

The Influence of the Development of Internet Technology on the Use of Chinese Swear Words—A Case-Based Analysis

LUN Xinyu

Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China

The development of network technology has had many influences on the use of Chinese swear words. By collecting swear words on the Internet, this article takes “cao (操)”, “bi (逼)”, and “tamade (他妈的)” which appear and are used the most frequently as examples to analyze their original meaning and use in Internet variant. It could be concluded that the development of network technology has produced a large number of variants in the use of Chinese swear words, and their generative model could be established from the perspective of formal, phonological, and semantic.

Keywords: Internet technology, Chinese swear words, variants, generative model

Introduction

People are increasingly active on multiple network platforms with the development and popularization of network technology and various social software. While these network platforms facilitate communication, they also give birth to a new social dialect—Internet language. On the one hand, Internet language has enriched the expression of Chinese. On the other hand, due to the anonymity, virtuality, and concealment of the Internet environment itself, it has caused unhealthy phenomena in the development of Internet language. Swear words appear more and more on the Internet. In this regard, this article has collected a large amount of new corpus and analyzed the changes in swear words in Internet communication based on linguistic facts.

Literature Review

The problem of Internet profanity is part of the problem of coarse language. The research on this issue could be traced back to exploring polite language, language “appropriateness”, and other related issues. Internationally, the research results of language politeness are abundant. For example, “Cooperative Principle” and “Polite Principle” discuss the effectiveness and appropriateness of language expression from the practical level. Research on uncivilized terms mainly includes Timothy Jay, Ruth Wajnryb, and others. However, most people who study the nature of language ignore the subject of cursing. In China, investigations of uncivilized language phenomena often start from actual language problems, and the results are fruitful. Liang Ren (1981), Wang Zhenkun (1981), Yu Hezhi (1981), and Li Xingjian (1988) all discussed how to use language appropriately.

Since the Internet entered China, Chinese scholars have begun to study various aspects of Internet language, which is mainly concentrated in four aspects: one is to collect and sort out Chinese Internet language;

LUN Xinyu, Ph.D. student, senior teaching assistant, International College, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China.

the second is to sort out the concept and structure of Internet language; the third is to explore the main reasons for the emergence of Internet language; the fourth is to examine the attitudes of the masses on Internet language. With the gradual expansion of the influence of the Internet, some swear words in online communication have also aroused the interest of many scholars. Li (2011) summarized the main characteristics of language pollution into three points: the disorder of its system, the continuous expansion of the scale of transmission, and use, which hinders everyday social communication. Hu (2014) believed that the vulgarization and non-standardization presented in online language and the appearance of many false, vulgar, discriminatory, and violent languages reflect the lack of ethical awareness and responsibility of the language online communication subjects.

There are many research results on Internet language, but there are not many types of research focusing on swear words on the Internet. Related research also mainly explores the causes and adverse effects of these Internet terms and lacks an investigation of the changes in the use of Internet profanity.

Methodology

This article collected more than 200 corpora from the Internet. After screening and screening, “cao (操)”, “bi (逼)”, and “tamade (他妈的)” are the most frequently used swear words, which are determined as the object of investigation for this project. Case analysis is used to study the use of Internet profanity.

Case Study

In the corpus of this study, “cao (操)”, “bi (逼)”, and “tamade (他妈的)” account for a more significant proportion, that is, they are more common in the Internet context. In addition, from the questionnaire survey results, the respondents generally believe that the words or phrases composed of these three characters/words and their variants are highly uncivilized. It could be seen that the number of internets swears words formed by these three words/phrases is relatively large, frequently used. Therefore, this research would take the Internet profanity composed of these three words/phrases as a case to analyze its meaning and variants.

“Cao (操)”, the original word is “cao (禽)”. The definition of “cao (禽)” in the Chinese Dictionary is “to have sex”. In the corpus related to “cao (禽)” collected in this study, the word “cao (禽)” does not appear, but all its variants. Among them, “cao (操)” is a borrowed word of “cao (禽)”, and it occurs most frequently. The word “cao (操)” itself does not have the sound and meaning of “禽”, but because the word “cao (禽)” is composed of the two characters “入” and “肉”, which is rather inelegant when it appears. Therefore, in-network communication, the word “操” is frequently used in input methods instead. In addition, “cao (禽)” has many variants. Table 1 is obtained.

Table1

“Cao (禽)” and Variants

Variations	Examples
Homophony + glyph change	cao (草) kao (靠)
Font change	cao (屮/艸/𦰩/𦰪)
Partial tone	ciao (次奥)
Harmony voice	fake (法克)
Imitate English pronunciation	woleigecao (我勒个擦)
Chinese Pinyin	kao (靠)
Dialect	dingnigefei (顶你个肺)

“Bi (逼)”, the original word is “Bi (屌)”. The definition of “Bi (屌)” in the Chinese Dictionary is “female external genitalia”. Similarly, in the corpus related to “Bi (屌)” collected, the word “Bi (屌)” does not appear, but all its variants. The difference is that the “Bi (屌)” variants are more abundant and diverse. Table 2 is obtained.

Table2

“Bi (屌)” and Variants

Variations	Examples
Homophony + glyph change	doubi (逗比)
Homophonic	niubi (牛逼)
Character Change(digital pictogram)	zhuang13 (装13)
Chinese Pinyin acronyms	SB (傻逼)
English phrases	bigger than bigger (逼格)
Parody	sibi (死逼)
Harmony voice	bige (逼格)
Number + homophony	2B (二逼)
Numbers + letters + Chinese characters	4B qingnian (4B青年)
Number + number pictogram	213 (2B)

“Bi (屌)” and its variants could be used to attack and abuse others on the one hand and could also be used to ridicule and self-deprecate. For example, “ZhaungBi (装逼)” initially means to pretend to be powerful, and then it is often used to show off and act to gain vanity. “DouBi (逗比)” describes someone as stupid, a little cute, and is used primarily to tease oneself or others. “KuBi (苦逼)” is used chiefly to ridicule, which means that people are not satisfied with the status but helpless.

“Tamade (他妈的)” and its variants evolved from “ta’niangde (他娘的)”. The written “tamade (他妈的)” and its variants were first seen in the Yuan Dynasty, and it would spread earlier in the folks. The structural form of “tamade (他妈的)” is between a phrase and a word. It is a phrase word. “tamade (他妈的)” is defined as “an unpleasant word that expresses emotions such as resentment and anger” in the Chinese Dictionary. According to Lu Xun, the word “tamade (他妈的)” is the elegant variant of “cut off a verb and a noun from the “national curse” to reduce the filthiness of the curse to a certain extent. The full form should be “caonimadebi (你妈的屌)”. After the change, the semantics became more implicit, and other variants appeared in the form as shown in Table 3.

Table3

“Tamade (他妈的)” and Variants

Variations	Examples
Homophony + glyph change	nima (尼玛)
Homophonic	caonima (草泥马)
Chinese Pinyin acronyms	TMD (他妈的)
Parody	tanainaide (他奶奶的)
Chinese characters + letters	ni M de (你妈的)
Reappearing old words (Classical Chinese)	ermubiye (尔母俾也)
Chinese Pinyin acronym + font change	qunianmailegebiao (去年买了个表)

In daily life, the name “his mother (孩子他妈)” has a corresponding title of “his father (孩子他爸)”. However, when used as a curse, “tamade (他妈的)” has no corresponding curse “tabade (他爸的)”. This is a reflection of the background of male superiority in feudal society in ancient China. When people scold people, they mostly choose women, commonly known as “swearing mothers” in the folk. Through the association of “Mom” with sex, instinctive sexual impulses are created.

Discussion

According to the vertical comparison and horizontal analysis of the collected corpus, the generation modes of variants could be divided into the following three types: form, phonetics, and semantics.

Formal Generation Mode

The variant generated by the glyph is to replace the glyph of the original swear words. The glyph changes mentioned here include both Chinese character glyphs and Western alphabet glyphs.

Split word replacement. Split word replacement refers to splitting the word and replacing the word’s meaning with the word’s constituent parts. For example, “艹 (cao)”, “屮 (cao)”, and “米田共 (mi tian gong)”. “艹 (cao)” is often used as a radical. “屮 (cao)” is a pictograph that imitates vegetation and is also used as a radical. They are all regarded as variants of “cao (禽)”. “米田共 (mi tian gong)” separates the Chinese traditional character “fen (糞)” and expresses the meaning of “fen (糞)”.

Pictograph substitution. Pictographic substitution refers to replacing the original expression with a similar expression. For example, “凸 (tu)” is used as a variant of “禽”; “13” is the digital pictogram of “B”; “213” express the meaning of “2B (2屌bi)”.

Acronym substitution for Chinese Pinyin. The acronym replacement of the Chinese Pinyin refers to the use of the initials of the Chinese Pinyin to replace the original expression. For example, the Chinese Pinyin of “傻逼 (shabi)” is “shǎbī”, and its acronym is “SB”; the Chinese Pinyin of “鸡巴 (jiba)” is “jībā”, and its acronym is “JB”.

Phonological Generation Mode

Phonological generation mode includes three methods: homophonic, partial tone, and phoneme loss.

Homophonic. Homophony is the use of homophonic or near-phonetic characters to replace the original character. For example, “淫 (yin)” is a homophonic dialect of “人 (ren)”. The pronunciation of the pinyin “r” and “y” in northeastern China are not distinguished, which makes the pronunciation of “ren” change to “yin”. Similarly, “碧池 (bichi)” is a phonological variant of “bitch”, which means “prostitute, bitch”. Both “牛 (niu) B” and “傻 (sha) B” use the pronunciation of the letter “B” to replace “屌 (bi)”.

Partial tone. Partial tone refers to the decomposition of monosyllable words into two-syllable words. For example, “次奥 (ci ao)” is to decompose the single syllable “cao (禽)” into two syllables “ci” and “ao”.

Phoneme Loss. The deepening of the weakening in the speech stream would cause the phoneme to fall off. Variations generated by shedding include “我擦 (wo ca)”, “我擦嘞 (wo ca lei)”, “我勒个擦 (wo lei ge ca)”, and so on. “擦 (ca)” means to drop the diphthong “ao” into a single sound “a” in “(cao) 禽”.

Semantic Generation Mode

Semantic generation mode refers to the use of semantically related generation, and there are two ways.

Reappearance of the old words. The reappearance of old words means that words that appeared in ancient times are used again by people. The swear words reproduced using old words include “尔母俾也

(ermubiye)”, “死公 (sigong)”, “役夫 (yifu)”, “奴(nu)”, “这厮 (zheshi)”, and so on. Descriptively, “尔母俾也 (ermubiye)” originally came out of *Warring* (战国策) and was interpreted as “Your mother is a maidservant” or “Your mother is an inferior person”. “死公 (sigong)” refers to “the dead old man”. “役夫 (yifu)” has the meaning of “base”. “奴 (nu)” and “这厮 (zheshi)” are both contemptuous names for people.

Allusion. The generation of allusions means that a particular word is given a particular meaning because of a significant event. For example, “去年买了个表 (qunianmailegebiao)” originated from the 2012 Famous Watch Incident. Its Chinese pinyin acronym is “qnmlgb”, and the Chinese pinyin acronym of “去你妈了个逼 (qunimalegebi)” is also “qnmlgb”. This is affected by the input method. Therefore, when expressing anger, netizens often use “去年买了个表 (qunianmailegebiao)” instead of “去你妈了个逼 (qunimalegebi)”.

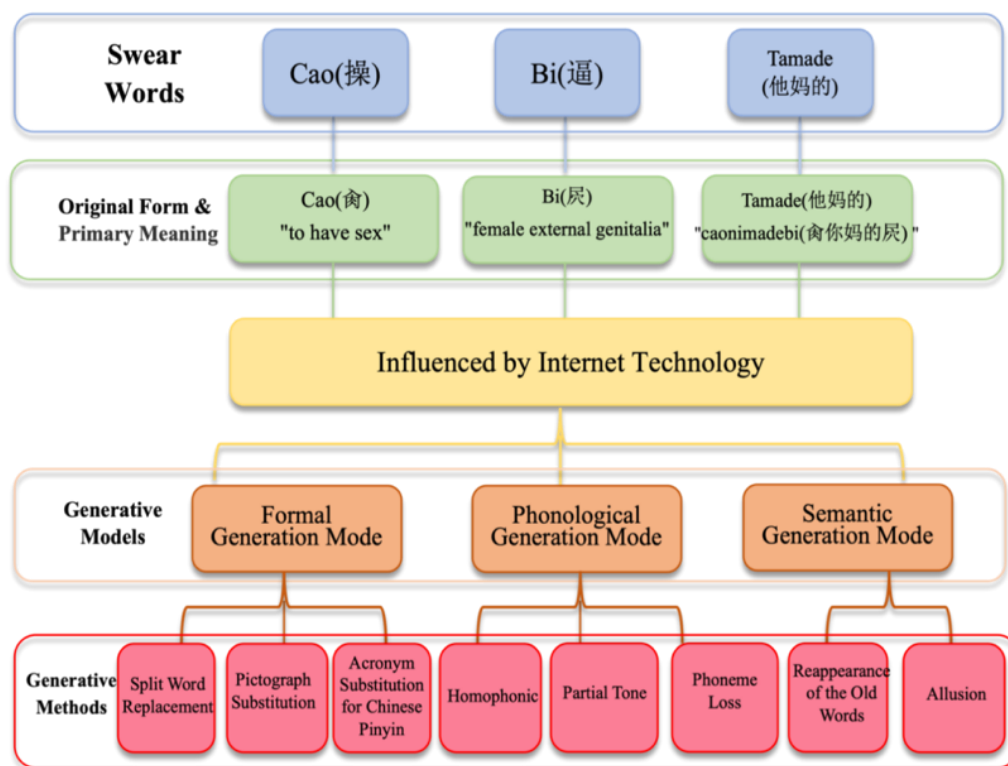


Figure 1. Generative model.

Conclusion

This article takes the most frequently used Internet swear words “cao (操)”, “bi (逼)”, and “tamade (他妈的)” as examples to show the diversification of their variants on the Internet. Among them, the variants of “cao (操)” swear words include Homophony + Glyph change, Font Change, Partial Tone, Harmony Voice, Imitate English Pronunciation, Chinese Pinyin, and Dialect. Variations of “Bi (逼)” swear words include Homophony + Glyph Change, Homophonic, Character Change (Digital Pictogram), Chinese Pinyin Acronyms, English Phrases, Parody, Harmony Voice, Number + Homophony, Numbers + letters + Chinese Characters, Number + Number Pictogram. “Tamade (他妈的)” variants swear words include Homophony + Glyph Change, Homophonic, Chinese Pinyin Acronyms, Parody, Chinese Characters + Letters, Reappearing Old Words (Classical Chinese), Chinese Pinyin Acronym + Font change. These variant approaches could be summarized

as formal approaches, phonetic approaches, and semantic approaches. In formal generation mode, split word replacement, pictograph substitution, and acronym substitution for Chinese Pinyin are three main methods. Phonological generation mode includes three modes: homophonic, partial tone, and phoneme loss. The reappearance of the old words and allusion are the two main methods in the semantic generation mode. These generative models and methods show the influence of the development of network technology on the use of Chinese swear words. After modelling it, the formation process of Chinese Internet profanity could be obtained as shown above in Figure 1.

References

- Chen, J. (1985). Talking about the arrangement of polite expressions. *Chinese Character Reform*, 2, 48-49.
- Chen, P. H. (1985). Strengthen the training of polite expressions. *Hunan Education*, 6, 15-16.
- Cui, Y. M. (2002). A humble opinion on language injury. *Petroleum Education*, 15(2), 89-90.
- Dai, Z. M. (1996). Language civilization and moral construction. *Language Construction*, 41(12), 25-27.
- Gong, C. F. (2009). On the construction of network civilization from the perspective of harmony. *Chinese and Foreign Entrepreneurs*, 18(6), 180-181.
- Guan, S. M., & Wang, J. (2010). Pragmatic analysis of language injury and countermeasures. *Journal of Hainan Radio and Television University*, 11(3), 58-62.
- He, S. X. (2009). The question of language politeness and its research status. *Afterschool Education in China*, 3(S5), 186-187.
- Hu, Q. Q. (2014). Ethical reflections on internet language. *Journal of Xiangtan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 38(6), 130-133.
- Jay, T., & Janschewitz, K. (2008). The pragmatics of swearing. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 4, 267-288.
- Jia, C. C., & Zhi, W. H. (2007). Research on linguistic pollution of internet language. *Modern Languages (Language Research Edition)*, 4(1), 80-82.
- Jin, Z. R. (2009). Analysis of the current situation of Chinese internet language research. *Journal of Jilin Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 27(3), 58-60.
- Li, S. S. (2011). An analysis of linguistic pollution in internet language. *Journal of Hubei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 31(4), 68-70.
- Li, S. S. (2012). On language pollution in internet language (Master's thesis, South-Central University for Nationalities).
- Liao, C. L. (2017). The experience of polite language. *Overseas English*, 18(11), 228-229.
- Liu, C. D. (2008). Current situation and development trend of Chinese internet language research. *Shandong Social Sciences*, 22(9), 155-158.
- Liu, R., Wu, T., Liao, W., Tao, J., Zhong, T., Li, Z. R., Wang, K., & An, C. H. (2014). Research on college students' network civilization education and behavior guidance. *Contemporary Education Theory and Practice*, 6(4), 110-112.
- Liu, X. P. (2017). The vulgarization of internet and advertising language and its governance. *Cross-Straits Lifelong Education*, 20(4), 37-40.
- Liu, Y. M. (2011). Pragmatic differences and strategies of polite language in intercultural communication. *Chinese Journal (Foreign Language Education and Teaching)*, 31(5), 99-100.
- Long, M. Y. (2016). Current situation and development trend of Chinese internet language research. *Young Writers*, 61(2), 145.
- Lu, S., & Tang, S. H. (2014). A survey on the current situation of the civilized speech and deeds of higher vocational students on the internet—Taking Fujian Electric Power Vocational and Technical College as an example. *Fujian Computer*, 30(2), 42-43.
- Meng, K. (2019). Legal regulation of online language pollution (Master's thesis, Lanzhou University of Technology).
- Mo, M. Y. (2017). A game theoretical analysis of polite language. *Social Scientists*, 32(10), 151-155.
- Qin, S. H., Gan, Y., Li, J. J., & Zhang, Y. (2013). A preliminary study on the causes, harm and governance of uncivilized language. *Legal System and Society*, 22(20), 192-193.
- Ran, Y. P., & Liu, P. (2021). From the perspective of language pragmatics to interpersonal pragmatics, the research evolution of (in)politeness. *Foreign Language Education*, 43(4), 31-36.
- Wajnryb, R. (2005). *Expletive deleted: A good look at bad language*. Simon and Schuster.
- Wang, F. F. (2016). Internet language pollution and countermeasures. *China Radio and Television Journal*, 30(8), 55-56.

- Wang, L. J. (2016). Negative influence of online vulgar language on college students and countermeasures. *Modern Vocational Education*, 7(18), 22.
- Wang, R. M. (2021). The influence and governance of uncivilized language on the internet from the perspective of cultural soft power. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University (Social Science Edition)*, 22(2), 53-59.
- Weng, J. (2007). The causes and governance of network uncivilized phenomenon. *Journal of Tongling University*, 9(4), 73-74.
- Wu, Z. Q., & Chen, T. (2020). Investigation and research on the use of uncivilized language among college students in Chongqing. *Comparative Research on Cultural Innovation*, 4(30), 49-51.
- Xiang, M. Y., & Jia, M. (2020). Leech's view of politeness in pragmatic languages. *Foreign Language Education*, 42(4), 1-6.
- Xie, C. Q., & Li, B. Y. (2006). Politeness, language and memes. *Journal of Fujian Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 51(3), 151-156.
- Xu, H. W. (2013). Micro-exploration of politeness in language politeness. *Foreign Language Education and Teaching*, 33(5), 45-46. (in Chinese)
- Xue, M. (1991). Training students to use polite language "four methods". *Tianjin Education*, 10, 27.
- Xue, L. S. (1991). Talking about polite language. *Foreign Language Studies*, 2, 27-33.
- Yan, X. J., Wu, C. Y., & Ya, Y. (2020). Research on the changes of uncivilized language on the internet. *Chinese Character Culture*, 32(18), 19-20.
- Zhang, H. X., & Zhang, Y. T. (2017). A study of Chinese college students' polite language and pragmatic competence in cross-cultural communication: Taking Dalian University as an example. *Modern Communication*, 33(16), 108-110.
- Zhang, J. H. (2014). Research on the countermeasures of network civilization construction in the new era. *Journal of Anhui Vocational and Technical College*, 13(2), 37-39.
- Zhao, Y. X. (2012). Analysis of the causes of uncivilized phenomenon of computer networks. *Modern Communication*, 26(8), 44.
- Zheng, Xi. L. (2018). Pragmatic analysis of impolite language phenomenon in internet context—Take Taobao bad evaluation as an example. *Overseas English*, 19(16), 237-238.