

The Generation Mechanism and Group Interaction of Sino-Western Hybrid New Words—A Case Study of the Chinese Internet Slang “打 call”

Mengjie Chao¹, Minsheng Mao^{2*}

¹*School of Chinese Language and Literature, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China*

²*Research Center for Language and Language Education, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China*

**Corresponding Author. Email: maoms1105@163.com*

Abstract: Internet slang serves as a linguistic representation of the public’s cognitive mentality in society. As an emerging internet slang, “打 call” has been classified by previous scholars as code-mixing, with analyses of its semantic and grammatical features as well as the factors driving its popularity. However, few studies have explored its intrinsic generation mechanism and propagation dynamics. In this regard, this paper redefines “打 call” proposes the concept of Sino-Western hybrid new words, and, from the perspective of socio-cognitive linguistics, examines the generation mechanism of “打 call” and its interaction with different social groups. The study finds that the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” is generated through an interactive subjectivity cognitive mechanism, shaped by the interaction between the speaker and the audience, and that it spreads widely from the youth in-group to the middle-aged and elderly out-group, forming a unique propagation path.

Keywords: 打 call, Sino-Western hybrid new words, social cognition, generation mechanism, group interaction

1. Introduction

Internet slang serves as a linguistic representation reflecting social realities and mirroring the general psychological mindset of a broad audience in the age of mass communication, acting as an image of the audience’s social cognitive mentality [1]. With the rise of micro-communication, audiences have been ushered into the new media era [2]. Driven by the joint forces of multi-dimensional “micro-actions” and “micro-media” [2], in order to cater to the social cognitive mentality of the audience and facilitate cognitive interaction with the social world, the speaker (subject of conceptualization 1) selects combinations of Chinese words (denoted as “X”) and foreign words (denoted as “Y”) to form constructions that result in cross-cultural internet slang, specifically Sino-Western hybrid new words [3]. These new words are then construed by the audience (subject of conceptualization 2) through an interactive subjectivity cognitive mechanism, undergoing rhetorical operations from semantic understanding to cognitive comprehension, which in turn responds to the feedback of expectation from the speaker, ultimately optimizing cross-cultural communication effects.

As an emerging cross-cultural internet slang construction of the “XY/YX” form, scholars tend to categorize it under “code-switching” [4,5]. We, however, hold a different view. Sino-Western hybrid new words refer to constructions formed by the selection of Chinese words (X) and foreign words (Y, primarily English words) due to language transmission and contact. X and Y can be freely combined to form two sub-constructs: XY (e.g., “打 call”) and YX (e.g., “hold 住”). Code-switching, on the other hand, refers to a phenomenon where, while communicating in one language, the speaker suddenly switches to using words or structures from another language for some reason, thus mixing two codes [6]. Moreover, code-switching is a temporary pragmatic strategy, characterized by improvisation and structural looseness. In contrast, Sino-Western hybrid new words exhibit harmonious rhythm between the two elements, align with the lexical characteristic of Chinese being dominated by disyllabic words, and represent stable lexical forms resulting from cross-linguistic contact. These words show a trend of lexicalization and possess both structural fusion and functional stabilization features. Therefore, the term “Sino-Western hybrid new words” is proposed to independently represent this phenomenon and avoid confusion with “code-switching”. This paper selects the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” as a case study to analyze its propagation interaction path and rhetorical processing under the interactive subjectivity cognitive mechanism, with the aim of offering a new perspective for studying the cross-cultural communication effects of internet slang.

2. The Generation Mechanism of “打 call”: Role Reversal and Ingroup/Outgroup Bias

2.1. Role Reversal and Word Selection

As an example of the Sino-Western hybrid new word XY construction, “打 call” originally referred to a fan activity in support of idols. It is a form of expression through physical actions (such as dancing, jumping, etc.) and verbal expressions (such as shouting slogans) performed by Japanese idol fans to demonstrate their intense affection for the artist [7-10]. The initial symbol of “打 call” was the Japanese word “コール” (pronounced [kouru]), a transliteration of the English word “call”. In addition to meaning “to make a phone call”, “call” also carries the meaning of “shout”. The meaning of “shout” further broadens and deviates toward “affection”, representing a semantic diffusion from the source domain (semantic field of base) to the target domain (semantic field of target). It also signifies a unidirectional cognitive metaphor mapping from a concrete action to an abstract emotion. In this unidimensional direction, the transliteration between symbols presupposes the “absence” of the English-speaking output creator [11], thereby highlighting the “presence” of the Japanese audience. This gave the Japanese audience control over the discourse and expression strategies, completing the rhetorical discourse construction of the word “コール” to express affection.

When the Japanese word “コール” (expressing affection) was introduced to China, the Chinese audience, adhering to the principle of linguistic economy, opted for the more easily pronounceable and direct English word “call”, instead of the more difficult-to-pronounce Japanese word “コール”. This choice formed a new phonetic-semantic combination “call”, retaining the meaning of the Japanese word while borrowing the form of the English word. This process reflects the interaction and negotiation between the “presence” of the expression and the audience. However, to further highlight the fans’ intense emotional affection for the object of their admiration, the Chinese audience added the verb “打” (to hit) before “call”, thereby enhancing the prominence of the meaning of “call” through the structure “打 call”. This rhetorical transformation not only made the emotional expression of “call” more vivid but also enabled the “presence” of the audience to creatively reconstruct the

language in the social context of the “absence” of the expression. The final form, “打 call” is harmonious in rhythm and clear in meaning, conforming to the rhythmic characteristic of Chinese being dominated by disyllabic words, and is highly expressive. It became a typical example of cross-cultural linguistic contact.

The established construction “打 call” was disseminated through Chinese emerging entertainment programs such as China’s Got Talent and other media, reaching a broad audience. Its meaning expanded, acquiring more positive connotations and a broader application range, nearly resembling “liking” or “cheering for” in meaning. For example:

(1) “打 call” for the extraordinary new era. (People’s Daily Overseas Edition, 2017-11-06)

(2) But they are also the “self-proclaimed supporters” who cheer for the motherland. (People’s Daily, 2017-11-28)

(3) Wu Jianhao, despite an ankle fracture, still went to the scene to “打 call” for his new work. (Information Times, 2019-06-25)

As seen, the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” in news headlines (or discourse) can replace Chinese expressions like “点赞” (like, give a thumbs-up) and “打气” (cheer for), independently expressing a complete meaning. This reflects the way the Chinese audience, through rhetorical processing of “打 call” constructs the text. At the same time, the expression “打 call” meaning “like” or “approve”, signifies the role shift from the audience to the speaker, and it gradually gained popularity in mass communication.

2.2. Ingroup/Outgroup Bias and Construction Preference

“Social categorization refers to the subjective process of grouping people based on shared characteristics” [12-14]. Therefore, “the direct result of social categorization is to classify categorized objects into the ingroup (which includes oneself) and the outgroup (which does not include oneself)... It influences people’s perception and evaluation of others, leading to ingroup-outgroup bias, which manifests as ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation. Specifically, this bias is reflected in the preference for one’s own group or the derogation of other groups” [12]. The Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” meaning “to like” or “to approve”, is constrained by microcommunication and the construction itself, and has become popular within the cultural circle of the broad online audience. The primary group within this cultural circle is the younger generation, who are more sensitive to internet communication media such as microcommunication. Therefore, the Sino-Western hybrid word “打 call” was initially used by the youth group. The youth group, driven by a desire for novelty and curiosity, forms an ingroup and devalues the outgroup, which is composed of older adults or non-internet users, thereby creating an ingroup-outgroup bias between youth (netizens) and older adults (non-netizens) as social categories.

This ingroup-outgroup bias is further triggered by the attitudes of the social cognitive subjects (the youth and older adult groups) [12], “leading to the cognitive subjects’ preference for specific constructions, which causes construction bias.” “打 call” composed of a combination of Chinese and English words, originated in entertainment variety shows and is favored by the broad youth group. This, in turn, participates in the subjective mental construction of the youth ingroup, forming a unique attitude within the youth ingroup to express cognitive states of liking and approval, which further results in a preference for the construction of the Sino-Western hybrid new word. In contrast, the older adult outgroup pays less attention to and accepts the cross-cultural buzzword “打 call” that emerged under the background of microcommunication, causing “打 call” to not be widely spread among the older adult outgroup when it was first created.

3. Group Interaction of “打 call”: Extension of Communication and Acceptance Strategies

3.1. Subjective Communication Interaction and Group Extension

“Interactive subjectivity refers to the cognitive coordination between the speaker and the listener. In constructions of interactive subjectivity, the listener, as the interpreter of the speaker’s discourse, occupies a more prominent position. The listener is not merely a passive recipient guided by the speaker’s given content, but an active conceptualizer” [15,16]. Interactive subjectivity highlights the subjective awareness and subjectivity characteristics of both communicative parties (the conceptualizing subjects), as well as the interactive relationship between these conceptualizing subjects. Ultimately, it achieves mutual evaluation and positioning of these subjects, along with the expression of cognitive states, i.e., the expression of stances.

With the continued popularity of the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” and its frequent use in various media headlines, the application scope of the exclusive social discourse of the youth ingroup gradually expanded. This trend prompted the youth ingroup to form expectations for feedback from the middle-aged and elderly outgroup, hoping that the middle-aged and elderly outgroup, as the audience, would gradually accept the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call”. To integrate into the language life of the new media era, the middle-aged and elderly outgroup, while evaluating and recognizing the subjective stance and construction preference of the youth ingroup (the speakers), broke the linguistic gap (utterance gap) between the youth ingroup and the middle-aged and elderly outgroup. This led to the realization of a one-way extension from the youth ingroup to the middle-aged and elderly outgroup.

3.2. Altercentric Emotion Acquisition and Acceptance Strategy

Fictional emotions (F-emotions) are the emotions generated during the interpretation of discourse [17,18]. Altercentric fictional emotions (F(a)-emotion) are a type of fictional emotion and refer to “the emotions experienced by readers (listeners) when placed in the role of the characters in the discourse or the situation described in the discourse” [17]. The acquisition of altercentric emotions requires active participation in the empathy-based social cognitive process. The empathy cognitive process refers to “the social cognitive process in which individuals understand the situations of others and experience the same emotional state as them during social interaction” [17]. The middle-aged and elderly outgroup, who recognize the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” evaluates the subjective stance expressed by the youth ingroup, thus interpreting the social context in which the youth ingroup exists. This generates an empathy process that aligns with the “like, approve” emotions of the youth ingroup, and subsequently leads to the adaptation to the new language life, acceptance of the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” and its widespread usage in the social context.

4. Conclusion and Further Discussion

This paper, from the perspective of social cognitive linguistics, explores the generation mechanism of the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” and the communication interaction pathways between different social groups, revealing the social cognitive motivations behind “打 call”, the cognitive generation mechanism of interactive subjectivity, and its communication paths. The Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call” is generated under the fundamental cognitive mechanism of interactive subjectivity, driven by the social cognitive mechanisms of role reversal and ingroup-outgroup bias. Through interaction between different social groups, the application scope of “打 call” gradually extends from the youth ingroup within society to the middle-aged and elderly outgroup. After the middle-aged and elderly outgroup acquires the altercentric emotions that align with the emotions of

the youth ingroup, they gradually accept the Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call”. Consequently, “打 call” has achieved wider dissemination within the broader social context. However, there are still issues that need to be addressed in the research process, such as: what are the specific cognitive and rhetorical processing processes for the Sino-Western hybrid new word as a construction? How does the communication path of the Sino-Western hybrid new word operate? Are the construction characteristics and generation rules of combinations like “hold 住” and “cue X” consistent? Through such research, new insights can be provided for the study of internet slang and its cross-cultural communication effects.

References

- [1] Huang, W. T. (2019). *Internet slang and its social dissemination function*. *Journal of Zhengzhou University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 3, 123-125.
- [2] Song, J. (2019). *An analysis of cross-cultural internet slang in the context of micro-communication*. *Publishing Horizon*, 8, 83-85.
- [3] Mao, M. S. (2018). *The Sino-Western hybrid new word “打 call”*. *Chinese Language Learning*, 4, 71-72.
- [4] Chen, M. C., Yang, Y. B., & Chen, K. R. (2019). *An analysis of internet slang formed by mixed codes through “打 call”*. *Modern Communication*, 4, 83-85.
- [5] Zhou, Y. R. (2019). *A study on the normalization of code-mixing in internet slang*. *Modern Chinese*, 2, 155-159.
- [6] He, Z. R., & Ran, Y. P. (2009). *An Introduction to Pragmatics (New edition)*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- [7] Lu, Q., & Li, Z. P. (2018). *A multidimensional discussion on the popularity of “打 call”*. *Journal of Hubei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 4, 31-37.
- [8] Xia, Z. H., & Chen, T. (2018). *A scattered discussion of the 2017 popular term “打 call”*. *Journal of Bohai University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2, 112-117.
- [9] Meng, R. S. (2018). *Why is “打 call” everywhere?* *Language Construction*, 1, 76-77.
- [10] Zheng, R. Y. (2018). *A study on the internet slang “打 call”*. *Modern Chinese*, 2, 130-134.
- [11] Tan, X. C., & Zhu, L. (2015). *Generalized Rhetoric (revised edition)*. Hefei: Anhui Education Press.
- [12] Jiang, C. Z., & Kuang, F. T. (2019). *The social cognitive motivation behind the use of constructions*. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 3, 328-338.
- [13] Dovidio, J. F., & Gaertner, S. L. (2010). *Intergroup bias*. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.). *Handbook of Social Psychology*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- [14] Crano, W. D., & Hemovich, V. (2011). *Intergroup relations and majority or minority group influence*. In R. M. Kramer, G. J. Leonardelli, & R. W. Livingston (Eds.). *Social Cognition, Social Identity, and Intergroup Relations*. New York/London: Psychology Press.
- [15] Yu, D. X. (2018). *A study of the intersubjectivity in Chinese (Doctoral dissertation)*. East China Normal University, Shanghai.
- [16] Verhagen, A. (2014). *Constructions of Intersubjectivity: Discourse, Syntax, and Cognition*. Beijing: World Publishing Corporation.
- [17] Liu, J., & Duan, H. (2019). *Conceptual integration analysis of emotional discourse comprehension from a social cognitive perspective*. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 3, 316-327.
- [18] Kneepkens, E. W. E. M., & Zwaan, R. A. (1994). *Emotions and literary text comprehension*. *Poetics*, 1, 125-138.