

Memetic Analysis of Campus Catchphrase Variation

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ABSTRACT

Memetics offers a new perspective to analyze the variation of college catchphrase. In the framework of memetic transmission mechanism, variation of college catchphrase can be found both in memetic genotype and in memetic phenotype. In genotype, based on the same information transmitted in the same form, variation of college catchphrase is displayed in the direct quotation of popular TV serials, lines in popular movies and songs as well as net-speak, while based on the same information transmitted in different forms, variation of college catchphrase is mainly manifested in synonymy, homophonic characters or numbers as well as Chinese-English code mixing. In phenotype, according to analogy with the same sound, variation of college catchphrase occurs at the phrase and sentence level, according to analogy with the same form, variation of college catchphrase happens at the phrase and discourse level and according to analogy with the same structure, variation of college catchphrase takes place at all the levels from word, phrase, sentence and discourse.

Keywords: *Memetics, Genotype, Phenotype, College catchphrase variation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Catchphrase refers to language forms that are favorably received in the society or in a specific group in a specific historical period, usually characterized by being very timely and being replicated quite frequently to make various representations of information in the level of words, phrases, sentences, discourse, etc.[1]⁹ College Campus Catchphrase, as a sub-type of catchphrase, is a special phenomenon of language, referring to the language which is widely used by students and well received among them in college campus. Since college students are quick in thinking, rich in imagination and good at imitation and creation, many of their catchphrases are formed by imitating and copying various factors in the social and cultural fields[2]⁹³.

Memetics is a new pragmatic theory of cultural evolution, based on Darwin's biological evolution. It takes meme as the key concept, which survives by replication and transmission through the main carrier of language. In 2005, He Ziran proposed language memetics and pointed out that "from the perspective of memetics, language memes reveal the laws of speech spread and language replication and that language itself is meme, which can be expressed at the level of words, phrases, sentences

and even texts"[3]⁵⁵. Memetics offers a new perspective to explain language evolution and its development, including campus catchphrase, thus, this paper adopts it as the theoretical framework and interprets the variation of campus catchphrase from memetic transmission mechanism, datum of which are mainly observed and collected in the college where the researcher has been teaching.

2. CAMPUS CATCHPHRASE

2.1 Definition of Campus Catchphrase

Campus catchphrase refers to a form of discourse that is widely popular in oral communication of college students at a certain time, including new high-frequency words, phrases, sentences or specific sentence patterns [2]⁹³. Campus catchphrases, being the symbol of social and cultural mentality of contemporary college students, express their multicultural thoughts and reflect their way of thinking, ideological tendency, psychological states, life attitude and life philosophy[2]⁹³. They come from a wide range of sources ranging from internet language, popular songs, movies, classical works and current events home and abroad, and they have various expression forms.

2.2 Classification of Campus Catchphrase

With reference to the classification of code-mixing of college catchphrases proposed by Li Cheng, Fu Rong and She Na[4]⁴², college catchphrases can be roughly divided into the following four types:

First, campus catchphrases related to students' learning, such as 上了门假课、学了个假专业、读了个假大学, expressing students' doubts about whether they really learn some course, their major or whether they go to college especially when they do not have enough knowledge of that course, that major or as a college students.

Second, campus catchphrases related to students' life, like call 我, 给我 email, 柠檬精, 干饭人, which means "call me" "email me" "someone who always compare herself with others and envy others no matter what others do" and "someone who is keen on eating".

Third, campus catchphrases related to students' emotions and psychological states, for example, 郁闷、你好衰, 你out了, meaning "depressed" "you are unlucky or low" and "you are outdated".

Last, campus catchphrases related to catchwords, slogans and posters of students' extracurricular activities in colleges, for instance, "皮皮虾, 我们走, 去看艺术节" "有一天, 我的意中人会驾着七彩祥云, 带我去看艺术节", they are two slogans for student' Arts Festival. Here, students imitate the structure of the internet song "皮皮虾, 我们走, 去找一个蓝盆友" and the classic lines in the TV serials 大话西游 (Gossip of Journey to The West), change part of the original information and create new expression suitable for the context of Arts Festival.

2.3 Feature of Campus Catchphrase

In addition to general characteristics of catchphrases, such as simple and fixed in language forms, easy to be understood, remembered and accepted in cognition, fast in transmission speed, wide in transmission scope, reflecting great social response and high social concern, and having a wide range of sources, diverse creation methods and various forms of expression, some features in particular are also shown[5]⁵²:

On one hand, because of the relatively high quality of the users, their unique personality and active thinking, most campus catchphrases convey specific cultural connotation[5]⁵².

On the other hand, the purpose of campus catchphrase in colleges and universities is to make tense and boring campus life more relaxed and lively[5]⁵². Therefore, most college campus catchphrases are full of interest, humor, fashion, and unique features, which bring relief, fun, and entertainment to college students, enrich campus life and make college culture colorful.

3. MEMETICS

3.1 Definition of Memetics

The word "Meme" appears first in *The Selfish Gene* written by Richard Dawkins in 1976. With analogy to biological evolution, Dawkins believed there was cultural evolution and he invented meme, the culture unit of replicator, as an equivalence of gene, the biological unit of inheritance[6]¹⁷³. In Greek, "Meme" means "things which (can) be imitated". According to Blackmore, any information, as long as it can be replicated through the general process of imitation, can be called as meme [7]⁶⁶, so, to be a meme, it should meet the requirements of both imitation and transmission at the same time.

3.2 Transmission Mechanism of Memetics

Based on the two different transmission ways: copying the result and copying the instruction, namely, memetic genotype (the same content in different forms) and memetic phenotype (the different contents in the same form) pointed out by Blackmore in her book *The Meme Machine* in 1999, He Ziran in 2005, sub-classified genotype and phenotype as follows [8]⁴²:

3.2.1 Genotype

Genotype, referring to "the same core content being inherited in various forms"[3]⁶⁴, means that memes replicate and transmit through repetition, such as direct quotation of original information or synonymy of certain information in similar contexts. He Ziran further classified it into the same information transmitted in the same form and the same information transmitted in different forms [8]⁴².

3.2.1.1 The Same Information Is Transmitted in the Same Form

It means information could be directly transmitted without changing its original language

form and meaning in some suitable situations, such as direct quotations, quoted slogans, classical lines, mottoes and aphorisms as well as repetition of other's words exactly[8]⁴².

For example, in the college campus, to encourage students to finish whatever on their plate and save food as much as possible, there is "谁知盘中餐, 粒粒皆辛苦", meaning that "who knows how hard it is to grow what is on the plate", which is directly quoted from the poem "paying sympathy to the peasants"(Minnong). Here, both its meaning and the form remain unchanged.

Another example goes like this: 少壮不努力, 老大徒伤悲, meaning that "a young idler, an old beggar", and its purpose is to encourage students to study hard when they are young and do not regret their laziness in youth in vain when they are old. Here, it is also a direct quotation from the poem Hanyuefu (Collections of Folk Songs and Ballads in Han Dynasties).

3.2.1.2 The Same Information Is Transmitted in Different Forms

This types of transmission mainly focuses on replicating the content. Thought in the process of transmission, the information mutates and may be different from original one in forms, this change doesn't affect the original information, the new replicated meme still keeps the core content as the original[8]⁴³. Simply speaking, people at different times of different ages use different language forms to express the same information for different purposes in different situations.

For example, for "教师", there are many different expressions: it can also be called "老师" in Chinese, "teacher" in English and "せんせい" in Japanese. Moreover, it is called "先生" in the past, "师傅"orally, "教育工作者" formally, "灵魂工程师" figuratively, or nicknamed "园丁" and "蜡烛", or "穷人" in a humorous and sarcastic way. Here despite of all the different names from "teacher, master, soul engineer, educator, gardener, candle to the poor", even they're different in language forms, but they all refer to the same occupation and express the same meaning.

3.2.2 *Phenotype*

Phenotype, referring to "the identical set pattern being followed by different contents" [3]⁶⁴, means to use the same language form to express different contents in different contexts for different needs.

He Ziran sub-classified it into the following three types:

3.2.2.1 Analogy with the Same Sound

New memetic variants are formed by imitating the pronunciation of one word or more than one word of some existing language patterns and then substituting part of original information with homophones[8]⁴⁴. They usually keep the structure of original language meme the same, and most of them are from the general to special.

For instance, students imitate the structure and sound of "研究生", and create "烟酒生" [9]¹⁰⁸. The former refers to "Postgraduates, or students studying for master's degree or doctor's degree", while the latter refers to "students who are always involved in tobacco and alcohol".

Similarly, from "黄昏练", there is "黄昏恋". The original one is "evening exercise", or to exercise in the afternoon, but the newly replicated one, in the campus situation, means "evening love, the love that starts near graduation"[9]¹⁰⁸.

3.2.2.2 Analogy with the Same Form

It remains unchanged in both the form and the content of original language pattern, but when applying into different contexts, it will evoke different associations in people's mind[8]⁴⁴.

干货 doesn't mean dry foods, but refined, practical and reliable information in college context.

留学生 doesn't refer to students studying abroad, but students failing to go up to the next grade.

3.2.2.3 Analogy with the Same Structure

This type keeps the same the structure and the form of language meme, but the content is replaced by other information partially, thus, new meaning is conveyed [8]⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵.

For example, by imitating the same sentence structure "you can never... but I can", different information can be conveyed for different people in different situations:

Jack Ma (CEO of China's Alibaba Group) may say, "you can never let woman spend money happily, but I can".

The Dama in students' canteen may say, "you can never control how much one eats, but I can".

The 100 paper money may say, "you can't let everyone like you, but I can".

4. MEMETIC INTERPRETATION OF COLLEGE CATCHPHRASE VARIATION

Dawkins believes that genes, like memes, are replication factors and can continuously replicate themselves, but they differ in copying fidelity. The more accurate the finished product of gene replication, the more successful the replication will be; However, due to the subjectivity of the meme host and the role of context, when the meta-information representation is transferred from one host to another, there will be mutations, resulting in new meme variants. He Ziran holds that language meme variant is different from its meta representation in content or form, but they all keep some recognizable features of its meta representations [10]¹³², which is also true with college campus catchphrase. Next, variation of the college catchphrase is analyzed from memetic transmission mechanism:

4.1 Variation of College Catchphrase from Genotype

4.1.1 Variation of College Catchphrase from the Same Information in the Same Forms

- (1) 三生三世桃花劫, 不如民院艺术节
- (2) 做王者荣耀的英雄, 看民院艺术的风采

The above two slogans are for students' Arts Festival. Here, 三生三世十里桃花 and 王者荣耀 are the direct Chinese quotation from the popular TV series 三生三世, 十里桃花 (Life After Life, Blooms Over Blooms) and the popular online games "King of Glory" without changing their form and content.

4.1.2 Variation of College Catchphrase from the Same Information in Different Forms

About this type, there are four types in particular.

The first is synonymy, or the same meaning conveyed by different expressions in different times or for people of different ages.

Compared with people in the past, people in the present day, have different expressions for the same information. For example:

- (3) 有钱, 就是任性.
- (4) 秀恩爱, 死得快!

The first sentence means "if you have enough money, you can do whatever you want", nowadays it is popular among students. But in ancient times, people say "家有千金, 行止由心", meaning if you have enough money at home, then you can do whatever you want at your will.

Similarly, students often say "秀恩爱, 死得快", meaning if you display your love in public and then the love will go die quickly, but in the past, people say "爱而不藏, 自取其亡", which means the same, but is expressed in different language forms.

The second type is the homophonic Chinese characters. For instance:

- (5) 蓝瘦香菇
- (6) 木有意思
- (7) 稀饭
- (8) 美眉/mm
- (9) 蟹蟹
- (10) 神马都是浮云
- (11) 鸭梨山大

The above examples are all Chinese homophones, meaning "you are so depressed and you wanna cry" "it makes no sense" "like", "beautiful girl" "thanks" "Everything is Nothing" "very stressful" separately. Their original memes are 难受想哭, 没有意思, 喜欢, 美女, 谢谢, 什么都是浮云 and 压力山大 respectively.

The third is to adopt some homophonic Arabic numerals to express certain meaning indirectly.

- (12) 9494
- (13) 886
- (14) 520

The above three examples means that "that's it", "goodbye" and "I love you", their original memes are 就是就是, 拜拜啦 and 我爱你.

The last is the Chinese-English code mixing, that's to say, to mix English in Chinese language, such as AA制, word 妈, I服了Y, hold住 and so on, which means "go dutch" "oh, my God" "I have no choice but to admire you" and "bring something under control".

4.2 Variation of College Catchphrase from Phenotype

4.2.1 Variation of College Catchphrase from Analogy with the Same Sound

Variation of College Catchphrase from analogy with the same sound can happen at phrase level and sentence level as follows:

- (15) 背多分
- (16) 拿到试卷，不要慌，深情地亲他一下，这叫吻过！

The first happens at the phrase level, meaning "you can get a high score in exam if you memorize a lot", which copies the sound of a famous musician's name, Beethoven(贝多芬).

The second happens at the sentence level, meaning that "Don't panic when you get the test paper. Kiss it affectionately because it's called kissing", here, the point lies that the Chinese sound of "kissing" is the same as "wen guo(稳过)"(the chance to pass the exam is 100%).

4.2.2 Variation of College Catchphrase from Analogy with the Same Form

It can occur at both the phrase level and the discourse level.

At the phrase level, for example,

- (17) 特困生
- (18) 打酱油
- (19) 中枪
- (20) 鲜肉

Here, 特困生 doesn't refer to very poor students but very sleepy students in class.

打酱油 means you just pass by, or you don't know anything instead of buying soy sauce.

中枪 does not mean that you are shot, it means that you do nothing, but you are involved in some topic.

鲜肉 does not refer to fresh meat, but young handsome new-generation male idol or male star.

At the discourse level, for instance:

又开学了，很多家长问，为什么同一位老师教出来的学生成绩差别怎么那么大呢？今天看到了一个形象的比喻，老师以 4G 的速度讲，学霸以 WiFi 的速度听，学神以 3G 的速度记，有的学生以 2G 的速度瞅或发呆，有的学生听着听着掉线了，还有个别孩子压根儿就没开数据线连接，还有几个

孩子一直飞行模式，还有的孩子一上课就开始自动关机啦，还有不在服务区内的。

The above example means: When school began again, many parents asked why there was such a big difference in grades of students who were taught by the same teacher? Today, I saw a vivid metaphor. The teacher spoke at 4G speed, Xueba(excellent students) listened at WiFi speed, and Xueshen(good students) took down notes at 3G speed. Some students looked or stared blankly at 2G speed, and some fell off the line when listening. Some did not connect the data cable at all. Several ones have been in flying mode. Some children started to shut down automatically the moment class began, and even others were not in the service area(they played truant).

It is a vivid example of students at different levels with different attitudes listening to and responding to teachers in different speeds and manners. By imitating the same language form of the cellphone terms as "4G, WiFi, 3G, 2G, offline, no data connection, flying mode, automatic shutdown, not in the service area", it creates a vivid picture in our mind by evoking the association of students' different learning speeds and learning attitudes.

4.2.3 Variation of College Catchphrase from Analogy with the Same Structure

It takes place at all the levels from word, phrase, sentence and discourse.

At the word level:

Analogy with the pattern of 水课, the word 金课 is formed. The former means "The course content is boring and students gain little, which typically features less homework, loose classroom management, and high course passing rates, being easy for students to earn credits, but being not conducive to their employment development. While 金课 means that course content is challenging, needing more efforts for learning and passing it, which has higher requirements for preparing lessons on the teachers' side before class and for doing assignments on students' side after class.

At the phrase level:

Based on the verb phrase 翘课, there is 蹭课, the former means that students do not attend class without reason and do not ask for leave, while the latter means students don't have this class, but they are willing to take it[5]⁵³.

The noun phrase 卧谈会 is created from 座谈会 [11]¹⁰⁹. The former means chatting by lying on the bed while the latter means discussing by sitting around a table.

At the sentence level:

- (21) 既生我, 何不生我对象!
- (22) 何以解忧, 唯有暴富?

Sometimes students imitate the structure of classic sentences and create new information with humorous effect. For example, During Double Elevens' Day, The Singles Day, if one does not have a girlfriend or a boyfriend, one may complain "既生我, 何不生我对象?" Which means that "God of heaven, after you created me, why don't you create my girlfriend or boyfriend?" The meme here is "既生瑜, 何生亮?", a complaint made by Zhou Yu about his strong opponent.

Still during The Singles Day, if you have no girlfriend or boyfriend and you have no money to buy whatever you want and then some students complain that 何以解忧, 唯有暴富?, meaning "how to relieve my pain? only by being rich overnight", the meme here is 何以解忧, 唯有杜康 (how to relieve my pain? only by drinking Dukang wine) said by Cao Cao, one of the most celebrated figures in the Three Kingdoms period.

At the discourse level:

A: 喂, 是张三老师吗? 我现在站在图书馆楼顶, 内容太多, 我实在背不完, 这里风好大, 我好害怕!

B: 喂, 是李四老师吗? 我现在站在大渡河河边, 内容太多, 我确实记不完, 这里水很急, 我好害怕!

The above example is quite popular in students' daily studies, especially when it's time for them to take final examinations. Some students may be nervous and text a message to the teacher, "hello, is this teacher Zhangsan? Now I'm standing on the top of our library, the information is too much for me to remember, it's so windy and I'm so scared". Some days later, when it was time for students to take the exam of my course, they also texted me: "hello, is that teacher Lisi? Now I'm standing by the Dadu river, I couldn't recite so much information, the water is flowing so fast and I'm so afraid". By imitating the same structure, they change part of the content and create a new variant.

5. CONCLUSION

Campus catchphrases, as an important symbol of campus culture and life, can truly and vividly

reflect college students' learning, life, emotion, psychological state and other aspects. Most Campus catchphrases are made by direct quotation or recreated by imitating either the content, or the sound, or the form, or the structure of existing language patterns, which corresponds with memetic transmission mechanism. Therefore, this paper adopts memetics as the theoretical guidance and explains variation of college catchphrase from its transmission mechanism.

After it is analyzed with specific and vivid datum, it is found that variation of college catchphrase is shown both in genotype and in phenotype. Based on the same information transmitted in the same form of genotype, direct quotation of popular TV program, lines in movies and songs, and net-speak features the variation of college catchphrase. Based on the same information transmitted in different forms of genotype, synonymy, homophonic characters or numbers and Chinese-English code mixing characterize the variation of college catchphrase. For analogy with the same sound of phenotype, variation of college catchphrase occurs at both the phrase and sentence level. For analogy with the same form of phenotype, variation of college catchphrase happens at the phrase and discourse level and for analogy with the same structure of phenotype, variation of college catchphrase takes place at the word level, phrase level, sentence level and discourse level.

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