



Study on Metaphors in Chinese Cyber Language

Duan Youguo^{1*}

¹*School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Jingzhou City, Hubei Province, China.*

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/JESBS/2018/41511

Editor(s):

- (1) Eleni Griva, Associate Professor, University of Western Macedonia, Greece.
- (2) Ali Kazemi, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Yasouj University, Iran.

Reviewers:

- (1) P. Moodley, University of Pretoria, South Africa.
- (2) Solehah Yaacob, International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia.
- (3) Rou-Jui Sophia Hu, Cheng Shiu University, Taiwan.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history/24869>

Mini-review Article

Received 5th March 2018

Accepted 12th May 2018

Published 29th May 2018

ABSTRACT

Aims: This study is aimed to find out various aspects of metaphors of cyber languages, such as: schools, formation, mechanisms and significance.

Study Design: The study begins with brief introduction of cyber language, including definition and features of it. Then, a brief review of metaphor, including its nature, forms and understanding, is presented here. What follows is the discussion of metaphors in cyber language that consist of school, formation, mechanism and significance of it in cyber language.

Methodology: Literature review is the main methodology adopted to implement this study.

Conclusion: Metaphor plays a crucial role in cyber language. Metaphorical cyber languages can be grouped into different schools by various criteria. It also has multiple sources and ways to form new metaphorical cyber language. In developing, spreading and understanding cyber language, metaphor has to be taken into counts. Last but not the least, metaphorical cyber language plays an important role in teaching Chinese as a foreign language to international students in China.

Keywords: *Metaphor; cyber language; nature; form; understanding; school; formation; mechanism; significance.*

1. INTRODUCTION TO CYBER LANGUAGE

1.1 Definition of Cyber Language

Internet plays an increasingly important role in present society, which makes many people depend on it in many aspects like work, study, business, etc. Some even can be said as to “live online”. In taking full advantage of the convenience that internet provides to people, where some of the people used to observe that certain new phenomenon are appearing online, one of which amongst these is some new languages, actually new use or new meaning or new forms of common language. Such is known as the so-called internet language or cyber language. Although it seems easy, however, it is not so easy to define cyber language scientifically. Rather several researchers interested in cyber language have defined it properly in various ways. Some people say that Cyber language refers to the language popular mainly online, especially among the netizens. Qi Xiaojie [1] said that as a product in the information age, cyber language is “the communication symbols used online to exchange and deal with information” [1:14].

On the other hand, about the forms of cyber language, people have attached different importance to different fields. According to Qin Xiubai [2], cyber language generally consists of three different schools, one is the terms related to computer and internet cultural phenomena, like hardware, memory, etc.; another is the terms related to internet cultural phenomena, like netizen, E-business, etc.; and the third one is the special utterance used in computer-mediated communication, like thx (thanks), BTW (by the way). Bao Ting [3] argued that online catchy language generally includes the following types, namely, acronyms of letters, figures, mixed expressions with letters and figures, pictograms, and variation of lexical meaning. The cyber language in this paper refers to the third school. It includes all the possible expressions netizens use to communicate with, to post news online, to comment on certain affairs, even to spoof some people. The expressions can be emotional icons, like “:->” (meaning smile), words, like Xianggu (wanting to cry), numbers, like 555 (crying), phrases, like you can you up, sentences, like No zuo no die. Netizens use them for various reasons, like for fun, for kidding, for simplicity, for imitating, etc.

1.2 Features of Cyber Language

Cyber language is mainly used among the netizens who are mostly young. Young people like new things, especially in a short form, which means that mostly cyber language should be new and brief in form. At the same time, young people pay much attention to the topics like love, current affairs, and celebrity gossips. Anything about such topics will surely make them interested, and some famous or humorous comments will come up to spread out and get imitated, similarly many new expressions will be produced quickly. The VANCL style is a good example of it. Therefore, cyber language is brief, symbolised, digitised, visualised in form, and innovative, colloquial, coarse, and being current in content. Whichever form it is in or whatever content it contains, cyber language carries much information.

2. NATURE, FORMS AND UNDERSTANDING OF METAPHORS

2.1 Nature of Metaphor

Metaphor, a long field of study as a figure of speech ever since Aristotle, has been transformed into a subject of study on human cognitive ability. It attracts more attention than ever, especially when people want to know or name some new things in life or discover the mystery of certain language utterances. The reason may be because it can be applied to account reasonably for many complicated phenomena which were difficult to explain in the traditional way. Based on the present studies on metaphor, Shu Dingfang [4] described the nature of metaphor. He thought the metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon, a pragmatic phenomenon and also the interaction between two different semantic fields.

Meanwhile, Duan Youguo [5] interpreted the essential features of metaphor. He said that metaphor bears the following three features, rhetoricity and cognition, prescription and description, and mental characteristics. No matter what definition or explanation of metaphor has been given, it is never denied that metaphor is both a figure of speech and a mode of thinking. In other words, it is still safe to decide that metaphor is both concrete language phenomenon and abstract thinking mode, which depends on what perspective the user is from.

2.2 Forms of Metaphors

In the first part, various forms of cyber language were mentioned where it also enjoy these forms. Metaphors here refer to the metaphorical utterances, in its pragmatic nature, but not a mode of thinking. Shu Dingfang [6] argued that the forms of metaphor should be based on different standards, such as the patterns of manifestation, the functions and effects, the features of cognition, etc. The patterns of manifestation decide to explicit and implicit the forms of metaphors. The functions and effects divide metaphors into root ones as well as derivative ones. The features of cognition characterization are said to be different bases of metaphors, as in namely similarity or created similarity. In the meantime, metaphors can be also defined by syntactic features, which classify metaphors as nominal metaphors, verbal metaphors, adverbial metaphors, prepositional metaphors.

2.3 Understanding of Metaphors

Due to the fact that metaphor is a usual usage of language, people should take advantage of a way different from common one to understand it. At least two steps should be taken before to understand metaphor, first to recognise or define a metaphor, then to understand it. Here both steps are very necessary.

In recognising a metaphor, Ortony [7] proposed three standards to follow for e.g. contextual anomaly condition, the removable tension of metaphor in principle and speaker's intention to use the metaphor. Such standards define how to recognise a metaphor, that is, an unusual language phenomenon which is likely to be as it is. Of course, such standards don't necessarily exclude the possibility of any common usage of language that is likely to be a metaphor. Such metaphors like languages are called dead metaphors, which has already been regarded as normal language.

After the recognition of metaphors, what a metaphor says or implies is very much important as it is usually difficult to figure out due to the multi-semantic features that a metaphor carries, like contradictoriness, temporality, fuzziness, context dependence, etc. Many factors should be taken into consideration to understand a metaphor. The literal meaning of any metaphor may lead to the wrong result in various situations

since different similarities can be adopted or created to generate a metaphor.

3. METAPHORS IN CYBER LANGUAGE

3.1 Schools of Metaphors in Cyber Language

Given massive cyber language forms and complexity of metaphors in cyber language, to relieve people's burden in studying them, usually, metaphors in cyber language are classified into various schools, based on various standards. Usually there are two different schools which are mentioned according to the forms of cyber language; one is the language form, the other is the non-language form. The former refers to those language utterances, including normal language utterances, homophonic language utterances, and so forth. The latter refers to the expressions that no language is included, like some pictures, abstract images, a concrete model, and so forth. Such various forms of metaphors in cyber language are mainly based on the similarities of existing forms or that are created by users.

In the meantime, Xu Yanzhen [8] classified metaphors in cyber language into other two schools, phonetic metaphors and semantic metaphors. The standard for the former school is the phonetic similarities between voice and the object that it refers to like 5555 meaning crying and 201314 meaning love you forever, etc. The standard for the latter school is the semantic similarities between the language forms and the objects they refer to, like the high in, I'm pretty high today or the low in, He is a very low person. The high and low in these two sentences can express how a person feels or what one is like by using the similarities between the physical height and mood or mental image.

3.2 Formation of Metaphors in Cyber Language

The metaphor was widely used in literary works as a method to beautify language mainly. Therefore, it has long been an object of literature studies. The fast development of internet technology and wide spreading of internet lead to do explosion to get increase amongst netizens worldwide, which causes the dramatic use of cyber language, thus metaphors are gradually fast spreading and accepted among the netizens. Those will of course make metaphors popular in

cyber language among the non-netizens. Therefore, what is source of metaphors in cyber language, what forms do they have and how are they formed are attraction and great attention among linguistic researchers.

3.2.1 Source of metaphors in cyber language

Needless to say, metaphors absolutely exist in cyber language, which, in turn, considering the social and online reality, emerge from the development and popularisation of internet technology, also from the development of online linguistic culture. Usually, some online catchwords come into being with the appearance of certain sort of events, for e.g. online collective kuso, hot news, or some media, advertisement, or some celebrity's micro-blog (like the small goal saying of Wang Jianlin). According to Wang, to earn, 100,000,000 RMB can be set up as a small goal, which became a laughing stock among people when they want to tease each other.

Specifically speaking, about the sources of metaphors in cyber language, Liu Fang [9] argued that there are five sources namely, animals, plants, human body, military terms and navigation. When animals are used to express some ideas metaphorically, especially emotions or feelings, it is mainly because the users are quite familiar with certain behaviors and features of them. When plants appear in metaphorical cyber language, it is also based on much knowledge about them. Similarly, after many years of exploration and experience, human beings have grasped much information about human body. It is even safe to say that they know the human body in much better way than other things. Therefore, human body or knowledge about the human body is another crucial source of metaphors in cyber language. When netizens are surfing the internet, they can relate easily to what happens when they are surfing. The similar images between surfing the net and surfing on the sea naturally lead in emerging the need of navigational metaphors in cyber language.

3.2.2 Forms of metaphors in cyber language

Regarding the forms of metaphor in cyber language, it mainly refers to the expressions in which a metaphor is used or applied. Although metaphor functions and appears in all layers of language, including cyber language, but the majority of current studies on metaphor in cyber language mainly concentrates on cyber

vocabulary, including words and phrases, such as databank and information highway, etc.

Lu Xinyu [10] summed up four different categories of metaphor in cyber language, namely, body metaphors, animal metaphors, architectural metaphors and navigation metaphors. Not only such classification can make the understanding of cyber language easily, but also it makes the function of metaphor in cyber language production very prominent.

3.2.3 Ways to form metaphors in cyber language

The ways to build metaphorical expressions vary in different languages due to their peculiar mode of thinking and culture. But still, similar techniques are adapted to form new words, which also work in the formation of metaphorical expressions. Mainly two ways to develop such metaphorical vocabulary are mentioned, one is semantic extension, the other is compound word formation. The former refers to the extension of word meaning, which centered to its original meaning. For example, building owner means the owner of a building originally. In cyber language, it is used to refer to the one who posts online. The latter refers to the formation of the metaphorical compound words. Such words usually include at least two parts, the modifier and the core. For example, in homepage, home is the modifier and page is the core. Other examples are mouse potato, databank, etc.

Still, there is a way to form metaphorical expressions, namely, lexical conversion. By this way, some words can be used very flexibly online, which means that netizens can use some words unusually. For instance, the word forward is an adverb originally, but it often is used as a verb in a sentence like "I will forward the message to you". In Chinese, such phenomena also exist, in phrase like "严重支持" (support somebody seriously), "严重" it is used as an adverb while it is an adjective originally.

3.3 Mechanisms of Metaphors in Cyber Language

Liu Lu [11] thought that as a mode of thinking, metaphor is widely used in the production of online expressions, especially when they are with new meanings. In doing so, the similarities between the original reference and the new object are employed; otherwise, the readers will always fail to understand the newly created

expressions. Therefore, certain features of the so-called source domain will be mapped onto the target domain. Such features include physical and mental ones. Mapping is the working mechanism in creating new metaphorical expressions in cyber language. It also happens in understanding them. The mapping consists of four different types, namely, the mapping of the gap in source domain schema, mapping of relation, mapping of features and mapping of knowledge. Without mapping, readers will find it difficult to get the actual meaning and will never use them correctly.

3.4 Significance of Metaphor on Cyber Language

As a figure of speech, metaphor in cyber language makes messages more amusing, which helps people to build a relaxing and harmonious relationship. The reason may be that metaphor helps to reduce the severity of some expressions and ease a certain amount of pressure due to its humorous essence. Metaphor, as a mode of thinking, can reduce people's burden in processing the received information, because metaphor usually shortens the expressions that people used to spread some messages, which makes human communication more economical and efficient.

Being a mode of thinking, metaphor can not only make people know new things in a briefer way, but also can make it easier and quicker for people to convey. Which metaphor does on cyber language as because the internet and cyber language are comparatively newer things in the world. When people want to describe some phenomenon, metaphorical expressions are a better choice, as the literal or original expressions are more time consuming. Therefore, metaphor plays a vital role in cyber language.

As it is mentioned above that by making use of the similarities between one thing and another, metaphor can make verbal ordinary expositions much extraordinary, profound, clear, abstract concrete as well as tedious and concise. Liu Liquan [12] thought that, metaphor does not only make the rebirth of cyber language possible, but also make cyber language more concise and clear, and more vivid for readers to understand. Therefore, metaphor plays a critical role in the production, accepting, understanding, spreading and reproduction of better cyber language.

At the same time, with the increasingly popular spreading of cyber language, more people will

accept and take advantage of cyber language in their net surfing, even if in daily life communication, which will, in turn, make cyber language become more widely used in any field of life, work, entertainment, etc. There will be no exception in the field where cyber language exists, including language teaching. In China, some people have begun discussing the application of cyber language in different language teaching and learning, even in foreign language teaching. Li Ping [13] discussed the influence of cyber language that has on middle school of Chinese teaching. Zhang Chunfeng [14], briefly discussed the significance of including metaphors in cyber language in the teaching materials for teaching Chinese as in foreign language program, and how teachers should carry this out. Jiao Luyan [15] mentioned that, despite of this fact that there are some shortcomings and problems in cyber language teaching which is showed in the process of educating Chinese as foreign language program, there are some solutions to them. After much investigation into the present situation in cyber language catchwords among foreign students in China, Wang Min [16] thought that some practical, normative, and positive catchwords should be included in teaching of Chinese foreign language program and some practical teaching methods are also recommended. Sun Yueling [17] discussed the possibility and practice of teaching cyber language in foreign students' Chinese classes under the guidance of cognitive teaching method.

Based on the present situation happening in China, especially among foreign students in China who want to grasp popular Chinese cyber language to know more about China, it is safe to include that metaphorical cyber language teaching enjoys inspiring future.

4. CONCLUSION

Cyber language gets increasingly popular among both netizens and non-netizens, young and old because it is very concise and easy to use by them. In cyber language, metaphor has many different forms, both verbal and nonverbal. Meanwhile, in the formation of new cyber language, metaphor plays a significant role by following certain mechanisms. Despite much work that has been done in the metaphorical study of cyber language, there are still a lot more to do. On the one hand, as for metaphors in cyber language, more profound classification can be made to manage and use them more

efficiently. On the other side, more in-depth research like discovering the connection between metaphorical cyber language and ordinary language, namely, from the perspective of conceptual metaphor, can be done. Still there is another field that requires better effort, is the application of metaphor in certain area like language teaching, especially in the application and practice of cyber language for foreign language acquisition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is supported by the Teaching Research Project of Hubei Provincial Department of Education, "Research on the Cause and Solution of Chinese Cultural Deficiency in EFL Teaching in Hubei Province-run Colleges and Universities."(2016261).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Qi Xiaojie. Study on cyber language. Language Planning. 2001;8:14-15.
2. Qin Xiubai. Cyberspeak and Cybertalk. Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education. 2003;6:1-2.
3. Bao Ting Study on Metaphorical Internet Catchwords. Journal of Taiyuan City Professional College. 2015;10:183-185.
4. Shu Dingfang. Study on the nature and semantic features of metaphor. Journal of Foreign Languages. 1998;6:10-19.
5. Duan Youguo. New study on essential features of metaphor. Journal of Yangtze University (Social Sciences Edition). 2014;12:70-71, 152.
6. Shu Dingfang. Types of linguistic metaphors and their syntactic and semantic features. Journal of Foreign Languages. 2000;1:20-28.
7. Ortony A. Metaphor and thought. Cambridge University Press; 1979.
8. Xu Yanzhen, Xu Ju. Conceptual metaphorical analysis on cyber language under the micro-era. Journal of Wuhan Textile University. 2014;5:54-56.
9. Liu Fang. Analysis of Metaphors in Internet Catchwords. Overseas English. 2017;8: 206-207.
10. Lu Xinyu, Ju Yumei. Study on cognitive metaphors in cyber language. Modern Chinese. 2011;1:157-158.
11. Liu Lu, Shi Baohui, Sun Ya. Metaphors in cyber language. Journal of Hotan Normal College. 2006;4:1-2.
12. Liu Liquan, Zhang Hongming. Metaphor and the semantic variation of cyber language. 2008;2:69-70.
13. Li Ping. Influence of Cyber Language on Chinese Teaching and Learning in Middle School. Learning Weekly. 2017;1:184-185.
14. Zhang Chunfeng. Metaphors in cyber language and their application in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Ability and Wisdom. 2018;1:81.
15. Jiao Luyan. Study on application of Cyber language in teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. Road to Success. 2018;5:19.
16. Wang Min. Study on Internet Catchwords and Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language; 2016.
17. Sun Yueling. A Teaching Design of Cyber Language Catchwords Based on Cognitive Approach; 2016.

© 2018 Youguo; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<http://www.sciencedomain.org/review-history/24869>