A Study on the Cyber Counterattack Language of Tangshan Violence From the Perspective of Memetics

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On June 10, 2022, a vicious violence event occurred in Tangshan, which attracted great attention on the Internet, and also caused chain reactions in the society, such as personal safety panic, fierce gender opposition, online reporting boom, and other ripple effect. There was a lot of counter comments against this event on the Internet. According to incomplete statistics, the counterattacks against Tangshan violence generally include five types: accusation, encouragement, empathy, irony, and retrospection. These counterattacks have the same profound impact as the brutal event itself, and the formation and development of this social impact can be explained and analyzed more or less through memetics. From the perspective of memetics, this paper will make a pragmatic analysis of the online counterattack against the Tangshan violence. The language materials are collected from the highly recognized and widely spreading posts and influential comments on social media such as Sina Weibo and Xiaohongshu. The results show that due to the existence of individual differences, different meme hosts have different understandings of the connotation of linguistic memes, and this understanding bias may lead to different meme hosts having completely different subjective attitudes when dealing with the same linguistic memes.

Keywords: pragmatics, memetics, linguistic meme, Tangshan violence event

Introduction

On June 10, 2022, there was a case of several men beating girls in a Tangshan barbecue restaurant. This violence, which can be qualitatively characterized as wickedness, was fully fermented on the Internet due to its bad nature and slow handling speed, and gradually caused a wide range of security panic, gender antagonism, online reporting boom, and other chain phenomena on the Internet. In such an environment, there are also many righteous fighters on the network who have come forward boldly and made various comments on this matter. According to incomplete statistics, the counterattacks against Tangshan violence generally include the following five categories: accusation, encouragement, empathy, satire, and review. Among them, empathy also includes the plain type of emotional empathy and the type of empathy with similar experiences. These counterattacks attract a lot attention as well as the violent event itself, and have a subtle influence on social psychology. So far, from the perspective of memetics, this paper will make a pragmatic analysis of the online counterattack against the Tangshan event. The language materials are collected from social media such as Sina Weibo and Xiaohongshu, which are highly recognized and have a wide range of repercussions.

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Overview of Memetics

The concept of memetics was firstly put forward by Dawkins (1976) in his book *The Selfish Gene*, in which he believed that cultural ideas can also be spread by copying the same way as genes, and created "meme" by imitating the word "gene" of genes, After several debates, domestic scholars chose the word "模因" as the Chinese expression of "meme" from a group of translated words, such as "觅母" and "谜米" (Z. R. He & X. L. He, 2003). Memes are similar to genes. Genes reproduce through heredity, while memes must be transmitted through imitation (Chen & He, 2006). Memes are generally defined as "information units that can be replicated through a process that is broadly called 'imitation'" (Blackmore, 1999). At the same time, memes exist because of communication, and the constantly spreading memes are also renewed, continued, and then become new memes. What is relatively different from gene is that, on the one hand, the copy or imitation process of meme is not simply duplicate and paste. Unlike the genetic process of gene, meme depends on the abstraction of subjective ideas. The process of imitation, propagation, and existence of meme itself is affected by the subjectivity of the host. On the other hand, memes are also much richer than genes in terms of communication methods, which can be transmitted both vertically and horizontally, and not only directly between people, but also through media such as television and newspapers.

When the idea of taking the lead in characterizing a meta-information occurs to its host, the target audiences who have access to the message will imitate out of individually-different common sense, thus realizing the memetic effect (He, 2017). From the perspective of pragmatics, linguistic memes can be defined as "information representations that carry the intension of the meme host and are willing to be relentlessly repeatedly transmitted by means of reiteration or analogy with the help of language structures" (He, 2014b, pp. 59-64). It can be said that linguistic memes are verbal data that can be copied, transmitted, and stored in the brain. This information has been naturally equipped with meme potential, and this kind of potential memes can also be called the meta-representation of information (He, 2016), which can be triggered in a specific context. Therefore, the replication and dissemination of memes are conditional, that is, potential memes and contexts. Under normal conditions, there are four contexts in general that can trigger the replication and dissemination of memes: situational context, linguistic context, cognitive context, and social context, etc. (Li & He, 2014).

The subjectivity of the meme host will inevitably have a great impact on the process of meme propagation because of which could be said to be an open imitation process. On the one hand, whether memes can continue to spread is mainly determined by the subjective thought of the host. Although memes themselves are endowed with a strong desire to achieve the destiny of communication and transmission, the process of dissemination can only be achieved depending on the host. On the other hand, in the process of meme replication and communication, the content of meme communication must be different from that before. Context and subject association will unavoidably edit meme to a certain extent before meme communication. The mode of meme communication includes two types: synonymous but different in meaning (imitating the central meaning to change the language form) and synonymous but different in shape (only copying the form to replace the central concept) (He, 2005). Whether memes can survive and continue to spread depends on whether they are practical, fashionable, reasonable, and authoritative (Chen & He, 2006). In the course of applying memes to linguistic units, He (2008) found that there are often five rhetorical effects in the process of linguistic memes imitating various linguistic phenomena, which include "following the fashion, code mixing, analogy and embedding", and to some extent, "imitation", due to linguistic memes' self-survival, reproduction, and dissemination.

At the same time, the subjectivity of the host can also be reflected in its pragmatic attitude towards the process of meme replication and transmission. There are three categories: positive-attitude, negative-attitude, and neutral-attitude. The positive-attitude represents the host's positive attitude towards meme replication and transmission, while the negative-attitude represents the host's resistance to the meme (in the process of the host copying and spreading memes in the form of synonyms, there will also be many situations in which the true meaning changes from affirmative to negative or from negative to positive, which need to be differentiated according to the context). The neutral-attitude naturally shows the host's impartial position (Li & He, 2014). Linguistic memes, which have long been influenced by context triggers and subjective factors and are equipped with the capability of high frequency and rapid transmission, combined with their impact on social psychological factors, will achieve social contextualization, resulting in the discourse structure succumbing to the specific context at that time and changing its original meaning. Therefore, this discourse structure is bound to the specific social context, and its meaning is also updated by the context, making it a contextualized discourse, in a manner of speaking, traditional irony, some online languages and many thought-provoking words are belonging to this category (Li & He, 2014).

The network counterattack terms studied in this paper can also be seen as contextual discourse in the context of Tangshan violence. In addition, linguistic memes also interact with the ecological environment of the public domain. The ecological environment in the public domain is a concept of ecological linguistics, which refers to the social ecological environment, a social environment that can adapt to language operation and reflect cultural evolution. The ecological environment of the process of language meme replication and transmission in the public domain greatly affects whether the meme information can be accepted by the audience and whether it can promote cultural evolution and development. At the same time, linguistic memes also reflected the social ecological environment at that time to a large extent. Linguistic memes can be said to be a microcosm of the time when they came into being and were popular, which was implemented at the language level. While being affected by the ecological environment, they can also reflect the current ecological environment in the public domain (He, 2017).

The Violence in Tangshan and Its Online Counterattack

In the early hours of June 10, 2022, a man who was dining outside a barbeque shop in Tangshan broke into the shop with the intention of misbehaving against a female customer. After being refused by the girl, he immediately resorted to violence against her. With another male friend, he assaulted a total of four girls, including the former one, for about 20 minutes. Most of his violence was inside the barbeque shop with monitoring and outside the shop, and several bystanders were present. The violence lasted for about half an hour until the police arrived. As of July 18, 2022, the violence has been fermenting online for more than a month, and there is still no authoritative information from official sources and no real information about the victim's cure. According to the latest news, the abuser was finally sentenced to 24 years in prison on September 30, 2022. The violence event has aroused widespread concern and heated discussion on the Internet since its occurrence, and even caused personal security panic on the Internet and even in real life, gender opposition, and other phenomena. At the same time, there are also chain phenomena such as victims in many relevant regions reporting bad illegal acts with their real names and ID cards. Due to the extremely bad nature and the extremely slow processing speed of this case, the news of this violent event has been fully fermented on the network. The public opinion trend and online speech trend inspired by the news are clear and east to be followed. Most of the popular speeches are counter attacks against the violence. According to the style and speech characteristics of the counter attacks, they can be

divided into five types: accusation, encouragement, empathy, irony, and review. Among them, Empathy counterattack speech includes both simple emotional empathy and empathy due to similar experiences.

As a result of online public opinion monitoring, most of the blogs and comments with high degree of concern and recognition at the initial stage of the event were cleared up. This article collects five pieces of various counter attacks from Sina Weibo App and Xiaohongshu App, which have active users. Through interpretation and analysis of the collected language materials, it is found that the event has achieved social contextualization. Most of the speeches can still spread the counterattack speech about the event on the network platform without obvious event related prompts and event keywords, and the content of the following comments is also integrated into the context, indicating that the counterattack speech related to the event has been bound with the social context caused by the event and become a contextual speech. At the same time, the key words of the event, such as "Tangshan, barbecue, four girls", and the words that semantically intersect with the event, such as "violence, harassment, beating, black", can be regarded as the linguistic memes related to the violence. Nowadays, any speech on the Internet that has no obvious directivity but has the above similar words is mostly used to fight back against the violence in Tangshan. The source of the fight may be fear or anger, but more attention is paid to the real victims. In addition to the condemnation and resentment of the violent acts of the principal offenders, the public expects that they will be judged by the law in a timely and fair manner. Therefore, in the face of the opacity of relevant information and handling methods after the violence and the lack of freedom of Internet speech, it is difficult for netizens to keep their subjective attitude neutral in the process of copying and retransmitting the language model, but to irony, resist, and even counterattack them with a negative attitude.

Contrary to this is the occasional use of linguistic memes of the Tangshan incident in a positive attitude on the Internet, and the use of words related to the Tangshan violence to intimidate and threaten vulnerable netizens, which proves that different meme hosts have deviations in their understanding of the information contained in linguistic memes, and the deviations in their understanding of linguistic memes may cause different meme hosts to produce completely different subject attitudes when dealing with the same linguistic memes. On the other hand, the study found that the linguistic memes of online speech sometimes overlap with event keywords, which can be easily understood in specific social contexts and can easily avoid online public opinion monitoring. Because of the particularity of Tangshan violence as a hot social event, it is also difficult to avoid having a profound impact on the ecological environment construction in the public sphere, which also reminds us from the side that the speed and strength of law enforcement and governance should complement the degree of social civilization. Even if the public political events become less concerned with the passage of time, they will still leave traces on the road to the development of civilization. The linguistic memes in the context of the Tangshan event are both the product of the event and the linguistic traces of the event. Only a fair and just, a reasonable and legal treatment of social events that have attracted much attention can be more conducive to building a more civilized ecological environment in the public sphere.

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