

A Study of Catchwords from the Perspective of Speech Community

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Abstract—Catchwords are an important part of our language. As a kind of language as well as cultural phenomenon, it has much more linguistic and social-cultural values. Starting from the general review of literature, the paper here analyzes reasons of catchwords, explains its definition and several characteristics. It explores the formation of catchwords in both English and Chinese, highlighting that catchwords both in English and Chinese can be attributed to three sources. Finally, it points out that young people may be the mainstream of the use and renovation of catchwords.

Index Terms—speech community, catchwords, dynamic

I. INTRODUCTION

Great social changes always cause great changes in social cultures, in which, language is the most active and sensitive component. During recent years, China, as well as the western countries, has been going through considerable changes. These changes are reflected prominently in the use of words, the most dynamic part in language, among which catchwords show their salient features.

Catchwords exist all the time, especially thrive during the social and cultural reform periods. They always appear initially in some social group, and then spread to all walks of life. They appear in people's daily speeches, newspapers, and TV programs etc.

Catchwords are a kind of language phenomenon. Some changes and developments in the lexical can be discovered from the categorization of the words. Catchwords are a kind of popular culture phenomena as well. They convey notable characteristics of the time, reflecting modern social life and people's thoughts directly and subtly. Compared with the ordinary words, catchwords have much more linguistic and social-cultural values.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Ideas from foreign linguists

Speech community, as a core concept in empirical linguistics, is at the intersection of many principal problems in sociolinguistic theory and methodology (<http://www.users.york.ac.uk>). The study of speech communities has aroused the interest of numerous linguists for many years, at least since Leonard Bloomfield (1933) wrote a chapter on speech communities in his book *Language*. According to Bernard Spolsky (1998), for general linguistics, a speech community is all the people who speak a single language and so share notions of what is same or different in phonology or grammar. This would include any group of people, wherever they might be, and however remote might be the possibility of their ever wanting or being able to communicate with each other, all using the same language (ojs.academypublisher.com). Underlying it is the idea of a group of people who could, if they wanted, speak to each other (<http://www.uab.ro>).

Sociolinguists, however, find it generally more fruitful to focus on the language practices of a group of people who do in fact have the opportunity to interact and who, it often turns out, share not just a single language but a repertoire of languages or varieties. For the sociolinguist, the speech community is a complex interlocking network of communication whose members share knowledge about and attitudes towards the language use patterns of others as well as themselves. The idea that the members of a speech community share norms about the selection of varieties is important. Though they might not all know and use each of the varieties, they recognize the conditions under which other members of the community believe that it is appropriate to use each of them. A small social network forms a speech community, and so does a large metropolis or a country, a region, or a communication network (Gabriel, 2007). To be exact, there are typically four types of definitions.

1) The simplest definition is from John Lyons (1970) "Speech community: all the people who used a given language (or dialects)." This definition is not clear. According to this definition, "speech community may overlap (where there are bilingual individuals) and need not have any social or cultural unity" (Hudson, 2000). Lyons emphasizes "a given language" in his definition. That is to say, he values similar linguistic behavior, but ignores nonlinguistic elements.

2) The most influential definition puts the emphasis on shared attitudes and knowledge, rather than on shared linguistic behavior (<http://homepages.nyu.edu>). According to William Labov (1972), "speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation

which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage” (ucy.ac.cy). Labov holds the view that linguistic similarity is merely on the surface level, though the shared norms (the similar attitudes towards language and evaluation standards) are of great importance. It can be seen that this kind of definition puts emphasis on speech community as a group of people who feel themselves to be a community rather than a group, which only the linguists and outsiders can know about (<http://elkniga.info>).

3) The next definition shifts the emphasis from shared norms to interaction, which is offered by John Gumperz (1968), the founder of interactional sociolinguistics (<http://Ling.lancs.ac.uk>). In his opinion, “speech community: any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant difference in language usage” (<http://Ling.lancs.ac.uk>). This definition is famous for “interaction” or “density of communication”. Gumperz thinks members of a speech community talk more to one another than they do to outsiders, then linguistic similarity appears gradually. As a result, the boundary of community will normally be in accordance with the pattern of communication. Gumperz agrees that the shared knowledge of purely linguistic norms is not enough; there are “a large number of shared values” (Hudson, 2000) among members of the same speech community. Besides Gumperz, Bloomfield (1933) offers similar definition.

4) Milroy’s approach emphasizes social network. Milroy (1980) believes that Labov’s definition is a very important innovation in research methodology, and it has great theoretical potential. Milroy’s research is based on social network, which is below speech community. The social network is the informal social relationship in an individuals’ communicative circle, such as relatives, neighbors and friends. She suggests that in a relatively closed society the social network is much more influential on the individual’s speech than social class emphasized by Labov, and individual’s sense of belonging is more direct in such a network.

2. Ideas from Chinese Linguists

Language is a semiotic system; language is the most important communication tool, a vehicle of thinking and culture (Dai weidong, 1998). The features determine that language is a social semiotic system.

According to Chen Yuan (1980), language and society are a pair of variables and they are changing accordingly. When changes, gradual or violent, take place, in social life, language will undoubtedly keep step with these changes. Language, as the most important communication tool, absolutely depends on society, and at the same time constantly changes and evolves with the development of society to meet the needs of communication. Therefore, any changes in society will be reflected in language.

Language plays a key role in human communication, and society is developing rapidly, so it is inevitable that language develops constantly. Whenever new things, new experiences and new ideas come into being, new terms are needed to express them. And some of them soon become popular among people. Among the three elements of language, vocabulary is most sensitive to changes of society. Since the very beginning of last century, great changes have taken place in all aspects of society. With the development of society, the vocabulary of both English and Chinese is developing at an unprecedented speed. A great many new catchwords have been spawned.

III. REASONS OF CATCHWORDS

As a semiotic system, language consists of form and meaning, and word is the combination of form and meaning, therefore the core of the semiotic system is vocabulary which has the function of naming objective things, phenomena and concepts, and at the same time provides materials for making sentences. As the embodiment of all the language elements, vocabulary is directly involved in communication. That means, vocabulary, on the one hand, is a system of physical signs; on the other hand, it plays a social function. The physical signs are a means to realize its social function. Whenever any change occurs in social life, it will be reflected in vocabulary. Words must correspond to things and ideas, or there is no need to exist. If there exist gaps in communication or information transmission when new things and new ideas appear, the creation of catchwords is required to fill in the gaps. The appearance of new things, new phenomena and new ideas force people to create new words and expressions, otherwise they have to explain these new things, new phenomena and new ideas in numerous words. The need to express new things and ideas is the main reason for catchwords.

Factors for the creation of new words fall into many respects, the most prominent of which are development of science and technology, changes in political and economic fields and people’s everyday life.

IV. DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CATCHWORDS

1. Various definitions

The term “catchword” has been defined from different perspectives. Several definitions from some well-established dictionaries are shown below:

---A catchy name or slogan. (<http://www.yourdictionary.com>)

---A favorite saying of a sect or political group. (<http://dictionary.reference.com>)

---A word or phrase that is often repeated by, or becomes connected with a particular organization, especially a political group. (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>)

---A word or expression repeated until it becomes representative of a party, school, or point of view. (<http://>

encarta.msn.com)

—Popular word: a word or phrase that is so frequently used, often over a short period of time, that it comes to be identified with a particular feeling, quality, or idea. (<http://encarta.msn.com>)

Obviously, it is hard to define catchwords definitely, though many linguists at home and abroad offer their definitions. The slippery definition of catchwords has troubled all linguists working in the field. However, with the reference of many different definitions and some distinct features of catchwords shown from the description, we can conclude that catchwords refer to those words and phrases, which are fashionable and widely used on a large scale for a period of time in a given speech community, which, from a certain point of view, express people's values, ideas and state of mind and reflect social phenomena. They are used to achieve an air of informality and relaxation, so as to provide and reinforce social identity.

2. Features of Catchwords

In the eyes of Connie Eble(1996), catchword is an area of lexis in a permanent state of flux consisting of vivid and colorful words and phrases that characterize various social and professional groups, especially when these terms are used in a speech community (Connie Eble,1996). As a special language phenomenon, it has its own distinctive characteristics.

2.1 Dynamic

Catchwords are dynamic. Every word undergoes the same process: being produced, becoming popular, being ignored and becoming unpopular, being forgotten or assimilated as part of the common language. “There are but two ends for catchwords: disappearing, that is being eliminated in practical use; or being accepted into the daily vocabulary” (chenyuan, 1980).

The popular courses for catchwords are usually short. Their lives depend much on their “freshness”. Most catchwords show strong freshness, with lively time features. But after being repeated too much, they will become plain, even stereotyped. Then they will be discarded or be replaced by fresher ones. Most of them do not last very long, though the duration of their popularity usually ranges from about several years to several decades. For example, the word “bloomer”, which means “loose pant gathered at the knee, worn by women for cycling or swimming in the late 19th century”, used to be very popular in the early 1900s because that kind of pants were worn by nearly all American women. But now people seldom use this word

2.2 High-Frequency

Catchwords are popular during a certain period of time. Once introduced and spread, most people in a social group accept them and use them as frequently as possible. They become words of high frequency in people's daily communication. And they are also used a lot in mass media to lead the fashion and become eye-catching. They turn to be more and more popular. Of course, the high frequency is also relative. Different people use catchwords in different ways in accordance with their occupation, age, sex, education and way of talking. And the choices of these words also vary according to the contexts, situations and people with whom they are talking. So high frequency is just relative to those ordinary words with average frequency.

2.3 Derivable

Catchwords are derivational. When one word or sentence becomes popular, some similar words or sentences are usually derived from the original one. For example, ever since the word IQ (Intelligence Quotient) becomes popular, we have many more "Qs": EQ (Emotional Quotient), IQ (Love Quotient), SQ (Smile Quotient) and CQ(Charisma Quotient or Creation Quotient).

2.4 Enclosed

Some catchwords are only popular within a certain society or cultural group. Some are popular in many societies and cultural groups, but their meanings differ a lot. That makes catchwords comparatively enclosed in a specific cultural community, which brings about difficulties in cross-cultural communication. That is to say, these catchwords can't achieve the same intercourse effect in different cultural groups.

2.5 Slangy and Dialectical

Catchwords usually appear in a certain dialect. They are created by some particular social group, or some low-educated social classes. Then as more and more people are using them, their influences get extended. So catchwords have a lot of dialectical characteristics. Catchwords in different places always reflect different regional cultures. Since the creators and users of catchwords are mainly common citizens, catchwords are thought to mainly carry the notes of so called “lower” social culture. No matter how commendatory or derogatory they are, they reflect the interests and values of ordinary people. Besides, catchwords are much more used in spoken languages. They are colloquial and not elegant sometimes. And the contents are much limited in daily life. They are mostly concerned with the things and phenomena that people care about.

Catchwords are a mirror of social life. They reflect all its dimensions. We can learn the local culture and psychology of a certain place from these words. Compared with written language, which is serious, formal and strict, catchwords are usually more popular and common.

V. FORMATION OF CATCHWORDS IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

According to Algeo (1991), there are six basic etymological sources for English new words: creating, borrowing,

combining, shortening, blending and shifting. Each of those six sources, however, has a number of important subtypes. In addition to the major six sources, there are some other types of incomplete etymology. Though Chinese and English belong to different language families, the sources for Chinese catchwords can be traced in the same way. For example, Chenyuan (1980) gives five different ways of creating new words in Chinese: combination (the novel concatenation of morpheme, often on analogy with existing words), abbreviation (shortened forms of preexisting words or phrases), borrowing (words whose sound or meaning is imported from another language), shifting (existing words used with a new meaning) and “creating numerical formulae”. Therefore, the catchwords both in English and Chinese can be attributed to three sources: by creating catchwords through word formation processes, by borrowing words from foreign languages, and by adding new meanings to the existing words, two of which will be discussed in the following in detail.

A. *Creating Catchwords through Word Formation*

Creating catchwords means creating words based on native word elements such as letters, sounds, morphemes, roots, affixes, bases, and words. Usually, native speakers can easily understand a new word. This ability derives in part from the fact that there is a lot of regularity in word formation of a language. In the following, some basic word formation processes will be explored by which catchwords are created in English and Chinese.

1. Compounding

In English compounding is the formation of new words by combining two or more bases. It has been a source of catchwords in English since the earliest times, and it is still a productive way to create catchwords in present-day English. In modern Chinese, it is the most important way of creating catchwords.

Catchwords formed in this way are called compounds. English compounds are written in three ways: being hyphenated, solid, or open. For instance, easy-listening, superhighway, emotional quotient are all compounds. Chinese compounds have no such morphological changes.

English compounds may be made up of more than two words such as electronic whiteboard, direct-to-consumer, golden handcuffs, stay-at-home, cold dark matter, back-to-the-basics.

Compounding is a traditional Chinese way to create catchwords. Nowadays, it is still the most important way. Chinese compounds are composed of two or more morphemes. The morphemes may be free ones. That means catchwords are the combination of words just like those in 热卖, 高聘, 网卡, 攀升, 朝阳产业, 白领, 下海. They may be bound ones. That means these components can not be used independently. In such words as 长项, 掌控, 揽储, 采信, some components are not words and they cannot be used as units in sentences. Most compounds are disyllabic for example, 晨练, 成教, 冲顶, 出镜, 出局, 出炉, but there are many compounds composed of three, four, or even more syllables, for example, 知情权, 电子战, 防火墙, 高新技术, 个人通信, 工薪阶层, 调制解调器.

2. Shortening

In English, shortening is the formation of catchwords by omitting part of an old word. The range of English shortening is flexible. In a narrow sense, it only refers to acronym. In a broad sense, it may include clipping, blending and even backformation.

2.1 Acronym

Acronym is a process of forming catchwords by joining the initial letters of different words. Words formed in this way are called initialisms or acronyms, depending on the pronunciation of the words (<http://www.qqcate.cn>).

Initialisms are words formed from the initial letters of words and pronounced letter by letter. In the case of C.O.D. the letters are separated by full stops, but in most cases, they have no full stops between the letters.

Letters may represent full words, for example, VOA (Voice of America), BBS (bulletin board system), CALL (computer-assisted language learning), PWA (person with AIDS), LQ (leadership quotient), NEW (nonexplosive warfare).

Acronyms are words formed from the initial letters of words and pronounced as words such as Dink (Double Income No Kids), CEPA (Closer Economic Partnership Agreement), SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), DEWA (dual employed with kids).

Letters may represent all constituents in a compound or just parts of a word, for example, DVD (digital videodisc), HDTV (high-definition television), APEC (Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum), WMD (Weapons of Massive Destruction).

2.2 Clipping

Clipping is the simplest form of shortening by cutting a part of the original and using what remains instead. The clipped part may be the front, or the back, or both the front and back, or the middle part of a word. Front clipping examples are mobile (automobile), zine (magazine), net (internet), bot (robot), while app (application program), cell (cellphone), and expo (exposition) are back clipping examples. Front and back clipping examples are script (prescription), and shrink (headshrinker) (<http://www.tde.net.cn>).

In modern times, people tend to be economical in writing and speech to keep up with the fast tempo of the new life style. To save time one is likely to clip words that are frequently used (<http://www.tde.net.cn>). They are frequent in informal language, especially in spoken language, as in the campus use of gym, econ, trig and grad for gymnasium, economics, trigonometry and graduate respectively. Most of them preserve a colloquial flavor and are limited to the special vocabularies of occupational people, such as admin, app, demo, dev and droid, which are used for administrator,

application program, demonstration, developer and android and circulate among the young IT technicians in Silicon Valley.

2.3 Blending

Blending is a process in which clipping and combining occur simultaneously. A blend is a word made by joining two or more forms but omitting at least part of one, for example, cobot (cooperative robot), smist (smoke+mist), digiverse (digital+universe), videomatic (video+automatic) etc.

In the past, blends were regarded as crack jokes. With time passing, catchwords produced by blending got to be accepted in writing related to newspapers and magazines, and in most times lost their humour, e.g. interpol (international police), autoindustry (automobile industry), petrodollar (petroleum +dollar), infowar (information+war), Siliwood (Silicon+Hollywood), infobahn (information+bahn). Because blends are economic and simple in form, they are also used widely in science and technology, for example, biorhythm (biological + rhythm), copytron (copy+electron), lidar (light radar), pragmatic (program+automatic).

In Chinese, shortening means creating catchwords by taking some characters from a long word or phrase, for example, 福彩(福利彩票), 车展(汽车展览), 大本(大学本科), 自考(自学考试), 外教(外籍教师), 三讲(讲文明, 讲政治, 讲正气), 世博会(世界博览会).

B. Creating Catchwords by Borrowing Words from Foreign Languages

“Languages, like cultures, are rarely sufficient to themselves. Then necessities of interaction bring the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighboring or culturally dominant languages” (Bernard, 1998). Linguistic borrowing takes place in every level of language. Among the three elements of a language, vocabulary is the most susceptible to the outside disturbance. Lexical borrowing is one of the sources of catchwords. We cannot find even one language immune from heterogeneous linguistic elements, especially when the whole world is becoming a global village in the present information age (<http://congress.aks.ac.kr>).

Lexical borrowing is one important aspect of linguistic borrowing, the study of which is an interdisciplinary subject incorporating linguistics, sociology, anthropology and history. Numerous scholars have devoted countless pages to the study of it. The most authoritative theoretical study of the subject is still Haugen's *The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing* in which he defines borrowing as “the attempted reproduction in one language of patterns previously found in another” (Haugen, 1950). Here, the language patterns involve the pronunciation, spelling, morphology and meaning. So lexical borrowing may happen in every aspect of a word (<http://www.lotpublications.nl>).

Haugen thinks that borrowing involves either or both of two processes: importation and substitution. The adoption of foreign words in any language may take place in different ways and result in various types of loans in the extent of nationalization. According to Haugen, loanwords in English include a number of types, such as foreign words, loanwords, semantic loans, hybrid compounds and loan translation.

Such a division applies to borrowing between languages with different writing systems like English and Chinese in most cases as well as to borrowing between languages with similar writing systems. In Chinese, borrowed words usually fall into the following groups: transliterations, which involve the phonetic transfer and belong to the above-mentioned loanwords, e.g. 托福, 迪斯科, 秀 which correspond respectively to *TOEFL*, *disco*, *show*; loanblends, which are phonetic loans with autochthonous elements and belong to the above-mentioned hybrid compound, e.g. 乌龙球, 呼啦圈 corresponding respectively to *own goal*, *hula hoop*; loan translations, which, like English loan translations, involves the substitutions of native morphemes for foreign ones motivated by the similarity of meaning, e.g. 软着陆, 金领, 年薪 which correspond respectively to *softland*, *gold collar*, *annual salary*; graphic loans, like semantic loans in English, only possible if the two languages share the same ideographic writing systems, like Chinese and Japanese do (partially), which are substitutions of foreign meanings for those native morphemes motivated by a similarity of writing forms, e.g. 写真, 新干线, 寿司, 料理 which cannot, as Japanese words created with Chinese characters, be inferred from their components, corresponding respectively to existing Chinese words 故事, 生鱼片, 饮食; foreign words, which are more and more common in Chinese, e.g. *DVD*, *DNA*, *GDP*, *WTO*, *Internet*, *Windows*, *Office*.

VI. CONCLUSION

A speech community is all the people who speak a single language and so share notions of what is same or different in phonology or grammar. The speech community, as well as our society, is in continuous change. The need to express new things and ideas is the main reason for catchwords (<http://ojs.academypublisher.com>).

Catchwords are an important part of language development, and they are indicators of the development and changes of society. As a kind of popular culture phenomena as well, they convey notable characteristics of the time, reflecting modern social life and people's thoughts directly and subtly. Of all social groups, the young may be the most prone to the use and renovation of catchwords. They exhibit great social dynamism and are adaptive to changes in clothes, appearance, style, and also in speech. They have little political power, but they may use catchwords as a countercultural tool, even as a weapon against established authority and conventions (Connie Eble, 1996). In our modern and cultivated societies, students constitute one large subgroup within the young that deserves special study, for they frequently develop a special kind of vocabulary (Connie Eble, 1996). As a teacher, getting familiar with catchwords is sure to be

helpful and valuable for his communication with his students.

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