LINGUISTIC IDENTIFICATION AND MEANS OF EXPRESSING SOCIAL BELONGING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN MODERN CHINESE INTERNET LANGUAGE (网络语言)

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Abstract: This article examines the role of modern Chinese Internet language in shaping young people's linguistic identity and its potential for expressing social belonging. Particular attention is paid to the significance of abbreviations, popular expressions, symbolic forms, and newly emerging lexical items used in online communication in creating a shared communicative environment among young people. The article also explores how group solidarity, emotional closeness, and generational linguistic characteristics are manifested through Internet language. Using selected examples of Chinese Internet expressions, the relationship between language, personal identity, and social interaction is examined.

Keywords: Chinese Internet language, linguistic identification, social belonging, youth speech, Internet slang, group solidarity, digital communication

The development of digital technologies has transformed the ways in which people communicate and created opportunities for language to evolve in new communicative environments. In particular, the Internet and social networking platforms have become important means through which young people exchange ideas, express their emotions, and present themselves as members of particular social groups. This process is also clearly evident in contemporary Chinese. In Chinese Internet language - 网络语言 (wǎngluò yǔyán) - abbreviations, phonetic wordplay, numerical expressions, meme-based phrases, and lexical items with newly developed meanings are widely used alongside traditional vocabulary. It is insufficient to regard Internet language merely as a means of conveying information quickly. It also provides an opportunity to express the worldviews, interests, emotional states, and social relationships of communication participants. By using a particular expression, young people can demonstrate their familiarity with contemporary Internet culture, identify individuals with similar interests, and establish closer relationships with them. Therefore, when studying Chinese Internet language, it is important to examine not only its linguistic characteristics but also its social functions.

Linguistic identification refers to the process through which individuals associate themselves with a particular group, generation, or communicative community by means of language. In this process, individuals reveal not only what they say but also the particular words, expressions, and stylistic devices they use. Among Chinese young people, this phenomenon is particularly evident in online communication through popular expressions, abbreviations, and phrases based on shared cultural experiences. One of the key characteristics of modern Chinese Internet language is that linguistic units acquire specific social meanings. A word used in ordinary communication may develop additional meanings, emotional connotations, or symbolic functions in the online environment. As a result, language becomes not only a means of exchanging information but also a tool for regulating interpersonal relationships among communication participants and expressing their sense of group belonging. For example, the abbreviation yyds (永远的神 - yǒngyuǎn de shén) is widely recognized in Chinese online communication. Literally meaning "eternal god," it is used in Internet discourse to express strong admiration and praise for a particular person, artist, athlete, or phenomenon. The use of this abbreviation may demonstrate young people's familiarity with popular

Internet culture and shared modes of expression. In particular, among users who admire the same person or appreciate the same phenomenon, such an expression can strengthen mutual understanding and a sense of closeness. Thus, the function of this abbreviation is not limited to making written communication more concise; it also conveys a shared cultural perspective. Another example is the expression 破防 (pòfáng). Initially used in certain fields to mean "the breaking of a defense," this expression has also acquired the meaning of being emotionally affected, deeply moved by an event, or experiencing a strong emotional reaction in Internet communication. For instance, after watching an emotionally touching video, a user may write "我破防了" (wǒ pòfáng le). Depending on the context, this sentence can mean "I was deeply moved" or "I could not hold back my emotions." Through this expression, young people communicate their feelings in a concise and impactful manner. At the same time, it can create emotional solidarity with other users who have experienced similar situations. Another popular expression in Chinese Internet language is 躺平 (tǎngpíng), which literally means "lying flat." In Internet discourse, however, this expression is sometimes used to describe a relatively passive attitude towards intense competition, excessive expectations, or socially established standards of success. This concept does not imply that all young people share the same views. Rather, it is significant as a symbolic expression of how certain young people reflect on their life choices and expectations of society. Thus, some expressions in Internet language not only communicate personal attitudes but also transform particular social experiences and perspectives into shared linguistic forms.

Furthermore, the term 内卷 (nèijuǎn) occupies an important place in contemporary Chinese online communication. This expression is commonly used to describe intense competition among individuals, excessive effort, and pressure that is disproportionate to the expected outcomes. Young people may use it when discussing competition in education, employment, or everyday life. The widespread use of this term demonstrates the potential of Internet language to name particular social experiences and establish a shared understanding of them. People who use the same term may recognize similarities in their own experiences and thereby develop a sense of commonality. The examples presented above demonstrate that Internet language expresses young people's social belonging in several ways. First, shared expressions become markers that unite participants in communication. Understanding the meaning of a particular abbreviation or meme demonstrates a user's familiarity with the relevant online environment. Second, Internet expressions strengthen emotional closeness. By expressing humour, admiration, dissatisfaction, or sympathy through concise and familiar forms, young people create a shared emotional space with their interlocutors. Third, such linguistic units can also reveal communicative differences between generations. While certain expressions may be readily understood among young people, they may require explanation for members of other generations. The issue of linguistic choice is particularly important in understanding the relationship between language and social belonging. People communicate differently in different situations: they may observe the norms of standard language in formal settings while using a more informal style rich in abbreviations and humour when communicating with friends. The same phenomenon can be observed in Chinese Internet communication. Users select linguistic resources according to whom they are communicating with, the topic under discussion, and the purpose of the interaction. Such choices also demonstrate an individual's ability to adapt to different social environments. A study conducted by Jun Fu examines how Chinese young people express their identities and develop a sense of belonging in different online environments. The author's findings indicate that identity construction in online spaces is not uniform but varies depending on the conditions of communication and users' individual experiences. This approach

provides a basis for analysing Internet language as one of the means through which social identity is expressed. However, the use of Internet language does not always indicate belonging to a particular group. Some expressions may be used simply because they have become popular, generate humour, or make communication faster. Therefore, when analysing linguistic identification, it is necessary to consider not only the expression itself but also the context in which it is used, the relationship between interlocutors, and the purpose of communication. The same expression may indicate group solidarity in one situation and simply convey humour or an emotional reaction in another. Another important characteristic of Internet language is the constant evolution of its linguistic units. Some expressions become popular within a short period of time and subsequently fall out of use. Others gradually move away from their original meanings and begin to perform new communicative functions. This process is closely associated with young people's linguistic creativity and changes in Internet culture. At the same time, the degree to which popular expressions are adopted varies among users. Age, interests, education, living environment, and the type of online activity may all influence linguistic choices.

The study of Chinese Internet language also has practical significance. Learners of Chinese as a foreign language should not limit themselves to grammatical rules and standard vocabulary; they also need to understand the meanings and contexts of use of linguistic expressions encountered in contemporary online communication. This is because the literal translation of certain Internet expressions does not fully reveal their actual communicative meanings. For example, understanding expressions such as 破防 or 躺平 requires consideration not only of their lexical meanings but also of the social and emotional connotations they acquire in the online environment. Such an approach enhances learners' communicative competence and deepens their understanding of contemporary Chinese digital culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, modern Chinese Internet language is one of the important means through which young people's linguistic identification and social belonging are expressed. Through Internet abbreviations, popular expressions, and lexical items that have acquired new meanings, young people express their emotions, communicate shared interests, and establish communicative closeness with other users. Expressions such as yyds, 破防, 躺平, and 内卷 demonstrate that Internet language possesses not only linguistic but also social and cultural significance. The analysis reveals that the functions of linguistic units in Internet communication are not determined solely by their lexical meanings. Their social significance is closely connected with the context of use, the relationships between interlocutors, and their shared cultural experiences. Therefore, studying Chinese Internet language from a sociolinguistic perspective helps develop a deeper understanding of changes in young people's speech, the formation of group solidarity, and the manifestation of personal identity in the digital environment. In the future, this topic could be further developed by examining authentic communication samples from Chinese social networking platforms, analysing the frequency of Internet expressions, and comparing the linguistic attitudes of different age groups. Such studies would not only help identify the patterns governing the development of Internet language but also contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language and social identification in contemporary Chinese society.

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