The sources of new words and expressions in the Chinese Internet language and the ways by which they enter the Internet language

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Abstract

The given work is focused on the principal ways by which new words and expressions enter the Chinese Internet language, the sources of new meanings for old words and phrases; neologisms and chengyu with modified meaning and structure. Some new tendencies in developing of the Chinese Internet language, such as wide use of dialect-originated words, archaic characters and monosyllabic words, are introduced as well.

1 Introduction

The Internet brings some new ways of words formation in language. Apart from character-written words, in the Chinese Internet language there also can be words written with English letters, pinyin, punctuation marks and even pictures. As a matter of fact, the Internet language is a kind of a social dialect. It is mainly spread in the Internet environment and differs from the language of the classical information channels and the real environment. Moreover, it has two characteristic features: virtuality and temporality (Yu, 2013).

The relevance of the research topic is defined by the fact that the Internet as a means of spreading information and exchanging messages becomes increasingly important in the modern world. The Internet language is constantly developing: it is being enriched with completely new words and new meanings for already existing ones, as a consequence, there can be confusion in understanding and usage of them either by native or non-native speakers; therefore a thorough research into such vocabulary is necessary. In view of rapid development and spread of modern science and technologies, including the Internet technologies, and the growing influence of the Internet on different aspects of contemporary human's life, the research on the Internet language seems to be more important, so the Internet lexicon is what has been chosen as the subject.

The attempts to find out how new words and expressions penetrate into the Chinese Internet language and where they originate from, constitute a fresh study field in linguistics

Elaboration on the ways in which the vocabulary is evolving in the modern Chinese makes the research theoretically valuable.

It can also have a high practical value, as the results of the research introduced here could serve as valid materials for lectures and practical classes of Mandarin lexicology, and for working on Internet language dictionaries.

The purpose of the research is to reveal the principal ways by which new words and expressions enter the Chinese Internet language. Apart from Chinese Internet language, the author also has done some research on words that emerged in English and Russian Internet language by the same ways as in Chinese Internet language.

In the lexicon of the Internet language Chinese and non-Chinese, ancient and modern languages, Putonghua (Standard Chinese) and different dialects are exquisitely combined. It is like a

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'jigsaw', different and numerous cuts of which have been put together by web-users, who had applied for it all power of their imagination and every piece of their knowledge (Zhang, 2014).

So, the principal sources of new words and expressions in the Internet language are introduced as below.

2 Dialect-originated words in the Chinese Internet language

All Chinese dialects are divided into 10 groups: guanhua, min, jin, wu, hakka, yue, xiang, gan, hui, pinghua (Zavyalova, 2010).

Nevertheless, the Internet has accelerated the process of integration: in the Internet language one can come across a great number of dialect-originated words regardless of where they are spread.

Dialects supplement the Standard Chinese and continually enrich the language on the whole. Each of the dialects in China is bound to a particular region, although web-users do not feel it when communicating online. Therefore many words from different dialects are widely used and becoming rather popular. For example, 粉 *fěn* 'pink' means 很 *hěn* 'very', as in the south min dialect 很 *hěn* is consonant to 粉 *fěn*, plus, the colour of pink itself symbolizes romanticism, kindness, love, so 粉 *fěn* has replaced 很 *hěn* rather quickly (Xu, 2013).

However, not all dialect-originated words can enter the common language and steadily fix in it. According to Xu Chaohui's point of view, to come into being in the common language a dialect-originated word should meet the two following conditions: 1) it should be easy to understand, memorize and use in speech; 2) it should go beyond the limits of the dialect it belongs to, be perfectly usable in everyday life. So, only highly expressive words are likely to enter the common language (Xu, 2013).

People from all over the country are permanently communicating with each other in the Internet space. As a result, a lot of dialect-originated words have entered the basic vocabulary of the Internet language (Zhang, 2010). Although web-users to communicate with each other mainly use the Standard Chinese, to accelerate the process of communication and to express one's region's particularity, in some cases they use dialect-originated words as well. Also web-users to show off their originality can deliberately use words from alien dialects.

Many dialect-originated words are written in the same way as words in Putonghua, the only difference between them lies in their pronunciation. As this cannot be noticed in writing, web-users write characters which pronunciations are near to the pronunciation of the given word in dialect, and therefore make a sound effect. Because of the fact that Chinese is famous for its numerous homonyms, when a person types a word on keyboard, he encounters more than one variant of characters of the word, so web-users in order to accelerate the process of communication choose the first variant in the list without consideration, sometimes implying a hidden sense. For example, in (1) a user chose 女银 *nǔ yín* instead of 女人 *nǔ rén*, because the latter is pronounced as the former in the north-east dialect, but the character 银 *yín* 'silver' itself is related to money (the left radical means 'money'), so the given word in the given context can imply two senses, one of which is 'mercantile girl' (Tang, 2010).

(1) 有个哥哥说这样子爱慕虚荣的女银不适合的
Yǒu gè gē gē shuō zhèi yàng zǐ ài mù xū róng de nǔ yín bù shì hé de
'One lad said that such girls, boasting of their positive sides, were really not suitable'.

Here are some more dialect-originated words that have entered the Internet language: 贼 *zéi* 'very' – belongs to the dialect group guanhua (Xu, 1999); 偶 *ǒu* 'I, my' – belongs to the dialect group wu (Xu 1999); 阿拉 *àla* 'I, my' – belongs to the Shanghai dialect of the dialect group wu (Xu, 1999).

Xinhua Internet Language Dictionary published in 2012 in Beijing contains 0.5% dialectisms (Wang, 2012).

English Internet language also has number of dialect-originated words, for example: cum 'ere – come here; o'er there – over there; 'em – them.

3 Use of archaic characters in the Chinese Internet language

Some characters, which were hardly ever used before, are becoming very popular in the Internet language today. The character 囧 is an example. In the Internet language the given character has lost its original meaning 'light (n/adj.)' and gained a new one 'sad, helpless, difficult'. The meaning is easy to work out, as the character's picture resembles a face of a depressed man.

Tang Lan once said that the three characteristics of each Chinese character are its spelling, meaning and pronunciation (Tang, 2005). But web-users in writing archaic characters save only their spelling and pronunciation but change their meaning. The new meaning is defined by meanings of radicals building the character.

As the character 槑 *méi* (original meaning is 'plum') consists of two 呆 *dāi* 'stupid', it has acquired the meaning of the word 很呆 *hěn dāi* 'very stupid' in the Internet language. It should be noted that with this meaning the word 槑 *méi* has been included in dictionaries of neologisms. (Wang, 2011)

The basic meaning of the character 靐 *bìng* is 'thunder'. The character consists of three 雷 *léi* which in the Internet language means 'shocking, stunning'. If three 雷 *léi* are gathered together, it means that a particular event or subject is extremely shocking, that is what 靐 *bìng* actually implies.

The word 煋 *xīng* has replaced 火星 *huǒ xīng* 'Mars' in the Internet language, and can be used instead of a sentence like (2) somewhere in a forum or chat as a reaction to an absurd saying or comment.

(2) 你火星来的吗？
　Nǐ huǒ xīng lái de ma？
　'Are you from Mars?'

The original meaning of the character 兲 *tiān* is the same as 天 *tiān* 'sky'. To work out the meaning of the former in the Internet language, one has to take out the upper and the lower parts of the character and put them together – 王八 *wáng bā* which means 'bastard, scoundrel'.

The original meaning of the character 畁 *bū* (or *pū*) is 工作人员 *gōng zuò rén yuán* 'working stuff'. But after the success of 'Kong Fu Panda', the film became a frequent topic in Internet forums and chats, so the character 畁 (it consists of 功 *gōng* and 夫 *fú* which combine as 功夫 'kong fu' has got the meaning of 有功夫的人 *yǒu gōng fú de rén* 'a person who can do kong fu' and come into wide use in the Internet.

The character 砳 *lè* is an onomatopoeia (imitates the sound of clashing of two rocks), and has acquired the meaning 'joy, happy' in the Internet language, because it sounds the same with 乐 *lè* 'happy' (Chinese General Political Propaganda Department, 2014).

Archaic characters compose 0.2% of the words in the Xinhua Internet Language Dictionary (Wang, 2012).

4 Monosyllabic (one-morpheme) words in the Chinese Internet language

The vocabulary of the modern Chinese in the process of development has gradually become disyllabic; most of monosyllabic words of the ancient Chinese have been replaced by their disyllabic variants; many polysyllabic words have been reduced to two syllables as well. But in the Internet language the situation is exactly opposite – more and more words are becoming monosyllabic (Lin, 2012).

One of typological features of Chinese is mutual exchangeability of a monosyllabic and disyllabic variant of one word. In the Chinese Internet language, as a result of realization of the economy principle in language, there has been the tendency to use only monosyllabic variants. Some monosyllabic words have come into use instead of di- and polysyllabic words with the same meaning. For example, one can come across such monosyllabic words as 晕 *yūn* instead of 搞不懂 *gǎo bù dǒng* 'to get confused, to feel faint'; 顶 *dǐng* instead of 支持 *zhī chí* 'to support'；赞 *zàn* instead of 赞同 *zàn tong* 'to put a like on smth, to praise'; 挂 *guà* instead of 失败 *shī bài* 'to fail'; 踩 *cǎi* instead of 反对 *fǎn duì* 'to oppose'; 萌 *méng* instead of 很可爱 *hěn kě ài* 'nice, lovely'; 晒 *shài* instead of 分享 *fēn xiǎng* 'to share'; 秀 *xiù* instead of 公开 *gōng kāi* 'open, public', etc. (Fu, 2013). It

should be noted that the last three words are loaned: 萌 *méng* from Japanese (もえ moe), 晒 *shài* from English (share) and 秀 *xiù* from English too (show).

Monosyllabic words written with archaic characters introduced above, and words like 把 *bǎ*, 雷 *léi*, 汗 *hàn*, 倒 *dào*, 菜 *cài*, etc., introduced below, have obtained other meanings in the Internet language.

Xinhua Internet Language Dictionary contains 3.3% monosyllabic words (Wang, 2012).

5 New meanings for words, phrases, expressions in the Chinese Internet

The emergence of new things and new concepts results in emergence of new words and new meanings of the old words. The arrival of the computer and the Internet furthered this process. Old words which gain new meanings in the Internet language, make 7.3% of all the new words (Cao, 2012). A word form can remain the same, but some changes can occur within a meaning. The words created this way are not completely new words as they remain their spelling and pronunciation, just get a new meaning.

There are three basic ways of changing the word meaning: widening, narrowing and transfer of meaning (Sun, 2006). In the Internet language the most common way is the transfer of meaning. It is often based on comparison and association.

A figurative meaning partly keeps an original meaning but at the same time the meaning partly changes, thus the new meaning of the word is created.

恐龙 *kǒnglóng* – a basic meaning is 'a dinosaur', but in the Internet language this word means 'an ugly girl'. This new meaning has the following prehistory: 龙 *lóng* refers us to Zhuge Liang's wife named Huang Yueying. She was one of the ugliest women in Jingzhou, prefecture-level city in Hubei province. Zhuge Liang was called 孔明 *kǒngmíng*, thus people started respectfully call Huang Yueying 孔龙 *kǒnglóng*. Afterwards all the ugly women were called 孔龙 *kǒnglóng*, and because 孔 *kǒng* and 恐 *kǒng* morphemes are homonyms, the word 恐龙 *kǒnglóng* little by little replaced the word 孔龙 *kǒnglóng* (Internet "Dinosaur", 2014).

However, considerable number of words taking on new meanings in the Internet is common:

打铁 *dǎtiě* 'to forge', being homonym of 打贴 *dǎtiē* 'to post, to leave a message', in the Internet language gets a new meaning 'to post, to leave a message'.

灌水 *guànshuǐ* 'to irrigate' is a loan translation of the English word "flood" i.e. to leave lots of unimportant messages.

造砖 *zàozhuān* 'brick production' – 'to flame', i.e. to give blunt statements, assault interlocutor, and if it causes arguments between forum guests, it calls 拍砖 *pāizhuān* 'to advance an opinion'.

隔壁 *gébì* 'through the wall' – 'another topic on this forum'.

潜水 *qiánshuǐ* 'underwater diving' – 'to visit forum without leaving messages', which is similar to 'surf the net' in English.

Internet users sometimes replace their names or other people's names with food products names. For example, fans of a Chinese actress Li Yuchun's (李宇春) are called 玉米 *yùmǐ* 'corn', because 玉 *yù* sounds similar to 宇 *yǔ*, and 米 *mǐ* – to 迷 *mí* 'fan'. Fans of a singer named Zhang Liangying (张靓颖) are called 凉粉 *liángfěn* 'cold mung bean noodles', as 凉 *liáng* sounds similar to 靓 *liàng*, and 粉 *fěn* is a part of the word 粉丝 *fěnsī* 'fan'. Admirers of He Jie (何洁), an actress and a singer, are called 盒饭 *héfàn* 'food in container', because 盒 *hé* sounds similar to 何 *hé*, and 饭 *fàn* to 粉 *fěn*. About those who like all the three girls people say: 早上吃玉米，中午吃凉粉，晚上吃盒饭 *zǎoshang chī yùmǐ, zhōngwǔ chī liángfěn, wǎnshang chī héfàn* 'he/she has corn for breakfast, noodles for dinner and food in container for supper'. These three girls were born in Chengdu (Sichuan province) so their admirers are called 成都小吃团 *chéngdū xiǎochītuán* 'a group of Chengdu light refreshments lovers' (Tang, 2010).

The morpheme 把 *bǎ* 'to keep, to grab' is used with meaning of 'to court, to flirt', e.g.: 把妹妹 *bǎmèimei* or 把美眉 *bǎměiméi* 'to court a girl'.

倒 *dǎo* 'to fall' is used with meaning of 晕倒 *yūndǎo* 'to faint away, to be shocked', which is caused by something unexpected or surprising (Zhang, 2010).

坛子 *tánzi* 'a jar' means 'forum', is formed from the word 论坛 *lùntán* 'forum' by omitting the morpheme 论 *lùn* and adding the derivational suffix 子 *zi*. The messages leaved top-down also have their own names – 楼上 *lóushàng* 'the previous post' и 楼下 *lóuxià* 'the next post'. And a person who created a topic is called 楼主 *lóuzhǔ* 'a topic starter'.

Some words, phrases and expressions used in popular movies, books, TV serials, advertisements, as well as said by famous figures, announcers, politicians etc., thanks to the resourcefulness of the Internet users get some new meanings in the Internet language. Here are some examples:

a) 理论准备不足 *lǐlùn zhǔnbèi bùzú*

People's Liberation Army National University of Defense Science and Technology professor Gong Fangbin was mocked in the Internet because of his article where he said: 中国不是惧怕民主，政治改革无法推进是因为"理论准备不足" *Zhōngguó bùshì jùpà mínzhǔ, zhèngzhì gǎigé wúfǎ tuījìn shì yīnwèi "lǐlùn zhǔnbèi bùzú"* 'China is not afraid of democracy, but political reforms won't turn into practice as we don't have enough theoretical training»'. So Internet users found the reason of all their problems and failures, they started to describe them like that: 不是惧怕结婚，而是很大程度上缘于理论准备不足 *Bùshì jùpà jiéhūn, érshì hěn dà chéngdù shàng yuányú lǐlùn zhǔnbèi bùzú* 'I'm not afraid of getting married, I just don't have enough theoretical training', a blogger wrote in his microblog. (The Top 10 Chinese Internet Memes of 2012).

b) 看星星 *kànxīngxīng*

A basic meaning is 'to look at the stars', but is the Internet this expression has a different meaning. The sources of this new meaning are the following: as in Chinese dormitories a student must come back strictly before certain time, those students who come late should write down the reason in a log book. So one of the students of Beijing Film Academy came late and to explain her delay wrote that 'she was looking at the stars'. After a time log entries got into the Internet and attracted user's attention. After that an expression 看星星 *kànxīngxīng* in the Internet language means 'a reason for evasion of business or a cause

for being absent at school or at work '(Yu, 2013). For example, (3).

(3) 谁和我结伴去"看星星"去?

Sheí hé wǒ jiébàn qù "kànxīngxīng" qù?

'Who will keep me company and go 'looking at the stars'?'

c) 躲猫猫 *duǒmāomāo*

A basic meaning is 'to play hide-and-seek'. 28 January 2009 citizen Li Qiaoming was imprisoned. His cellmates treated Li very unkindly and often beat him. During another assault co-prisoners blindfolded him, and Li didn't survive. At the interrogation about the incident Li's cellmate said they were just playing hide-and-seek, and Li Qiaoming accidentally stroke himself against the wall and therefore died. After these events the expression 躲猫猫 *duǒmāomāo* began to be used for labeling different wordings people use to evade legal accountability. (Yu, 2013). For example, (4), (5).

(4) 检方调查男子看守所身亡，真相不会"躲猫猫"

Jiǎnfāng diàochá nánzǐ kānshǒusuǒ shēnwáng, zhēnxiàng bù huì "duǒmāomāo"

'The Prosecutor's Office opens an investigation into the circumstances of the death a man in a lock-up ward, and the true state of affairs won't be concealed'.

(5) 政府不应该和媒体玩躲猫猫

Zhèngfǔ bù yīnggāi hé méitǐ wán "duǒmāomāo"

'The government shouldn't 'play hide-and-seek' with mass media'.

d) 卖肾 *màishèn*

In 2012 a 17-year-old man decided to sell his own kidney to buy a new iPhone. This incident caused a surge of discussions in the Internet and now the word 卖肾 *màishèn* 'to sell the kidney' is used in the meaning 'to sell something in order to use the gained money for buying a new thing'. For example, (6).

(6) iPhone 6 要出了，又要卖肾了

iPhone 6 yàochū le, yòu yào màishèn le

'iPhone 6 is going on sale, I have to «sell my kidney» again'.

There are some words in the English and Russian Internet language that gain new meanings, for example: 'to freeze' means 'become temporarily locked because of system problems (of a computer screen)'.

Original meaning of the Russian word 'грузить' *gruzit'* is 'load', but in the Russian Internet language it means 'download' or 'upload'.

6 Chengyu with modified meaning and structure in the Chinese Internet language

The chengyu 不见不散 *bù jiàn bù sàn* 'not to party before seeing', having a positive connotation, with putting one comma obtains a different meaning in the Internet language: 不见，不散 *bù jiàn, bù sàn* 'not to see, not to party'; besides, the chengyu can be lexically altered, thus acquiring another sense: 一见就散 *yī jiàn jiù sàn* 'to party immediately after seeing' (Zhang, 2014).

The chengyu 娇生惯养 *jiāo shēng guàn yǎng* 'spoiled, effete' has a modified form in the Internet language – 娇身冠养 *jiāo shēn guàn yǎng* 'Jiao keeps Guan' where 'Jiao' means 阿娇 *ā jiāo* 'A Jiao' (a stage name of a Chinese female singer) and 冠 *guān* means 陈冠希 *chén guānxī* 'Chen Guanxi' (a name of a Chinese male singer). This 'new' chengyu emerged after one scandalous photo of A Jiao and Chen Guanxi being together had released in the Internet (Cao, 2012).

In the Internet language there are some examples of 'new' chengyu created by replacing one of their components, and thus frequently acquiring a meaning opposite to the original one. For example, 如花似玉 *rú huā sì yù* 'to be like a flower and a jade' (refers to a beautiful woman) transforms into 如花撕玉 *rú huā sī yù* 'lit. to be like a flower tearing a jade' (refers to smth ugly and disgusting) (Cao, 2012).

The chengyu 奋发图强 *fèn fā tú qiáng* 'to work hard and enthusiastically in order to make (the country) powerful and flourishing' transforms into a homonymic one 粉发涂强 *fěn fā tú qiáng* '[referring to] girls who are mad about make-up' (粉 *fěn* – powder, rouge; 涂 *tú* – to paint (face), to smear).

The chengyu 一键钟情 *yī jiàn zhōng qíng* 'to fall in love at the first click' originates from the chengyu 一见钟情 *yī jiàn zhōng qíng* 'to fall in love at the first sight' (键 *jiàn* and 见 *jiàn* are homonyms), and is used in respect of people addicted to the Internet.

The chengyu 美丽动人 *měi lì dòng rén* 'beautiful and charming' refers to beautiful girls; a homonymic chengyu 美丽冻人 *měi lì dòng rén* 'lit. beautiful and frozen' is used in respect of girls who try to dress beautifully but not according to the weather.

Besides, there are some chengyu which can obtain new meanings without replacement of their lexical components. For example, the chengyu 火眼金睛 *huǒ yǎn jīn qíng* 'lit. fire eye, golden eye' is used when talking of a person who has a sharp eye and is capable to discriminate the truth from the lie. In modern Chinese the idiom is used in respect of a student whose perfect seeing enables him to successfully cheat on exams.

The chengyu 后起之秀 *hòu qǐ zhī xiù* means 'a young talent' (后起 *hòu qǐ* means 'young generation, youngsters, young'), but it has acquired a new meaning which is 'a student who was the last to get up from bed' (refers to lovers of sleep). In the given context the word 后起 *hòu qǐ* should be read according to the basic meanings of the first and the second characters: 后 - 'last', 起 - 'to get up' (Xu, 2013).

Xinhua Internet Language Dictionary contains 1.6% different types of idioms (Wang, 2012).

English spoken Internet users and Russian Internet users also create new idioms. For example, the idiom 'to rock smb's boat' means 'drive crazy', 'to grind gears' means 'enrage'.

Russian idioms 'аффтар жжет' *afftar zhzhot* means 'the topic's author wrote something interesting, absurd or shocked'.

7 Conclusion

Due to a great variety of ways by which new words enter the Internet language, the latter is dynamically developing. The Internet language is full of words originated from different dialect groups and used by web-users regardless of their own belonging to a particular dialect group. As a result, dialect-originated words are no longer regarded as such in the Internet language, and

become a part of the basic vocabulary of the whole language, thus making it more expressive.

The other source of new words and expressions in the Internet language is new meanings for words written with archaic characters. To work out a new meaning, one has to read a character according to radicals building it from top to bottom (i.g., 嫑 *biáo*) or from left to right (i.g., 煋 *xīng*), or sometimes by associating a character with a certain image (i.g., 囧 *jiǒng*).

Words written with archaic characters as a rule are monosyllabic; use of monosyllabic words instead of di- and polysyllabic ones is one of tendencies in developing of the Internet language, and, besides, one of the sources of its lexical enrichment. Some monosyllabic words replace their synonymic variants with more than one morpheme; some constitute a part of a polysyllabic word.

Some words, when entering the Internet language, are gaining new meanings derived from the original meaning of a word, or created by semantic transfer based on metaphorical, metonymical, functional and associative connection with the original meaning.

The Internet language has its own chengyu which mostly are coined by replacing one of lexical components of existing chengyu. Some chengyu can obtain new meanings without any modifying in structure.

The sources of new lexis in the Chinese Internet language are numerous and different. For example, they can be events causing a particular reaction among web-users, posts on forums, sayings of different people, etc.

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