon.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

After the publication of The Selfish Gene, people realize that biological theory can be applied in sociolinguistics. Memetics has attracted linguists' attention and aroused their heated discussion.

A.   Studies on Memetics Abroad

Memetics was first presented in *The Selfish Gene* written by Richard Dawkins who was a famous Oxford biologist in 1976. Gene can transmit genetic information to the next generation. Meme is similar to gene. There is a divisor that replicates cultural information, and that is meme. Meme is defined as a cultural communication unit. *The Journal of Memetics-Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission* shows how to learn meme. It lays a solid foundation for further research.

Susan Blackmore summarized the study of memes in other fields in *The Meme Machine* in 1999. After that memes became very popular in linguistics. Blackmore's research was a milestone in the development of memetics. Memes are replicator because they duplicate information by selection and variation. Any information can be called as meme only if they can be duplicated by imitation (Blackmore, 1999). Memetics is a theory that can explain rules of cultural evolution. Meme facilitates the development of society due to duplication and transmission.

Dennett (1995) described meme as an information pattern. It is a schema that a memory can be copied from one to another. Deacon (1999) regarded memes as signs. They can influence human minds and change their behaviors. Hudson (2000) pointed that memes are social symbols and cultural units that are perceived easily. Meme is the form of replication that can be stored in people's brains, books, computers and other mass media.

B.   Studies on Memetics at Home

The study of memetics was introduced into China very late. Many scholars have studied the translation of relevant books. He Ziran first introduced memetics and explained the relation between meme and language. He and other linguists compiled some books, such as *Relevance Theory*, *Adaptation Theory and Memetic Theory*.

The transmission of language, perception, faith and behavior is similar to the inheritance and replication of gene in biological evolution. What distinguishes genes from memes is the way of transmission. Gene is a vertical proliferation by heredity. However, meme is copied and spread by imitation, which can be transmitted either by inheritance or by the same generation (He Ziran, 2005).

Chen Linxia (2006) explained the causes of successful dissemination of advertisement from the angle of memes, such as genotype and phenotype memes. Xie Chaoqun (2007) used memes in the linguistic politeness. Memetics develops quickly at the end of 2007. Chen Yuan (2000) believed that catchwords are the reflection of culture, politics and web environment through the way of meme propagation. He Ziran and He Xuelin (2003) discussed the film language memes

through their mechanism of transmission. They compared memes with genes and explained the propagation law of language meme.

Xie Chaoqun, He Ziran and other domestic philologists discussed the definition and dissemination of memes. Zhang Xuhon studied how the linguistic memes affect language teaching. There are many memetics articles in Chinese academic journals, magazines and newspapers from 1999 to 2010.

III.   THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMES AND THE NETWORK CATCHPHRASES

Memetics mainly explore the social evolution model of information's dissemination. It shows the connections between things and cultural inheritance.

A.   The Characteristics of Memes

Dawkins stated that fidelity, fecundity and longevity are three ways to measure the quality of memes. The successful replicator is a steady gene that survives for a long time, reproduces itself quickly and replicates itself accurately. It possesses three features.

1. Fidelity

Fidelity is one characteristic of memes. The better it duplicates, the more it will be remained. Language and culture can be passes down due to superior fidelity. The copied memes in the course of transmission can reserve the nature of previous memes. Classic words or phrases can stand out after the competition of dialogues in conversations. The popular network catchphrses have simple forms and concise contents. Although the form may be varied, the essence of content is not changed completely. The forms of network catchphrases may be changed in different contexts, but the meaning is alike.

2. Fecundity

Fecundity is a main trait of memes. The faster the replication, the better the meme. It means that spread fast and wide scope. Catchphrases that have been replicated can be active in the internet and media. Netizens are committed to communication, therefore, many catchphrases with derivative forms are created. "Ungelivable", "unkaoable" and "undingable" are examples of this feature. It depends on the amount of communication.

3. Longevity

Longevity shows meme is enduring, which can maintain in people' minds. The longer the replication remains, the more the probability and quantity of duplication will be. It is an important feature of meme. If network catchphrases need to be improved, time is necessary. They are disseminated through inheritance and infectivity of its culture, which depend on media, such as internet, television. Some network catchphrases can be memorized forever, while others vanish quickly.

The relationship between meme and language is close. The spread of memes depends on language and promotes its development. Memes drive the development of network language and make it popular. Language meme can be used to analyze the characteristics of network catchphrases. It can also explain reproduction and dissemination of forms. Language is the carrier of culture, which survives through the replication and dissemination by language users. So language is meme. Language meme is not invariable because of people's powerful creativity, which enriches our language and culture.

B.   The Characteristics of Network Catchphrases

Network catchphrases are a variant of language that is affected by human's thinking ways and cultural knowledge. They are spread from one generation to the next through imitation and reproduction. Therefore, most of the characteristics are embodiment of people's thinking. Internet buzzwords and catchphrases are spread widely. Although some network catchphrases violate Chinese grammar, they reflect the expression of the order of Chinese characters.

1. Fashionability

People who carry memes are hosts. Netizens are hosts who replicate memes. The main part of netizens is young people. They use the internet to spread information. Network catchphrase memes are related to front-burner issues. It is easy for the young generation to accept new things, use advanced technology and spread information. They are the main force that makes network catchphrases popular. People imitate and spread them far and wide. Network catchphrase memes reflect social tendencies over a period of time, which can be in line with public thinking. People like to quote language, so these colloquial words turn into buzzwords. For example, the network catchphrase "skinny blue mushrooms" (蓝瘦香菇) comes from an online video. The meaning is someone feels unhappy and wants to cry with a hilrious expression. It causes a heated debate at that time. The network term "melon-eating masses" (吃瓜群众) describes onlookers with a self-mockery attitude who browse the forum without commenting. It represents a popular trend. Netizens tend to use such entertaining words to achieve fashion effect. It csn satisfy the freshness of the public.

2. Originality

The network catchphrase memes are novel and creative. They expresses the psychology of people who want to find originality. The innovation of language is based on imitation. People tend to use the popular language with novelty and extraordinary. Language innovation can renew the network catchphrase memes that are disseminated by media tools. Meme is the indication of social development and the embodiment of culture. The term "antizen" (蚁族) refers to a

group of people with low incomes and poor living condition. It combines "ant" with "citizen", showing ridicule about social situations and problems.

3. Simplicity

The network catchphrases are concise. Users use less words to convey more information. Simple and brief forms can gain recognition and support from people. And clarity is catchphrase memes' superiority. It is efficient to use brief phrases. The expression "No zuo no die" creates a public uproar. Then it is widespread on Twitter. It means that there is nothing to be indecent if you do not do anything stupid. This catchphrase was included in the American slang website of "*Urban Dictionary*" in 2014.

4. Authority

The spread of network catchphrase is from one host to another or a group. Meme can be accepted and copied by the public. They are disseminated by those who are expertised in a field or have high status. Network catchphrses are so popular because of enormous netizens' communication power.

5. Popularity

Network catchphrase memes can be popularized. With the updating of buzzwords, the main body extends from the younger generation to the other generation. They are curious about new things and imitate those expressions. Network users utilize simple forms to show rich meaning.

There are many prevalent network catchphrases, such as "给力". It means excellent and remarkable, which belongs to a kind of cyber language. "Gelivable" originates from northeast China. It describes joyful feelings that personal anticipation is actualized in some situation. "Ungelivable" appears after that. It describes something or someone that is not splendid or wonderful. With this form comes into being, many similar catchphrases are used in daily life, such as "niubility", "zhuangbility" and so on.

There exists a lot of catchphrases that combine the first part of one word with the hind part of another word. The ultimate word's meaning blends both meaning of two words. For instance, "brunch" is the variant of "breakfast" and "lunch", which is spread quickly on the internet. Netizens put "vegetable" and "steal" together to express a popular internet game. "Livelihard" refers to people who earn their own living toughly.

IV. THE ANALYSIS OF THE WAYS AND FACTORS OF NETWORK CATCHPHRASES' DISSEMINATION

A. Ways of the Dissemination of Network Catchphrases

The form of reproduction and dissemination of network catchphrases is not onefold. Genotype and phenotype memes are two ways of dissemination. Genotype memes is that content is similar but form is various. Phenotype memes is that analogous form but different content.

1. Genotype Memes' Dissemination

Genotype memes include two cases. One is the identical form based on same meaning. Another is the same meaning with diferent forms. The form of information is related to current affairs and social phenomena. It refers to idiom, idiomatic phrase, proverb and famous aphorism that are spread originally. During this process, the initial information is unchanged, but the context and the way of dissemination change. Although form is transformed, the content is copied.

Some network catchphrases are so dialectical that they become abnormity. In recent years, internet buzzwords use abbreviation and harmonic tone. Because online communication emphasizes convenient and quick, netizens use abbreviation to raise efficiency. For example, "网红" is the abbreviation of "网络红人"；CP means "couple", which refers sweethearts on the screen. "蓝瘦香菇" is the most typical example. This word originates from a disappointed net friend who said he was grieved and wanted to cry on video. His words have a strong Guangxi accent, sounding like "蓝瘦香菇". It was posted on internet with embarrassed face, then it was spread quickly. "小公举" and "虾米" refers to "小公主" and "什么". "猴赛雷" is a harmonic tone of "好犀利，好厉害". Besides, "歪果仁"means "外国人", "油菜花" refers to "有才华". These catchphrases with accents are used to express inward feelings. It is not only humorous, but also cater for modern people's release of pressure and emotion. There are many buzzwords with English accents, such as "逼格". It derives from iphone's advertisement "bigger". It applies to the style that people make grand gestures pretendedly. "狗带" means "go die", coming from Huang Zitao's rap in his concert. On the internet platform, someone would say "我选择狗带" when they are helpless and discontented. It is vividness and expressiveness that make network catchphrases more popular.

2. Phenotype Memes' Dissemination

Phenotype dissemination accounts for a large proportion of network catchphrases. It refers to the identical form but different contents. Although information reserves basic form, contents are completely different. Different situations require different contents. Behavioral expression is a symbol in the process of replication and dissemination. He Ziran thought phenotype memes propagates in three ways: homonym, homomorphic association and isomorphic different meaning.

"洪荒之力" refers to the most primitive power of God. After Olympic Games, it implies people with mightiest power make great efforts. People also use it to ridicule and mock themselves. There are many similar examples, such as "套路" in 2016. It initially meant a whole set of martial art movements, systemic skills, and methods. Now it refers to

intentional, deceptive statement or practice, even trick and trap. "也是醉了" is not about drunkenness, but it expresses helpless and speechless about people and things.

"XXX 也是蛮拼的" is an example of phenotype memes. Another classic example is "友谊的小船说翻就翻". This catchphrase came from caricature The Boat of Friendship, which means friendship can not stand test. In a few months, fans of this cartoon are up to nine hundred thousand and spread to the circle of friends. Netizens compile many variants, such as "XXX 说 X 就 X". "任性的体重说涨就涨", "刚吃的晚饭说饿就饿", "好好的姑娘说胖就胖" and so on. This variant permeates work, study and life. "一言不合" means words are untimely. Now its meaning generalizes, showing people are capricious and do something unexpectedly. Many terms are based on the structure of "一言不合就 XXX". For example, "一言不合就飙车", "一言不合就辞职", "单位一言不合就发奖金".

Many variants are contextual generalization of initial catchphrases. "任性" comes from a news that the elderly is deceived to buy healthy products. Netizens mock up them "有钱就是任性". To satisfy certain desire or achieve some goals, people are willful and unscrupulous. It is a derogatory term in the traditional sense, but it is tinged with commendatory meaning, such as innocent, spontaneous, decisive and responsible for doing something. For example, "年轻就是任性", "有房就是任性", "成绩好就是任性". "宝宝" is a nickname that parents call their baby. Ever since the buzzword "吓死宝宝了" came out in 2015, it has become a term for girls to be cute when they are scared. Now this catchphrase can be used in any relaxing and casual situation. For example, "乐死宝宝了" and "笑死宝宝了".

The thrid type is more popular. For example, "xx 门", which derives from Watergate scandal, refers to disgracefully scandalous matters in policy. Now it refers to any scandals in any realms, such as entertainment, sports. "甄嬛体" is copied quickly and spread widely. The more popular language patterns are "xx 是极好的，xx 倒也不负", "xx 真真". Put new wine in old bottles, network catchphrases become creative and recreational. They make network language relaxing and amusing, which meets psychological demands of the public.

B. Factors Affecting the Dissemination of Network Catchphrase Memes

The network catchphrase is not only a linguistic phenomenon that reflects language change and development, but also a cultural phenomenon at specific times. Network catchphrases affect people's thinking and expression to some extent. Online intercourses are transformed into daily communication, which enriches expression and promotes language development. Network catchphrases are successful and powerful memes that are preserved by choice and elimination.

Dawkins pointed that successful memes is longevous, productive and loyal. Leigh stated the replication and propagation of better memes go through four stages: assimilation, memory, expression and dissemination. Catchphrase, a successful meme, is affected by five factors: the mental disposition of people who are the subject of information; contextual conditions selected by potential information; pragmatic function expected by subjects; surface features of information that is convenient to imitate and memorize; public character effect and media publicity.

According to the degree of language popularity and creativity, the most popular catchphrases can be estimated and elected annually. Network catchphrases increase year by year. Nearly thirty thousand netizens who were launched by the People's Daily voted the top ten network catchphrases in December in 2017. The first one is freestyle that refers to improvisation and casual exertion. "扎心了！老铁" "老铁"means best friends in the northeast China. This sentence shows people's emotion is touched by something. "贫穷限制了我的想象力" is usually used to make fun of people who have a large amount of money and live an inconceivable life. "你的良心不会痛吗?" expresses the bad mood of speakers. "惊不惊喜意不意外"refers that things happen unpredictably, which is used to ridicule a dramatical reversal. "请开始你的表演" was said by judges who appeared on TV's talent shows. Contestants should keep the attitude of pious and respectful listening. "还有这种操作" is the same as "套路" that is used for internet chat to express shock and suspicion. "尬聊" shows an awkward chat and the atmosphere falls into a freezing point. "戏精" refers to someone who pretends to have special effects. "皮皮虾，我们走" sweeps the internet. To the extent of the range and speed of transmission, the influence of the internet on language is enormous. "疯狂打 call" means fans wave fluorescent stick, cheer and bolster up, which creates an atmosphere of enthusiasm. They show their supports for the idol who sings on stage. Now it means backing up somebody or something. With the spread of this catchphrase, it becomes a popular expression in reality. Variants with the content "为 XXX 疯狂打 call" appear accordingly. They are used to describe all kinds of people.

"Prehistoric powers"(洪荒之力) comes from legendary TV drama *Hua Qiangu*. Two factions yearn for the most powerful power to be invincible. It was widely disseminated in Rio Olympics in 2016. The athlete Fu Yuanhui used this phrase in a humorous tone to express that she had already used all strengths. Her exaggerated countenance and funny expression attracted people's interest and attention. The buzword is reported on TV, internet and newspapers and spread quickly. "洪荒之力" is in line with psychological tendencies of young people who hope to have positive attitude and fighting spirit. In terms of pragmatic effect, it conveys a positive energy and inspires people to commit themselves to their cause. The buzzword became a hot word in 2016. It is easy to find and use it in life. When "洪荒之力" appears, it is a commendatory term that people devotes them to work. However, with the widespread use of various social

platforms, its meaning has changed in some contexts. For example, a sense of sarcasm spawns.

"洪荒之力" and "疯狂打 call" are representatives of network catchphrases. Netizens make catchwords enrich the network language. Their language forms are short, pithy, simple, memorable and readable. They find resonance with readers originally. Then by drawing on the popularity of public figures, network catchphrases are spread by mass media, such as online social media and TV. They respond to people's optimism. People are deeply influenced by these expressions as if they had experienced them. Because they can imagine those situations. Therefore, their ability to replicate is powerful, which is suitable for different circumstances and contextual spaces. People copy a variety of catchphrases to express true feelings and intentions. It is obvious that their popularity fit five factors above. When information is publicized by public figures or mass media, it is easy to imitate, memorize, copy and disseminate further.

"We are 伐木累" is very popular in *Running Man of Best Variety Program*. Deng Chao inspires team's morale to finish tasks when they faced challenges. The pronunciation is funny and ridiculous. "Smilence" (笑而不语) shows someone is unwilling to give opinion, just smile and reflects social hot topics. Their spread is due to the prevalence of the internet.

The way of thinking in China not only influences internet buzzwords, but also affects network catchphrases. In order to have a relaxing and pleasant network communication environment, internet users create entertaining words. There are also a lot of popular sentences on the internet, such as "long time no see". Now it becomes a standard English phrase. Network catchphrase is the symbol of the integration of network culture and native culture. For example, "No zuo no die" and "you can you up" are famous expression, which are imitated, replicated and disseminated widely on the internet.

Network catchphrase memes is essentially similar to strong memes. They lay a solid foundation for language innovation. The creation of network catchphrases is concise and interesting, revealing people's contemplation. They receive support from people because of their specialization and originality. It is network catchphrases' vividness and liveliness that convey people's feelings.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Findings

Memetics provides a prerequisite for the correct understanding and proper use of language and cultural evolution. It is helpful to explain rules of the dissemination of the network catchphrases. Virtual cyberspace and language community create a new social model. In addition, the combination of social culture and network culture contributes to the development of network catchphrases.

After analyzing the examples of network catchphrases from the perspective of memetics, the author makes some findings. Firstly, the characteristics of memes in network catchphrases can reveal the reasons for the popularity of buzzwords. Secondly, netizens like to create simple new words and phrases from social phenomena. Thirdly, the meaning of some network catchphrases will change in the process of dissemination.

B. Limitations and Suggestions

There are still many problems to be solved. The examples cited in this thesis are limited. Accumulating sufficient information sometimes impedes the correct understanding. Besides, memetics is a new field that is worth exploring.

Meme is a new theory to explain cultural evolution. Language is the carrier of cultural diffusion. Language itself is meme. Network catchphrases are not only a special language, but also a cultural phenomenon. And they reflect social hot spots and mental requirement. Some of them will become very popular and influence people's lives. So the study of network catchphrases has great sociocultural and linguistic value. Memetics also provides a new theoretical basis for the study of network catchphrases. People can know more about the development and popularity of language. Memetics and network catchphrase memes are worthy of further study by linguists and researchers.

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