The Positive and Negative Influence of Language Memes

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Abstract. At the setting of communication technology's rapid development, a lot of language memes have emerged. The paper analyzes the possibility of meme's spreading: the feature of Chinese structure, meme's productiveness and learnability, memes can be classified into gene-type and phenotype. Memes have positive and negative influence because of meme's "selfishness". Through reflecting meme's negative aspect, we should realize the importance of standardizing written language and make human beings become the true owner of memes.

Keywords: language memes; positive influence; negative influence.

1. Introduction

With the development of communication technology, especially internet technology, language meme phenomenon is more and more popular, which is the inevitable outcome of human being's social practice. This paper takes memetics as the perspective, it argues the possibility of spreading Chinese as a language meme. Language memes have the same characteristics, which will recombine, replicate and mutate as much as possible during transmission.

This paper discusses the language patterns and the rhetorical effects of language meme phenomenon. At the same time, we should know the language memes are like genes, "they can't anticipate themselves, they only care about their own replication whether the replication is good or not for themselves, this is the "selfishness" mentioned by Dawkins [1]. Memes will be replicated as much as possible regardless of whether it is beneficial, neutral or harmful. So, language memes have both positive and negative effects. We should realize its "selfishness", rethink some deep things behind language, recognize and explore language memes, especially the conflict and negative effects for language standard ability and cultural heritage, which is the research purpose of this paper.

The author input the theme "language memes" in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), time is from 2000 to now, there are 2870 relative journal papers and master and doctoral papers about language memes were searched and sorted out. It is shown that there are about 15% (430) papers in theoretical introduction and discussion of memes. About 5% (143) papers about the application in the field of translation, there are 23% (660) about the conduct in the field of language teaching, and the papers in the field of pragmatics account for 57% (1636), in these 1636 papers, 70% of the papers research and explore language memes phenomenon of cyberwords and advertising language, most of articles show a one-side positive attitude and boost role. Only 13 journal and master and doctoral papers mainly discuss the negative effects, which made the author come to realize that it is urgent and necessary to correctly understand the positive and negative influence, especially rethinking the negative effects of language memes.

2. The Definition of Memes and Language Memes

Meme is mentioned in *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Rawkins, who is a well-known zoologist and behavioral ecologist. The theory of memes is expanded by Darwin's genetics. The unit of gene is DNA, which is a unit of ecological gene. The unit of memes is a semantic entity, that is morpheme, word, phrase, sentence and discourse. Memes evolve by imitation.

In our academic community, He Ziran first put forward the idea of language memes [2]. Combining the generalization of characteristics of gene and meme, Language memes can be defined: language memes is a kind of semantic entity, language memes are the replicator of language. Morphemes, words, phrases, sentences and discourses are recombined, replicated and transmitted by certain rules, the complex and multiple body of memes can be formed. And the effect of

humanity factor, which are the internal causes of the diversity of human languages. For example, political memes: Chinese dream, the road of recovery; economical memes: green products, green channel; fashionable memes: Chinese good voice, a bite of China.

3. The Possibility of Wide Spread of Language Memes

3.1 The Flexibility of Chinese Patterns and the Meaning of a Word

Chinese is ideographic, has more simple sentences, more four-word groups, more parallel sentences, which is jumpy and poetic, belongs to lyric language. Chinese emphasizes parataxis over analysis. Every word is just like a fundamental particle, can be bound with other words at will. Chinese is rich in subjectivity, Chinese patterns are very loose, concentrating language by rich imagination. For example, "paper flower" and "flower paper" ("纸花","花纸"), "the front trees" and "in the front of trees" ("前面的小树","小树的前面"),Chinese words can be bound to form different word orders, the meaning is quite different. What's more, Chinese words are rich in meaning, which is full of flexibility. For another example, "Chinese team thrashed Japanese team." can be translated into "中国队大胜日本队","中国队大败日本队"in Chinese. "win" and "defeat" are opposite words, the second sentence is a passive voice, means "be defeated", so both of the two sentences have the same meaning, means Chinese team has won. From these examples we can see that the flexibility of Chinese patterns and the meaning of a word make language memes become possible.

The kind of words and sentences with simple structure and easily understood meaning are easy to become language memes. Take "校长" as an example, if "长"is used as the center word, the language memes can be: 厂长、组长、班长、家长、机长、院长……; i f "校"is used as the center word, the language memes can be: 学校、校园、校花、校草、校舍、校友……,In "ideal and reality" , ideal and reality are opposite words, according to the structure is "╳and ╳", a lot of language memes can be produced: conspiracy and love, mind and material, sense and sensibility, red and black, war and peace…….However, the kind of words with complicated structure and meaning which is hard understood are difficult to become language memes. For example: 爻、鳎、鹨、铫、垚……,龌龊、窈窕、鸟瞰、囹圄、褡裢、偏锋、偏枯…… these words seldom have language memes. So, language memes, like genes, are subjects to some kind of adaptive selection, survival of fittest, the variation and reorganization of language memes are also selective.

3.2 The Productivity of Language Memes

The productivity refers to language memes are just like "virus" which can "infect" and "spread" rapidly, rapidly mutate and produce multiple copies in different situation, which can be applied to various contexts like a formula.

For example, the popular "Chen Ou style" on the internet represents a young man still adhere to his own ideal and work hard even in the voice of suspensions. Take "Chen Ou style" as original edition, there appear studying abroad edition, history edition, Nanjing University edition, Southwest University edition, Sun Yat-Sen University edition on the internet.

3.3 Learnability of Language Memes

There is a classic line in the movie "Tunnel Warfare", "Great, it's really great!"("高,实在是高") the structure is"╳,实在是╳！",In this structure, just replacing a few words can produce language memes which express different meanings, for example, "Good, it's really good!", "Powerful, it's really powerful!"……,using different words to fill in the structure, the language memes are more lively in different contexts. These language carriers themselves are simple in structure, easy to speak, easy to remember and imitate. So, language memes are easy to learn.

3.4 The Development of Communication Technology Creates Condition of Language Memes

Television, newspaper, radio, internet and smart phone are called five macromedias. Media is a main carrier of information transmission. More and more people communicate with others by cyberspace and smart phone. The development of communication technology makes it possible and inevitable to spread language memes quickly.

4. The Positive Effect of Language Memes

Language memes can't anticipate themselves, they only care about their own replication whether the replication is good or not for themselves, which leads to both have positive and negative effects of language memes.

4.1 Practicability

Why human beings create language to express colorful and complicated mind? Because language is the tool of thought. Thought can't leave language; language can express human beings' thought as simple as possible. If language is more complicated than thought, which will increase the burden of thinking. Language memes eliminate those tedious, hard to understand language with complicated structure. And choose those simple, easy to understand language with simple structure which can be replicated and transmitted quickly.

4.2 The Economy Principle

The economy principle refers to obtain the maximum semantics with the minimum language symbol. When communicating with others, speakers always choose the minimum language symbol both to express their meaning completely and can be understood easily. So, it is received and transmitted rapidly.

4.3 Fashionability

Language memes have a strong flavor of the times. With its humorous language, funny style, optimistic attitude and critical eye, which is especially popular with young people who like to pursuit the fresh and different. Nowadays, the pace of work is faster and faster, language memes can relieve people of mental pressure and heavy burden and give people pleasure temporarily.

4.4 Rhythm

Language memes are rich in rhythm. The more regular and rhythmic the language memes have, the easier it is to copy and spread. Songs, ballads, nursery rhymes and poems are easy to be imitated.

5. The Negative Effect of Language Memes

5.1 Language Memes Accelerate the Development of Language and Culture Towards Vulgarization

With the development of communication technology, language memes have become an inevitable part in our life. People are familiar with language memes, which exist in our life here and there. At the same time, we feel very unfamiliar, because the thing behind language memes affords for thought. Language memes show strong temptation. Human beings are supposed to be the master of language memes, but the actual situation is beyond our expectation. Even control human beings' mind and become the master. Language memes bring us not only happiness and laughters, but also sadness and suffering, even effect the direction of culture and people's value orientation. Just like that human beings invent computer, smart phone, build up network platform in order to make science service mankind, make our life more convenient. However, in our real life, a large number

of people who are indulged in cyberspace are here and there. Even many people can't lead a normal life and study. So, we must confront and rethink how to correctly use language memes.

In popular cyber languages, there are full of such phrases: "poor diaosi"("穷屌丝"), "diaosi reverse" ("屌丝逆袭") "white and rich beauty" ("白富美"), "GFS-Boy"("高富帅"), "rich second generation"("富二代"), "official second generation" ("官二代"), "you know" ("你懂得"), which mean to compare, envy, worship with the copper stink of the tendency of worship and vulgar taste. Language memes accelerate the development of language and culture towards vulgarization. Language is the tool of thought, language runs through the whole process of mind, people use language to think. That is to say, rough language will inevitably lead to rough thinking, rough thinking can only produce shallow thoughts.

5.2 The Variation of Chinese Idioms by Memes is the Destruction and Tampering of Chinese Traditional Culture

Many advertisements use homophonic language memes, that is phonetic derivation memes. The way of copy is complete homophonic replication or partial near-phonetic replication. There are many Chinese idioms are varied, and the meaning is far different from the original meaning. For example, 默默无"蚊"(an advertisement of mosquito dispeller),笑逐"言"开(a program item of Phoenix Satellite Television),"衣"鸣惊人(a dress advertising),一望无"牙"(an advertisement for children),……There are too numerous to mention one by one.

But Chinese idioms can be varied? Chinese idiom itself has conventional meaning, mostly from allusions. Most of Chinese idioms themselves are from historical allusions, inherited from ancient times and carrying the long history and culture of our country. These Chinese idioms are culture treasures from generation to generation. What's more, Chinese idioms have fixed structure and special meaning, the four-word structure only can be used as a whole and can't be varied. The variation of Chinese idioms by memes is the destruction and tampering of Chinese traditional culture.

5.3 Language Memes can Limit People's Ability of Language Expression and Thinking.

Language memes are popular because they are vividly, humorous and close to real life. But most of language memes are very vulgar and inelegant. If young people often touch such language, their ability of expression will be limited greatly. Language memes limit people to express colorful affection and complicated thought. Language competence is closely related with thinking and lead thought is too simple and facial.

6. Conclusion

We are surrounded by language memes, especially with the development of cyber platform, language memes show numerous vigour. This paper discusses the positive and negative effects of language memes in order for readers to understand language memes objectively. It is not a trifle to resist firmly the negative language memes, because we think, express our affection and inherit culture through language.

Acknowledgements

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