

# The Study of Cyber-bullying from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis: A Case Study of Tik Tok Comment Area Language

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With the spread of the Internet, cyberbullying can also be seen in cyberspace. This will not only destroy our network usage environment, but also affect the harmonious development of society. Due to the lack of attention to the process of cyberbullying, many previous researches have been conducted only in terms of causes and strategies, and the relationship between cyberbullying and ideology has been overlooked. Therefore, this study collects Tik Tok comments and builds a corpus to study the relationship between cyberbullying and ideology from the perspective of critical discourse analysis.

*Keywords:* critical discourse analysis, cyberbullying, TikTok, ideology

## Introduction

As the number of Internet users increases, the cyberspace environment is also becoming increasingly complex. The development of the Internet has allowed us to communicate more freely, but cyberbullying has also emerged. Cyberbullying refers to the use of online text as a medium to physically and mentally harm others or groups through violent language. Although cyberbullying exists in cyberspace, it does no less harm than verbal violence in the real world. Therefore, the issue of cyberbullying has attracted a lot of attention from the public.

Belsey first proposed the concept of cyberbullying in 2004, arguing that cyberbullying is the intentional use of information technology by individuals or groups to inflict repetitive and malicious harm on others. At present, research on cyberbullying mainly focuses on analyzing the causes of cyberbullying (Mao & Liang, 2014; Lee, 2017; Dou, et al., 2017; Chen & Shen, 2017;), the definition and evaluation of cyberbullying (Geng & Xie, 2020), language characteristics (Wang, 2018; Shan & Zhang, 2014), and the relationship between culture, family environment and cyberbullying (Balakrishnan, 2018). It can be seen that the study of cyberbullying from the perspective of linguistics is still in its infancy.

Online violence is mostly achieved through violent language. Liu Wenyu and Li Ke (2017, p. 122) pointed out that “Analyzing cyberbullying from the perspective of linguistics is a direct and powerful way”. Critical

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discourse analysis can provide strong support for this. Critical discourse analysis aims to study the relationship between discourse practice and power and ideology, revealing how discourse stems from and serves social structures and power relations. Therefore, critical discourse analysis provides us with a tool to understand the ideology behind cyberbullying, that is, social interaction and social manipulation processes, in order to better understand the subtle relationship between language and language users, and the intricate relationship between language use and unequal social relations.

Liu Wenyu and Li Ke (2017) believe that in the process of studying cyberbullying, critical discourse analysis can compensate for the micro orientation of the behaviorist paradigm and supplement the macro orientation of the context-interaction paradigm. Therefore, combining critical discourse analysis with cyberbullying could make up for some previous research shortcomings. Critical discourse analysis regards discourse not only as a reflection of reality, but also as an important part of social practice. Through the study of discourse practice, social reality can be understood and explained, discourse can be linked with social ideology and the complex relationship between language, power and ideology can be exposed. At the same time, it also provides theoretical support and practical support for the research of this paper.

This paper selects the comment language of Tik Tok's popular events as the research object and builds a mini corpus. As part of the network language, Tik Tok comment language not only has the commonality of network language, but also has new characteristics under the new era and new platform due to its novel communication methods. As an emerging short video platform, although Tik Tok has attracted attention from all walks of life, there are not many studies on Tik Tok comment language from the perspective of linguistics, so it is highly innovative and cutting-edge to analyze and study Tik Tok comment language from a linguistic point of view. This paper aims to analyze and study the comment language of Tik Tok from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, and explore the relationship between cyberbullying and ideology, in order to provide reference for curbing and weakening cyberbullying, purifying the online language environment, promoting the healthy development of online communication.

## **Study Design**

### **Research Questions**

This study mainly attempts to explore the following questions: (1) The discourse characteristics of cyberbullying; (2) The relationship between cyberbullying and ideology.

### **Corpus Collection**

This study collected a public event with more than 10,000 likes and comments from the Tik Tok hot list in August 2022 (On the high-speed train, a little rascal's family scolded a lady), and extracted 117 Tik Tok comments that conform to the characteristics of cyberbullying and built a small corpus.

### **Research Process and Corpus Processing**

This paper takes critical discourse analysis as the theoretical basis and AntConc 3.2.2.1 as the research tool to carry out the combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Systematic function grammar analysis is an important method for critical discourse analysis. Systematic function grammar believes that language has ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function. Transitive features can well express the

ideational function of language. The transitive characteristics of cyberbullying are mainly reflected through the distribution of transitive processes related to it. Transitive processes include relational processes, material processes, mental processes, verbal processes, behavioral processes, and existential processes. One of the manifestations of interpersonal functions is the modal system. Through the analysis of the modal system, we can find out the degree of responsibility that the speaker bears for the truth of the proposition and the commitment to future behavior, as well as the speaker's attitude towards the listener and the composition of the situation, the social distance and power relationship between the speaker and the listener, etc.

So this paper aims to describe the discourse characteristics of cyberbullying from the perspective of ideational function and interpersonal function. First, this article annotates the collected Tik Tok comments as 117 small sentences. After the labeling is completed, the transitive processes appearing in the corpus are quantitatively counted, and the transitive processes of cyberbullying are analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Then this paper retrieves the distribution of high and low values of modal verbs in the corpus through AntConc 3.2.2.1, and then discusses the discourse characteristics of cyberbullying.

## Discussion and Analysis

### Analysis of the Transitive Characteristics of Cyberbullying

According to the transitive system of the functional grammar, the transitive system contains several processes. The corpus was marked as 117 small sentences according to the characteristics of the processes. The types of transitive relationships of cyberbullying are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*The Distribution of Transitive Process Types in Cyber-bullying*

Type of Process	Material Process	Relational process	Mental Process	Verbal Process	Behavioral Process	Existential Process
Number	26	56	20	5	2	8
Percentage (%)	22.22	47.86	17.09	4.27	1.71	6.84

According to the results shown in Table 1, the proportion of relational process of cyberbullying ranked first, accounting for 47.86%. This is followed by material processes, accounting for 22.22%. Mental processes ranked third, accounting for 17.09%. Verbal process, behavioral process and existential process accounted for relatively small proportions, 4.27%, 1.71% and 6.84% respectively. This distribution trend is related to the characteristics of various transitive processes, and can also indicate a certain preference of cyberbullying.

#### Analysis of relational process

The relational process reflects the relationship between things, or refers to the nature, characteristics, etc. of an object. There are a total of 56 relational process sentences in this article. Through the analysis of the relationship process, we can understand the background of the incident and the hidden ideology and position of netizens on the incident.

#### Examples

- (1) 这家人也太无语了
- (2) 果然是跟那个没素质同类型的父母
- (3) 你乐山大佛

- (4) 他是第一次做人吧！
- (5) 他一家子才是没素质

In example (2), the perpetrator of cyberbullying chooses to omit the vector, which weakens the influence of the abuser and successfully shifts the focus of the audience to the victim. In examples (1), (3) and (5), the perpetrator of cyberbullying uses nouns or adjectives to define what kind of person the victim is, and describes the netizen's evaluation and views on the family in the incident through relational process. In examples (2) and (4), verbs such as "is" directly regard negative representations as the equivalent of the target noun or pronoun "he", "his family", and "you". Through this expression, the abuser strengthens the negative characteristics of the victim, and it is the shaping of this negative image that allows more netizens to stand on the side of the abuser, and even let more netizens join the team of the abuser to attack the abused together.

It can be seen from the above examples that when online language abusers publish their own comments, they tend to use the relational process to impose negative attributes on the abused, which can also reflect the identity of the abused person. At the same time, it can also be seen that the abuser does not pay attention to the way he speaks on the online public platform, which to a certain extent also reflects the distorted values of the abuser.

#### **Analysis of material process**

Material processes represent the process of doing something and are generally embodied by verbs. Among the marked sentences, there are 26 sentences of material processes, which is the second largest process.

##### **Examples**

- (6) 我都直接开骂
- (7) 她这个不好意思就是拱火
- (8) 我一个飞毛腿把你踹过去

Material processes can objectively describe the occurrence and development of things. In example (6) "Scolding" reflects the material process, which reflects the netizen's dissatisfaction with the characters in this incident, and thus takes an extreme way to vent his emotions. The "arch fire" in example (7) is the perpetrator's specific description and evaluation of the behavior of the characters in the event. Through the specific description, perpetrators let other netizens understand the development of the event and pull other netizens to their side. The netizens want to describe the process of the incident through the material process, but due to the problems of language literacy and their own quality, inappropriate expressions are adopted to describe the development of the incident, resulting in the generation of cyberbullying, polluting the online language environment and causing troubles to others.

#### **Analysis of mental process**

Mental processes can describe the feelings of the inner world and represent the development and changes of the inner world of people. Mental processes are related to the world experience and focus primarily on the perception, cognition, and emotions of participants. In the selected corpus, mental processes appeared a total of 20 times.

##### **Examples:**

- (9) ？？？？祝你以后每一次坐车都能遇到同车厢一路吵闹的孩子
- (10) 真以为年纪越大越有理？

Example (9) is the abuser's reply to other people who give comments. A series of question marks indicate the abuser's confusion about the netizen's comment. "I wish you..." here is not a sincere blessing, but more like a swearing, using such extreme language to express their disagreement. It can also be seen that the victim of cyberbullying is not necessarily the characters of the incident, it may also be some other netizens. They fight with each other because of the disagreement of opinion, and then cause the escalation of the contradiction, which leads to cyberbullying.

The verbal process, behavior process, and existential process appear less often in the text, accounting for a total of 12.82%. Perpetrators of cyberbullying directly publishes what they want to say in the comment area, so there are not many verbal processes like "speaking", "telling" and so on, and there are not many behavioral processes and existential processes.

Through the analysis of the transitive process of cyberbullying, it can be seen that perpetrators of cyberbullying regard violent language as a symbol and tool of power, and shout to the public. Their purpose is to express their dissatisfaction with a certain network incident in the form of cyberbullying, and at the same time express their dissatisfaction with the current social situation, so as to carry out verbal attacks.

### Modality of Cyber-bullying

Interpersonal function refers to communicating through language and forming a good interpersonal relationship, which will have a certain impact on others while expressing one's own views and attitudes. Interpersonal relationships can express the speaker's identity, status, attitude, motivation, and function of inference about things, which is directly related to attitudes, opinions, and can be used to express ideology. One of the interpersonal manifestations of language is the modal system. In cyberbullying, modality mainly refers to the validity of what the speaker said and the judgment of the changing trend of events.

Since the corpus collected in this article is Chinese, Chinese modal auxiliary verbs that conform to Chinese characteristics are needed. Peng Xuanwei classified Chinese modal auxiliary verbs according to Halliday's classification of English affirmative modal auxiliary verbs and combined with the characteristics of Chinese, see Table 2.

Table 2  
*Chinese Modal Auxiliary Verbs*

表2 汉语情态助动词量值		
低量值	中量值	高量值
可能, 会, 可, 可以, 能, 能够, 好, 得以, 容易, 来得及	乐意, 愿, 愿意, 情愿, 想, 想要, 要 <sub>2</sub> , 要想, 希望, 企图, 好意思, 乐得, 高兴, 乐于, 肯, 敢, 敢于, 勇于, 甘于, 苦于, 懒得, 忍心, 值得, 配, 便于, 有助于, 易于, 善于, 适于, 宜于	得, 应, 该, 应该, 必须, 须得, 必得, 要 <sub>1</sub> , 务必, 务须, 须要, 犯得着

Based on Table 2, this paper uses AntConc 3.2.2.1 to count the frequency of the high, medium and low magnitude values of modal auxiliary verbs in the self-built corpus, and the statistical results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
*The Distribution of Modal Auxiliaries in Cyber-bullying*

Value of Modality (Type)	Low	Median	High
Frequency	8	9	4
Percentage	38.10%	42.86%	19.05%

According to the results, it can be seen that in terms of cyberbullying, the frequency distribution of modal auxiliary verbs is uneven. Specifically, medium and low value of modality predominate, and high value of modality is used the least frequently. Different modal magnitudes reflect different modal meanings. The higher the modal value, the more affirmative the speaker's attitude towards the proposition and the lower the degree of politeness. The lower the modal value, the more tactful the speaker's tone and the higher the politeness.

Examples

#### Low

(11) 不是什么生物都可以称为人的

(12) 她好毒说女孩别生孩子

#### Median

(13) 怎么你这绿茶也想被人民网点名啊

(14) 你这么有爱心希望你以后遇到的全是这种小孩和这种老人

#### High

(15) 应该是最后一次做人了

(16) 给你脸了高铁上不知道要安静吗

Wei Benli once said: "Compared with high-value modal expressions, medium and low value modal expressions have a relative attitude, which leaves a certain margin for listeners to express opinions and make decisions, so it can create a harmonious and equal interpersonal atmosphere." Through the statistical analysis, we can understand the speaker's affirmation of a certain topic and the amount of pressure exerted on the listener. Therefore, cyberbullying expressed in a high-value manner can cause serious harm to all participants and the environment, but Table 3 shows that most netizens tend to use low-value or medium-value modal auxiliary verbs to express their uncertain attitude when expressing their views in cyberspace, and also reserve some leeway for their own words, so that more other netizens can join the comments and stand on their side. At the same time, it also shows that some netizens are not so sure of their comments, but blindly follow the crowd to get more attention. But such negative comments run counter to mainstream ideology and are not conducive to maintaining the dominance of mainstream ideology.

## Conclusion

Taking critical discourse analysis as the theoretical basis, this paper analyzes the transitive process of cyberbullying from the perspective of transitive system, and then analyzes the distribution of high and low values of modal verbs in the corpus from the perspective of modal system. Through the analysis of cyberbullying, we can better understand the discourse characteristics of cyberbullying, so as to better improve the situation and create a more civilized and friendly online environment.

Cyberbullying not only exists in cyberspace, but also has impacts on our real world. In this study, netizens' abuse of the family on the high-speed train is actually dissatisfaction with this kind of behavior in reality. Cyberbullying is ostensibly a criticism and condemnation of an incident, but in fact it is also a criticism of reality and a challenge to mainstream culture. At present, social development is unbalanced and inadequate, and some people cannot fully enjoy the dividends of social reform. They are left behind, feel oppressed, and gradually accumulate the negative mindset of vulnerable people. Due to the lack of real solutions to related problems,

irrational behaviors such as cyberbullying, verbal violence, etc. have become a means to protect their own rights and interests and vent their grievances.

Therefore, it is urgent to curb cyberbullying. From the above analysis, we can see that some netizens lack language literacy, they do not know how to express their emotions correctly, and some comments will have grammatical errors or pragmatic errors, which often produce misunderstandings in online communication, pollute the language use environment at the same time, and lead to a new round of cyberbullying. Based on this, schools should emphasize the standardization of grammar and pragmatic teaching and cultivate students' good habits of using language correctly. The public should also continuously improve their personal qualities and change their language habits. Secondly, improving the relevant legislative system is also an effective solution to the governance of cyberbullying.

Finally, in response to the ideological impact of online language, mainstream ideology should carry out cultural counterattacks, and closely follow the development of network technology in theory and system, and adapt to the changes of network society. The mainstream ideology should maintain its dominant position in the cyber realm. The above suggestions aim to better create a civilized and harmonious online environment.

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