

Cognitive Interpretation of Online Catchwords and Catch-styles

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Abstract—By taking the wide-spreading catch-words and catch-styles on the internet as examples, this paper discusses the developing procedures and laws of network catch-styles, that is, the processes of coming into being, becoming popular, being imitated, generalization, abrasion and disappearing. At the same time, through combining the relating cognitive capability, process of getting-to-know and the cognitive laws of human beings, the corresponding mechanisms of appearing, understanding, spreading and metonymy are included in the catch-styles and its possible social functions are also verified in the paper.

Index Terms—network, catchwords, catch-style, law, cognition, mechanism

I. INTRODUCTION

Internet, emerged in the second half of twentieth century and entered common people's life in the beginning of 1990s, with features like convenience and freedom, characterizes 21 century when being individual, fast and convenient is a basic requirement. Gradual popularization of the internet leads to the flourishing of various kinds of online cultures, among which is a phenomenon called catchwords, based on which catch-style is built subsequently. Various studies on the online catchwords or the catch-styles are on the rise and have harvested large amount of popular papers, which, in turn, inspired much more interest in creating more catchwords and in studying catchwords in more fields and layers.

As the theoretical source of these studies, Memetics is widely used in such studies to discuss the foundation of the appearance, development and disappearance of such words and styles. Memetics is a theory to explain the evolutionary laws in culture, which was put forward by Dawkins based on Darwin's Theory of Evolution. It refers to the phenomenon that in the field of culture, people imitate and spread some certain thoughts or ideas, and keep such thoughts or ideas transmitted from generation to generation. The emergence and spreading of online catchwords and catch-styles surely follows the principles in Memetics, which explains the reasons why scholars are fond of taking advantage of it when they study catchwords and catch-styles. They explore the rules of online catchwords phenomenon. In the meanwhile, still some of the popular studies are about the interpretation of some single catchword or catch-style.

By taking the online catchwords and catch-styles as a whole to study, and through making use of knowledge in Cognitive Linguistics and laws in human cognition, this paper deals with the basis, mechanisms, and social functions of the online catchwords and catch-styles.

II. DEFINITION

Oxford dictionary says, a catchword is a word or phrase that is widespread, commonly and repeatedly used in phenomena related to organizations in politics or other fields. Collins Dictionary defines Catchword as "A catchword is a word or phrase that becomes popular or well-known, for example, because it is associated with a political campaign." And "Hon" (for honey) or "Lol" (for laugh out loud) are among the best examples of such words. Therefore, we can define it as "A catchword is a specially-oral word or phrase, produced and widely accepted and spread online, in particular among the netizens." Based on the classification of catchwords in similar form, and by extracting the similar elements among the catchwords, online catch-styles come into being. Therefore, the online catch-styles are all kinds of sentential patterns or expressions with similar structures or for similar purposes, like Taobao Style or Zhenhuan Style. Based on the structures of such catch-styles or in order to produce some certain effects, in turn, some more new catchwords emerge by following the examples of such catchwords, and will get popular online for some time. Shortly put it the other way, a catchword is a concrete word popular online, while a catch-style is an abstract form, which is a popular sentential pattern and expression extracted from the catchwords and used for reproduction online. Huang Ziran (2011) said that, in terms of mode of transmission, the main features of catchwords are "validity, high frequency, dynamics, cross expansion and short period of transmission".

III. LAWS OF CATCHWORDS AND CATCH-STYLES

Being a general sentential pattern, like other things in the world, the appearance, development, flourishing and extinction of online catchwords and catch-styles must also follow certain special laws, especially the laws about human recognition process about entities and the laws about the existence of entities. The generally held opinion is that the first catch-style popular in China is Lihua Style. Since that, more than 60 catch-styles have come into being online, like

To See or Not To See Style, Roaring Style, QQ Style, etc. What follows is the whole life circle of online catch-styles.

A. *Emergence of Catch-styles*

Based on the above mentioned information, we know that, till now, tens of various catch-styles have been in use, and even more are on the way. Then what is the source of them? Taking the social and online reality into account, catch words mainly come from the development and popularization of internet technology, also from the development of online culture. Therefore, catchwords and catch-styles are popular mainly among the netizens, online and offline. Usually, the catchwords come into being with the appearance of certain sort of events, like collective kuso, hot news, or being inspired by some media, advertisement, or some celebrity's micro-blog, for example, High-speed Rail Style comes from the words of the spokesperson after the Yongwen Line Accident; Vancl Style is the production of the slogan of VANCL, that is, "Love....., but not....., it's....., but not....., I'm.....".

B. *Development of Catch-styles*

Despite the different causes, developing processes belong to anything, namely, anything must have a process of developing, though not all the same, after they emerge. Catch-style is not an exception. After its emergence, before it gets wide acceptance among the netizens, catch-styles needs a stage of development, when netizens always want to use such style to describe something or some affairs they encounter in order to catch people's eyes or display their individuality. Just thanks to their painstaking effort in using such styles, they become increasingly familiar online and offline. As a result, more attention will be paid to them, providing them the nutrition they need to grow up.

C. *Flourishing of Catch-styles*

As soon as catch-styles are widely accepted among the netizens, the online catch-styles are widely used and will be used to produce more expressions by way of imitating the existing ones. That is, catch-styles become popular after its emergence and development due to the enthusiastic pursuit and imitation of great many netizens. Usually two stages appear before catch-styles become flourishing, imitation and application in other fields, Vancl style is the best example. The Wang Luodan version of Vancl is "Love performance, but not role playing; love struggle, but not enjoyment; love fancy clothes, love discount tags more; I'm not Millais, not so-called look-down-on-money, I'm VANCL. I'm nothing special but special. I'm different from others but you, I'm VANCL." Ever since its appearance and advertising, amusing and easily acceptable as the netizens found it was, the omnipotent netizens produced many popular sentences online with similar structures based on it, Luo Yufeng version and Huang Xiaoming version are the best examples. This is only the first stage in the flourishing stage of Vancl Style. Application comes closely after the imitation stage, on which, Vancl was applied in many other fields, for instance, Nanjing policemen once made some public posters after it. The application of such catch-styles is mainly due to their popularity and easy acceptability among people, especially among the young people, which makes the message they want to spread quickly and widely spread. The same stages also happened to other catch-styles, like Taobao Style, etc.

On the stage of flourishing, the catch-styles get spread quickly and accepted widely. Netizens, even the non-netizens will get familiar with them, leading to another circle of imitating and developing of the catch-styles, which will, in turn, lengthen the lifespan of the catch-styles, and of course, maximize the practical functions of them.

D. *Erosion and Extinction of Catch-styles*

With the times developing and things changing, and the netizens getting rid of the stale and bring forth the fresh, catch-styles get anew frequently. It often happens that the old and new catch-styles appear at the same time. This is partly due to the fact that the netizens are not always satisfied with the present situation and the existed catch-styles, they are trying hard to make up some new styles to say something or to show something. Consequently, some new catch-styles will take the place of the old ones. As for the old styles, they will be abandoned gradually, and at last disappear, following the exact rules in human society development, which can explain why Lihua Style and Zhenhuan Style have disappeared. Of course, the extinction of such old catch-styles does not happen immediately. In order to survive the irreversible trend of death, maybe some would try to fight back, some can even make it, when the old and the new exist for a certain time. Meanwhile, what must be clarified here is that the emergence of new catch-styles has nothing to do with the old ones. The reasons for the extinction of the old catch-styles are mainly because that they are too familiar for the netizens to use again. The fighting back during the extinction process simply because that there's something similar to the original source of the old ones happening, which arouses the similar image or feeling among the netizens, or because that there are some new netizens who just know them and want to use them without much knowledge about the history of them.

IV. COGNITIVE INTERPRETATION OF ONLINE CATCH-STYLES

In the processes of knowing the world, human beings kept accumulating knowledge and experience, which helps the accumulation and promotion of human cognition, which is, in turn, will help people know more about the world. Especially the promotion of cognition in human beings will surely accelerate the process of people knowing the world, and the interest and ability of people knowing the unknown world at the same time, which in return will promote the accumulation of knowledge and experience in human beings. That is to say, they are mutually influenced and benefited.

Among the unknown things in the world, Internet and online catch-styles were once unknown to people. Then how did human cognition work on people knowing them? In other words, what mechanisms exist in the emergence, development, flourishing and extinction of the online catch-styles?

A. *Generation Mechanism of Catch-styles*

Guo Jiexiang (2012) said, there's a special operation mechanism in the emergence and development of online catch-styles, namely, the analogy and generation. Analogy is "the attraction and assimilation from the existed structure to the existing one." And analogy "works by circling around the paradigmatic axle picked out on any node existing in any component of the structure." Generation refers to the generation of meaning of language in analogy, which is a must process because generation of meaning can avoid the possible limitation on objects and ranges of analogy.

Therefore, when catchwords get emerged and spread online, the catch-styles were produced by the netizens according to the similar mechanism, that is, sentential structures are extracted based on the catchwords, and similar sentences will be made up based on the structures naturally. Subsequently, when the constructor of certain sentences get more knowledge about other things or entities, in order to make them known to other people, they will naturally use the structures, namely, the catch-styles, to describe them, which helps the dissemination of such catch-styles.

In a word, the cognitive process of this generation mechanism is "from concreteness (specific sentences) to abstraction (sentential structure) to generalization (meaning generalization) and at last application". The generation mechanism works on the emergence of any online catch-style.

B. *Understanding Mechanism of Catch-styles*

Guo Jiexiang^[2] also said, two steps, construction and gestalt, are necessary in understanding online catch-styles. "Construction" refers to "words, phrases and sentential structures", whereas according to Carl Koffka (1997) "Gestalt" is a psychological term, referring to perceiving the incoherent constituents as dots or lines as coherent ones, even pretending the gapped pictures non-gapped in mind. In real life, gestalt can refer to perceiving the objects according to the existed complete structures of them in our mind. Simply put it this way, in understanding the *Drawing Sword* version of VANCL style, that is, "Love drawing sword, but not incubation; love Xiajia Bay, and the girls in Xiajia Bay; love broadsword, bayonet, bright machine-gun also; I'm not a hero, neither big shot; I belong to the independent regiment; Like you, I am a real man", people should first get the construction of VANCL style, the "Love....., but not....., it's....., but not....., I'm....." structure in their mind, and then they can get the gestalt structure by taking advantage of the existing information, namely, the TV series. By then, people can say that they have finished the understanding of *Drawing Sword* version of VANCL style.

Based on the above-mentioned message, we can safely draw the conclusion that the understanding of newly produced expressions should be based on the provided information or pre-existing knowledge. Without enough background knowledge, no one can figure out the hidden message in such sentences, let alone to understand the essence.

That is to say, the understanding mechanism of catch-styles also consists of the process of "from concreteness (specific sentences) to abstraction (sentential structure) to concreteness (new specific sentences)", which is similar in form, but different in content, with the generation mechanism of catch-styles.

C. *Metonymic Mechanisms of Catch-styles*

Xu Guanglian (2005) says defines metonymy as "a figure of speech that is used to refer to another thing that has something to do with one thing". Zhao Yanfang (2006) provided another more detailed definition to metonymy, that is, metonymy is usually used "based on people's experience. It is conceptual in essence. It is a process of being spontaneous and unconscious. It is also a method to enrich certain language expressions." Meanwhile, Xiao Yi^[6] explains the use of metonymy in online catchwords and catch-styles, "Metonymy is widely used in online catchwords." There are many sorts of metonymic phenomena in online catchwords, like "the metonymy between language and symbols", "between language and voice", "between different language systems", etc. And there are many catchwords describing the metonymic relations. For example, in Chinese, 88 can mean bye-bye in pronunciation, referring to the language and symbol type; Everything could be an illusion (神马都是浮云) could be a best example for the language and voice type; "聊天 ing" is an excellent example for the "between different language systems", as -ing form is borrowed from the Present Progressive Tense in English grammar, referring to the proceeding actions or events, while 聊天 is a Chinese phrase.

Cognitive psychology holds that when human want to store some messages in their mind, they usually classify the messages according to the principles like adjacency, similarity, relevance, etc. Some famous Cognitive psychologists also proposed the famous Spreading Activation Model, namely, the connection between concepts or things is usually activated and spread by the cognitive competence based on the principles like adjacency, similarity, relevance, etc. Meanwhile, as metonymy also operates within the cognitive domain based on the principles like adjacency, similarity, relevance, etc., we can safely draw the conclusion that metonymy is widely used in catchwords online, although we can't deny the fact that when people create such catchwords or catch-styles, they may not have such metonymic mechanism in their mind.

D. *Spreading Mechanism of Catch-styles*

In the Laws of catchwords and catch-styles part, we discussed the emergence, developing, flourishing and extinction stages in catchwords' life. The four stages are usually the reflection of any life entity. Then, in the catchwords' and catch-styles' life, what makes the originally nonliving language phenomenon living? What makes the originally-disobedient expressions popular both online and offline?

It's know to all that the beginning of some catchwords simply comes from the misuse or even deliberate misspelling or mispronunciation of words, which unexpectedly arousing people's interest in imitating when they think they can use the imitated words to say something. When they find the entertaining or some other practical functions of the words, they will surely want to share with their friends, even strangers online. Finally, with the wide spreading of the words, they become the catchwords. It means that the spreading of catchwords mainly stems from certain purposes, like entertaining, warning, etc.

As for the ways of the spreading of catch-styles, it mainly happens online for at least two reasons. One is that internet is a comparatively free kingdom. On the internet, people are free to post messages they want, even some illegal ones (of course, they will also bear their corresponding responsibilities if proved illegal). The internet is free also means that message can be spread free all over the world, seldom run into some barriers if there is no manmade conditions for any reasons. The other is that internet is an ideal carrier of messages as it can transmit them at fastest speed than ever and can make the largest amount of audience possible globally.

E. *Social Functions of Catch-styles*

Great philosopher Hegel once said that *to be is rational*. It means there must be certain right reasons supporting the existence of some things or phenomena. Meanwhile, great educator Confucius once held the methodology in dealing with others, namely, to learn from others what they are good at while say no to what they are not. According to Hegel, the existence of catch-styles must be rational, has its own social needs and social functions. Meanwhile, in dealing with the large amount of online catch-styles, what we should do is to follow Confucius's instruction, that is, to take advantage of the elements including positive energy and rewarding message, but to refuse the opposite ones.

According to social linguists, the emergence of new language phenomena must bear some social functions and significance. As for online catchwords and catch-styles, there must be some unique social functions. Shi Limei (2012) said, both in life and at work, the use of Taobao Style will make the communicators feel closely mentally, which will make the communication move on smoothly. Giving extended application of this idea, we know that, the online catch-styles must bear the following social functions.

First, to communicate more smoothly

Communication is the first and foremost function language has, and is also what language is for, so is online catchwords and catch-styles. As netizens are usually fond of the catch-styles, they naturally will communicate more smoothly and better with such expressions. That means the use of catch-styles in online communication will not only make the users feel better, but also make the communication go more smoothly as the users can better understand and accept the language easier, which will, in turn, save much time and energy.

Meanwhile, the use of catch-styles will absolutely make the youngsters communicate more smoothly. For example, there is certain gap between teachers and students, especially in college. In order to bridge the gap between him and his students, when a counselor in a university met his students for the first time, he made a self-introduction in VANCL style, that is, "Love movies, love great adventure, love to cook for myself, love to be the linebacker when playing football. Don't like to vegeteal, neither a stay-at-home type. I'm Wu Zhiming. I'm a Gemini. I'm a striving counselor." When he finished introducing himself, he also asked the students to introduce themselves the same way he had used. Immediately, the gap between them was gone, making the students feel closer to their counselor.

At the same time, as people often take advantage of the informal language forms and informal styles when they use the catch-styles, which helps to avoid the sense of seriousness carried by formal language forms and styles. Such informality can make the audience find that his communicator is easygoing. Such feeling will, in turn, surely make the communication go better. So, no matter in what situation a catch-style is adopted, as long as it is appropriate, it will make people feel easier and better, and can make the communication go more smoothly.

Second, to show individuality and creativity

At the same, we know that one of the reasons why catch-styles come into being is some catch-style producers thirstily want to show their individuality and creativity (to show individuality and creativity characterize the modern young people), which may not only make them famous online, but also give them a sense of achievement once they find the catch-styles they created are widely accepted and popularized online. In order to make their individuality known by larger groups of people, they will produce more catch-styles.

Third, to entertain people

Just as what has been discussed above, catch-styles come from the abstraction of catchwords online and is used to make up more catchwords to describe some cases or phenomena. In application, catch-styles are mainly used to entertain the netizens, or to display their dissatisfaction with some phenomena but in a humorous way. In doing so, the audiences and users themselves can get certain knowledge about the affairs concerned in a lighter way. On the other hand, we must admit that nowadays, in most humorous TV programs even some movies, most of the laugh stocks are derived from the online catchwords, which proves the entertaining function of catch-styles in a new light.

Fourth, to promote harmonious society

In a macroscopic light, online catch-styles help to promote harmony in the society to some degree. As we all know that online catchwords usually come from all sorts of affairs, many of which deliver somewhat negative messages, which will easily arouse anger among the netizens, then bringing negative effects on the social stability. But, when people alter the catchwords and get the catch-styles, such negative messages may get reduced, even disappeared at last. Subsequently, when the catch-styles get applied to interpret some affairs humorously, the process to alter and apply such catch-styles may help them release their negative feeling. So, in some sense, the popularization of catch-styles has positive influence on the society.

Of course, catch-styles do not always transmit positive energy. They sometimes may have negative influence on some aspects, like what the Textspeak and Candy Style have had on the development of language and literature, etc.

Apart from the above mentioned four social functions, there are many other functions that catchwords and catch-styles can have, only in different conditions, like at home, or between coworkers, etc.

V. CONCLUSION

As an online phenomenon and social reality, online catch-styles get known among, accepted and spread by the netizens. In this process, the netizens take advantage of their intelligence, personal experience and knowledge, the accumulated cognition also. Meanwhile, reasons and malpractices coexist in the online catch-styles. In knowing them, people should do with them reasonably but not blindly; in applying them, people should know the affairs thoroughly first in order not to get themselves involved in trouble because any wrong spreading of the illegal or wrong messages may cause the spreader some trouble.

At the same time, as catchwords and catch-styles may have both positive and negative influence on every aspects of social life, in applying such expressions, people should try hard to first decide the respective nature in order not to blindly use any. Therefore, people should try to take advantage of the positive catch-styles to influence people around them and cause positive influence to the society to help build a harmonious society. As for those carrying negative messages, people should first define them and pick them out, and then ignore or even bury them.

As for the studies on them, the abundant information in online catch-styles deserves more energy, which also should be carried out from different angles. The right study and appropriate use of catchwords and catch-styles will surely not only entertain the audience but also benefit the society.

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