

An Analysis of the Linguistic Form and Pan Entertainment Phenomenon of Cyberbullying Language

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Abstract

In recent years, the cyberbullying problem, which is widespread among the internet community, has increasingly gained academic attention. This paper analyzes and discusses the linguistic form and the pan entertainment phenomenon of cyberbullying language from the perspectives of linguistics and sociology. Through a series of case studies and social research, the main purpose of this study is to further explore the linguistic features and social development trend of cyberbullying language in the new era.

Keywords

Cyberbullying, linguistic analysis, pan entertainment, internet community.

1. INTRODUCTION

After printing, imaging, and broadcasting, the advent of digital media which brought by the development of internet has been categorized as the fourth media revolution to change the established social order dramatically (Kovarik, 2016). The Internet itself is highly interactive and anonymous, which allows its audience to express their opinions with almost no pressure. It is for this reason that in a variety of social events, the Internet has become the most concentrated area of public opinion. At the same time, it also brings problems that have a serious negative impact on people's lives, one of which is cyberbullying.

Growing evidence reveals that many facets of cyberbullying—from its definition, prevalence rates, risk and protective factors, outcomes, and prevention strategies—are related and yet somewhat distinct from traditional bullying (Espelage & Hong, 2017; Kowalski, Limber, & McCord, 2019; Patchin & Hinduja, 2012; Zych, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019). Cyberspace makes bullying easier, more accessible, and inflicts greater harm than traditional bullying (Vaillancourt, Faris, & Mishna., 2017).

As a kind of network language, cyberbullying language has not only the commonness of network language, but also its own unique characteristics. The diversification of the language forms of cyberbullying has gradually developed the feature of interestingness, which promotes the emergence of "pan entertainment" phenomenon in this field. Entertainment itself doesn't matter right or wrong, but the amusement of violent online language, which is believed to embody the "dark personalities" (Bogolyubova, Panicheva, Tikhonov, Ivanov & Ledovaya, 2018) of people exists the potential danger of worsening the network atmosphere and accelerating the spread of negative information while entertaining people, thus it should be paid more attention to.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Psychological and Social Psychological Perspective

Cyberbullying is psychologically harmful, with impacts ranging from emotional problems (anger, fear, self-blame etc.), social problems (low self-esteem, loneliness etc.), physical problems (loss of sleep, eating disorder etc.), to suicidal ideations (van Geel et al., 2014, Olweus and Breivik, 2014, Holt et al., 2015). For instance, cyberbullying victimization is associated with higher levels of social anxiety (Dempsey et al., 2009), depression and suicidal ideation. Interestingly, perpetrator-victims have been shown to display the highest negative scores on measures related to psychological health and physical health (Kowalski and Limber, 2013).

2.2. Linguistic Perspective:

Chinese scholar Xi (2008) makes an investigation and analysis of today's language violence phenomena from the real world and the virtual world, in which the virtual world refers to the Internet community. He advocates that it is mainly manifested in two aspects: "using the violent words popular in the Cultural Revolution" and "using abusive words in large quantities". However, the author doesn't make further discussion on the forms and characteristics of violent language online. Li (2008) discusses the phenomenon of cyberbullying language in more detail. He concluded that internet language violence is characterized by "Randomness", "Irrationality" and "Emotionalization".

3. METHODOLOGY

First of all, in the research of the linguistic forms of cyberbullying, I mainly used Sina Weibo, one of the most popular social software in China, for case collection. After observation, I selected the cases of Luo Zhixiang and Bao Yuming respectively from the fields of entertainment news and social news. The reason for choosing these two cases was that they both caused a sensation and a strong negative evaluation by netizens immediately after being exposed. Therefore, in these two cases, researchers could find more comments related to cyber violence.

Secondly, in the study of pan entertainment of cyberbullying language, I collected relevant events and internet works related to the entertainment of cyberbullying in some popular social platforms like Sina, WeChat, Tik Tok and Bilibili, which were highly concentrated by the we-media. For this section, two representative cases were selected: the "scolding group" and the "Zaun culture". The entertaining trend of cyberbullying language is a new social phenomenon in recent years, so the research on it is limited. In order to better understand the public's response, attitude and participation in this phenomenon, I used the method of questionnaire to conduct this survey. This questionnaire survey was aimed at college students, and the number of participants reached 108.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Linguistic Form of Cyberbullying Language

4.1.1 The main linguistic forms of cyberbullying language

Negative news events tend to be the most concentrated areas of cyberbullying on the Internet. Comments containing violent information are very common in the comment sections of posts related to the Luo Zhixiang and Bao Yuming incidents. The following is my classification and statistics of the 4000 violent comments based on their manifestations.

Table 1. The main linguistic forms of the comments related to cyberbullying in the cases of Luo Zhixiang and Bao Yuming

| Luo Zhixiang case | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Linguistic forms | Number of comments | Proportion |
| Lettered word | 230 | 11.5% |
| Non-word expression | 115 | 5.7% |
| Homophonic word | 111 | 5.5% |
| Other forms | 25 | 1.25% |
| Bao Yuming case | | |
| Non-word expression | 120 | 6% |
| Lettered word | 83 | 4.15% |
| Homophonic word | 68 | 3.4% |
| Other forms | 16 | 0.8% |

From these two cases, we can see that in the comments containing language violence, in addition to the most commonly used original Chinese expressions, some new forms of language are gradually being used by people. In Luo's case, 470 comments are posted with other language types, accounting for 23.5 percent of the total, with lettered words being the most frequently used ones.

In the case of Bao Yuming, the frequency of use of different language types changes to some extent, and the total number of violent comments involving other language forms is 287, accounting for only 14.35% of the total. Compared with the entertainment news with private life as the main content, it seems that in the face of the more serious social events especially the ones involve legal issues, people tend to use less new linguistic forms of language expression. However, because the relevant cases discussed in this study is limited, this reasoning still need further proof based on a large number of observation and statistics.

Although people may choose different language types in different incidents, we can see from the above two examples that the most commonly used new language forms when Internet users make comments containing violent content are lettered word, non-word expression and homophonic word.

4.1.2 The usage characteristics of the new language forms of internet violence

1. Concealment

The three types of cyberbullying mentioned above all reflect the characteristics of concealment. Usually, the traditional violent language will contain many so-called indecent expressions such as sexual words, swear words or disparaging terms. In recent years, the examination and control of network content has been strengthened, thus many of such expressions will be blocked. Therefore, in order to maintain the integrity of expression, people begin to use various other forms to replace some words which are not supposed to appear on the internet. Secondly, due to the cultural tradition, Chinese people will deliberately avoid some words or vocabulary that are considered "unlucky".

2. Convenience

In the context of rapid economic development, the accelerating pace of life makes people bring "Minimalism" into all aspects of life, including the use of language. The convenience of the new forms of cyberbullying is mainly reflected in the use of lettered words and non-word expressions (especially memes). Initialism save people's typing time. Although sometimes people may have difficulties in understanding the meanings of some lettered words because of

their concealment, the high convenience prompts the acceptance of this expression by more and more people. The use of memes makes people do not need to use too much text but only rely on the information on the existing pictures to express their attitude towards something vividly, and this, to a certain extent, simplifies people's communication procedures on the network.

3. Interestingness

According to the observation in the case study, netizens sometimes deliberately use some new language forms different from the traditional language to enhance the interest of their speech, so as to achieve a more influential effect. Some phrases have been given completely different meanings by netizens according to the pronunciation of these English words. These "ingenious inventions" create a certain entertainment effect while expressing the violent information contained in the language, and at the same time further push the cyberbullying language into the trend of entertainment to a certain extent.

4.2. Pan Entertainment of Cyberbullying

With the development of network media, the phenomenon of pan entertainment in television is rapidly spreading to Internet, and the trend of "everyone is entertaining, everything is revealing" (Wang, 2012) quickly expands to the field of cyberbullying language.

4.2.1 Embodiment of pan entertainment phenomenon of cyberbullying language

In 2018, the annual NBA championship competition between Cavaliers and Warriors was launched, which attracted wide attention of domestic fans. The popularity of the two teams inevitably led to some offensive and demeaning comments about the other while both sides support their own teams. Later, some netizens created a "Cavaliers vs. Warriors scolding group" on WeChat to provide a platform for fans from both sides to attack each other. In order to gain the upper hand in this verbal contest, some of the participants gradually developed other more attractive forms besides text attack, such as b-box, rap, songs, etc., which add some entertainment to the cursing battle. Since then, many other netizens have followed the practice of these fans and created various scolding groups, such as "Pepsi vs. Coca Cola scolding group", "Chongqing vs. Chengdu scolding group", "KFC vs. McDonald scolding group" to provide platforms for the netizens to attack the opposing opinions. However, it's obvious that after continuous distortion, people use violent language to attack others online in such a group of scolding, whose purpose is not to hurt the person or viewpoint of the other party any more, but to achieve the entertainment purpose of pleasing themselves or others.

Another case of the entertainment of cyberbullying language is the "Zaun culture", which originates from the electric competition circle and becomes very popular recently. The original Zaun, in fact, was an area in the game of the League of Legends. Because the early players were mostly young people with excess energy in junior high school and college, it was common that they will be rude sometimes if they don't play well in the game. "Zaun culture" was a joke in the lol circle at the beginning, which was not known by outsiders. However, since the end of last year, many we-media operators on social platforms began to use Zaun as the title keyword of their works, making "Zaun culture" jump out of the original small circle and enter the public vision. After this, "Zaun culture" no longer simply represents the lol Zuan region, or really malicious insults, but evolves into a kind of teasing way in the form of being sharp-tongued.

4.2.2 Social impact of pan entertainment of cyberbullying

The pan entertainment of cyberbullying is an emerging social phenomenon which is generated spontaneously by the majority of network users and gradually becomes popular. As the number of Internet users has been increasing rapidly in recent years, the pan entertainment phenomenon will also affect more and more network audiences. In this process, the attitude of the public plays an important role in its later dissemination and development. Therefore, I

designed a simple questionnaire for college students to carry out a survey based on the their attitude towards the entertainment of cyberbullying and to what extend people know and participate in it.

Table 2. The degree of participation in the entertainment of cyberbullying language

| Degree of participation | Number of people | Proportion of people |
|--|------------------|----------------------|
| Never pay attention to such activities | 14 | 12.96% |
| Just watch for fun sometimes | 62 | 54.41% |
| Have the experience of actively participating in such activities | 27 | 25% |
| Have the experience of initiating such activities | 8 | 7.41% |

Table 2 shows the degree of familiarity and participation of the investigated college students in the entertainment activities of cyberbullying. From the data we can see that for college students, who are relatively active on the Internet, only few indicate that they have not seen such phenomenon in the Internet community while the vast majority of people have the experiences of watching or occasionally joining such activities, which proves that the phenomenon of taking cyber violence for entertainment has become quite common in their lives.

In the survey on the attitude towards the entertainment of cyberbullying language, 25% of the people express their favorite attitude and think it is an interesting Internet phenomenon. 32.41% give a negative evaluation to it and think that this kind of activity is rather rude and vulgar. The remaining 42.59% of them are neutral, with no special feelings for this social phenomenon. Interestingly, no matter what the overall attitude of the college students towards the phenomenon is, 100% of the participants think it has both positive and negative effects on the society. I collected the main influences of both sides given by the participants that they believe may be produced by the entertainment of cyberbullying and summarized them as follows:

Positive influences:

1. Relieve life pressure. (66.67%)
2. Increase the interest of network environment. (51.85%)
3. Increase cultural diversity in Internet community. (48.15%)
4. Expand social circle and meet more friends with the same interests. (24.44%)

Negative influences:

1. Negative influence on language habits of minor Internet users. (65.74%)
2. Cause personal injury to others. (52.76%)
3. Accelerate the formation of bad network atmosphere. (50%)
4. Indulge the proliferation of cyberbullying. (45.37%)

From the conclusion above, it is not difficult to infer that the impact of this new social phenomenon is not one-sided. At first, our country is in a period of social transformation with rapid economic development. The acceleration of the pace of life makes people under increasing pressure in real work and life, which becomes one of the important reasons that lead to cyberbullying and entertainment of it. The anonymous nature of the Internet makes it easier for people to say and do things they would not say or do in real life. Cyberbullying, in this sense, can be regarded as an abnormal behavior stemming from a person's "inability to realistically satisfy the needs of power and entertainment" (Taşkın, 2014). The activities with language

violence as the main content, such as scolding group and Zaun culture have the important characteristics of catharsis, interest and entertainment, which enable them to attract more and more people to join in and relief their pressure in real life. Another important positive significance of the entertainment of cyberbullying language is to promote the enrichment and development of network subculture. Although subculture is not completely the embodiment of the mainstream values of society, it still has significance that cannot be ignored. This kind of culture reflects the unique concept and life style of some collectives, and has its own values. Actually, we can find that the themes of many internet works with the content of "Zaun culture" often have reflections on the social problems.

While affirming the positive social effect brought by the entertainment of cyberbullying language, we should also pay attention to its negative side in time. In the survey, the biggest potential danger recognized by the participants is the impact on juveniles. According to the data released by CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center) in 2019, the number of minor Internet users in Chinas is 169 million, and the Internet penetration rate among minors has reached 93.7%. Minors are in the forming stage of language habits, which are very vulnerable to the influence of the network environment, so as to absorb a large number of non-standard and uncivilized language, which may lead to the formation of bad language habits.

Finally, for the future development of pan entertainment of cyberbullying language, more than 80% of the participants believe that such entertaining activities can continue to exist in the network culture, but on this basis, it should be reasonably limited and managed. It is acceptable that people use relatively vulgar language to entertain and relax in the network environment, release the pressure in real life and express their attitude towards the society. However, if such behavior is used maliciously to slander and hurt others, it is necessary to reflect on the rationality and necessity of its existence in time.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper makes a preliminary study of the language of cyberbullying from the perspectives of linguistics and sociology.

From the perspective of linguistics, through the summary and analysis of the comments with cyberbullying collected in Luo Zhixiang's case and Bao Yuming's case, it is found that besides the original structures of Chinese expressions, people also apply many other linguistic forms to cyberbullying language. Among them, the three most frequent types are lettered word, homophonic word and non-word expression. The characteristics of concealment, convenience and interestingness of these new linguistic forms of language satisfy the different needs of network users for online communication, which promotes their rapid and extensive popularity in various fields, including cyberbullying. Various new types of network languages have enriched the original language system and changed people's communication mode to some extent. Although these varieties enhance the interest of language and superficially weaken some of the violent factors, in fact, the aggressive and harmful information conveyed is not reduced compared with the traditional expression.

From the sociological point of view, this paper mainly studies the pan entertainment of cyberbullying. As the American media and culture researcher Postman (2005) said in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*: "... entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment." The phenomenon of excessive entertainment has now spread to all areas of our lives, no matter what content is likely to be used for entertainment by the general public, including language violence which has been regarded as dark and harmful. Cyberbullying, a negative social phenomenon that people would like to avoid at first, seems to become quite interesting after

entertaining processing. However, excessive addiction may lead more and more people to gradually ignore the harmful nature of language violence itself.

Towards the two linguistic and social phenomenon related to cyberbullying, people should hold a dialectic attitude and respect the inevitable evolution of language and communication pattern. The implications discussed in this thesis reflect the evolution trend of internet language and can reduce the misunderstandings of the cyberbullying language in internet communities to some extent.

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