

The CALA 2020 Proceedings Paper 7 - 3

Language, Dialect, Sociolect, Genre, Paper 3

**A Study of the Cultural Characteristics of Chinese
College Students Using Cyber Language**

Shuang Hong

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University, P. R. China

A Study of the Cultural Characteristics of Chinese College Students Using Cyber Language

Shuang Hong^a

^a*School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University, P. R. China*

Abstract

With the development of internet and the increase of internet users, cyber language develops rapidly. Cyber language as a kind of social dialects, which application and development can reflect cultural characteristics of the netizens. College students as young netizens are one of main creators and users of cyber language. Through the investigation of cyber language using among college students, the cultural characteristics of this group can be explored.

Keywords: Cyber language, Chinese undergraduates, cultural characteristics

Cyber Language

This paper takes new Internet idioms as an example of cyber language. New Internet idioms generally abbreviate a sentence as a four-character idiom without any 'reasonable' rules, shown in (1) to (6).

(1)	人	艰	不	拆
	ren1	jian1	bu4	chai1
	person	difficult	not	expose
	Life is so hard that some lies are better not to be exposed.			

(2)	细	思	恐	极
	xi4	si1	kong3	ji2
	careful	think	horrible	very
	When you think it over, you will feel horrible.			

(3)	不	明	觉	厉
	bu4	ming2	jue2	li4
	not	understand	feel	awesome
	I don't quite get it, but I think you are really awesome.			

(4)	累	觉	不	爱
	lei4	jue2	bu4	ai4
	tired	feel	not	love
	One is very tired and cannot love again.			

(5)	十	动	然	拒
	shi2	dong4	ran2	ju4
	deeply	moved	but	reject
	One is deeply moved but still reject.			
(6)	喜	大	普	奔
	xi3	da4	pu3	ben1
	happy	great	universal	spread
	The news is so exhilarating that everyone celebrates and spreads it to the rest of the world.			

These new idioms generated on a wide scale on the Internet around the year 2013. At first, they were forbidden in official publications and radio/television programs, owing to their destructive tendency on classic Chinese idioms. However, after seven years, these new Internet idioms have proliferated, not only in cyber language but also in official publications. Here, these new internet idioms have vitality and advantages in expression, thus becoming standardized and halting their disappearance.

Survey of Cyber Language Usage

In 2015, I made available questionnaires to 999 college students, surveying the usage of 24 new Internet idioms. The survey results indicated that 93.5% of participants can fully understand these new Internet idioms. 20.3% use these idioms often and 79.7% use these idioms occasionally. The participants use the new Internet idioms in a certain contexts. All use the idioms online, while 60.2% also use the idioms in spoken language, and 2.9% use the idioms in written language. The participants use the idioms according in communication. All use the idoms with contemporaries and peers, while 3.7% use the idioms with their elders such as their parents and teachers. The participants have different attitudes toward the development of the idioms. 22.2% have positive attitudes, while 21.7% have negative attitudes. 56.1% have an open attitude to allow ‘nature take its course.’ These people suggest that others should give the idioms time to develop. If the idioms are helpful for our language communication, they should have life and continue to be used. Otherwise, they will disappear from our language. 24 idioms surveyed have unbalanced frequency in use. Six of these idioms have a high frequency: ren1-jian1-bu4-chai1 > lei4-jue2-bu4-ai4 > bu4-ming2-jue2-li4 > xi3-da4-pu3-ben1 > shi2-dong4-ran2-ju4 > xi4-si1-kong3-ji2. These six idioms are still used, while the other 18 have disappeared.

At the end of 2019 and at the beginning of 2020, I conducted a second survey, sending questionnaires to 270 college student, regarding the idioms (1) to (6). The survey results indicate that 9.6% of the participants have never used these idioms. 23.7% of the participants only use the idioms online and 66.8% use the idioms both online and in spoken language, while 9.5% also use the idioms in written language as well as online and in spoken language. All participants who use the idioms use these with their contemporaries and peers, while 1.2% of those using the idioms use them with their elders. 91.7% of the participants have positive attitudes that these idioms can be alive and will continue to be used in language communication, while 56.3% think that people should avoid the use of these idions in certain. They suggest that the idioms should be standardized in official publications and can be freely used in informal contexts such as online or in spoken language. 8.3% of the participants claim that the idioms should be forbidden online and offline.

Through the two questionnaire surveys, we found that college students prefer to use cyber language and have positive attitudes to the new language phenomena, and we thus tend to reconsider the advantages that

cyber language might have. The new Internet idioms are abbreviated from sentences, which renders them precise and suitable for online use and in spoken language. The idioms have four-character formations that are the same as classic Chinese idioms, a property which conforms with Chinese prosodic principles and also shapes assigns the idioms grace and a solemn style. These advantages of expression have thus sustained the use of the idioms. More so, some of the idioms have been introduced into Global Chinese and now have their own organic development, shown in (7). *Ren2-jian1-bu4-chai1* has become *shi4-jian1-bu4-chai1* in Global Chinese.

(7)	世	艰	不	拆
	shi4	jian1	bu4	chai1
	world	difficult	not	expose
	The whole world is so hard that some lies are better not to be exposed.			

Characteristics of College Students

The age factor had significant impact on the results. The frequency of the usage and the acceptability of the idioms declines with the increase in age and year level of participants. When asked why they use the idioms, 46.4% note that these idioms are cool and fashionable, and 36.9% note that they use the idioms due to their concise expression, where 14.2% of the participants use the idioms owing to their humorous function. 2.5% of the participants use the idioms to emulate their contemporaries and peers.

Through surveying the use of cyber language by college students, we can expose that contemporary college students prefer to accept emergent trends in thinking and seek to create new expressions while challenging traditional use of language. They are socialized into Internet environments, which are thus unavoidable.