

社会语言学视角下的网络语言

A Sociolinguistic Interpretation of Netspeak

张春琴 著



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Chapter 1 Literature Review

1.1 Netspeak

1.1.1 Definition

The term “Netspeak” is initially put forward by Crystal in his book *Language and the Internet*. It morphologically consists of two parts: “net” and “speak”, which involves writing and talking. It is “an alternative to ‘netlish’, ‘weblish’, ‘Internet language’, ‘cyberspeak’, ‘electronic discourse’, ‘electronic language’, ‘interactive written discourse’, ‘Computer-Mediated Communication’ (CMC), and other more cumbersome locutions” (Crystal, 2001: 19). Each term has different implications; netlish and weblish are derived from English and are useless as Internet becomes more multilingual; electronic discourse and electronic language focus on technology; CMC emphasizes the medium itself; Netspeak is broader, accurate and functional enough, which implies both the medium and the core feature of the language on the Internet.

Although there are many synonyms in English, they are translated into Chinese as “网络语言” (wang luo yu yan), simple as the term seems to be, it is far from easy to give a definite answer to the term “Netspeak”. The reason is that many scholars and linguists have considered it as a new linguistic phenomenon and proposed a variety of answers to it

in accordance with the emphasis they put on different aspects.

D. Crystal defines Netspeak as “a type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet, and encountered in all the above situations (namely, in email, chat groups, virtual worlds and World Wide Web), arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global and interactive.” Susan C. Herring holds that the language of CMC is typed, and hence like writing, but exchanges are often rapid and informal, and hence more like spoken conversation. Moreover, the computer-mediated register has unique features of its own, such as the use of “emoticons” (smiley faces composed of ASCII characters) and other graphics, as well as special lexis (lurking, flaming, spamming) and acronyms (FAQ, IMHO, RTFM). B. Fliss says in the *Language of Email Netspeak* that it is an extremely informal type of English slang used in electronic communication which implements both graphological and lexical deviation.

Chinese scholars also attempt to capture the definition of Netspeak in broad and narrow senses. Among all the definitions, three definitions are the most popular ones which are frequently referred to. Liu Haiyan believes that Netspeak includes three categories: technical terms, cultural networks and chatroom words (Liu, 2002). Qin Xiubai holds that Netspeak is a new kind of media language used in network communication. It mainly consists of three categories; the first category includes the technical terms involved in computer and network technology, such as memory, hypertext, windows,

etc.; the second category is the words and expressions related to network culture, such as net bar, hacker, net bug, and so on; the third category consists of the specific words, slangs, idioms, terms, smileys and emoticons, abbreviations and acronyms used for online communication in chatrooms, BBS, blogs, microblogs, etc. The first two categories deal with Netspeak in a broad sense, while the third one handles Netspeak in a narrow sense (Qin, 2003: 1–6).

In the thesis *New Linguistic Revolution*, Yu Miao, a postgraduate in University of International Business and Economics divides all the views concerning Netspeak into three categories: Netspeak as a new language; Netspeak as a set of conventions; Netspeak as a collection of idioms, slangs and abbreviations. She considers David Crystal as the representative of the first category—Netspeak is a new language. Based on her analysis of the three categories of Netspeak, she gives the following definition:

Netspeak is an evolving language variety used by human beings for collecting, posting and exchanging information on the Internet. One of the most remarkable features of Netspeak is its rich vocabulary including acronyms, abbreviations, Internet idioms and slang. Netspeak is a dynamic jargon in and of itself, rather than a mere collection of words. The use of Netspeak should be governed by netiquette.

Liu Haiyan, a Chinese Linguistic scholar in Beijing Broadcasting Institute gives eight types of connotation for this term

in her book *Cyber-language* (2001:20—37)

- 1) All the means of expression on the network, including pictures, icons, and letters;
- 2) All the comments and remarks on the network;
- 3) The broken, fuzzy languages specific to the net, which are often incomprehensible;
- 4) The technical terms of network, such as Java, ASP, HTML;
- 5) The culture and pattern of thinking brought forth by network;
- 6) The networking languages such as English, Chinese, etc.;
- 7) The typed written discourse or conversation appearing on the screen;
- 8) Specially referring to the real-time, interactive conversation or discourse in BBS and chatroom.

Yi Shaohua shows implements on both graphological and lexical deviation. In her thesis *The Superficial—Talk about the Language Applying to Internet Communication* published on www.adcr.com.cn, she thinks that in a broad sense, Netspeak refers to any language applying to Internet communication including natural language and technical language; in a narrow sense Netspeak refers to natural language applied by humans to collect, post and exchange information on the Internet. Cheng Shanfeng also gives his definition in *Handbook on IT Internet English*. He thinks Netspeak is a collection of idioms, slang and abbreviations such as CU, commonly used by netizens on the Internet, and the use of Netspeak

should be governed by netiquette.

Definitions of Netspeak can be classified into three categories. First, Netspeak is a new language. According to David Crystal, the representative of this category, Netspeak is neither spoken writing nor written speech. It is fundamentally different from both writing and speech, as traditionally understood. The emergence of Netspeak is worth being remarked as a new linguistic revolution. Second, Netspeak is a set of conventions. People with this view consider Netspeak as a set of conventions for the language applied to communication on the Internet. Third, Netspeak is classified as a collection of words, idioms, slang, terms, abbreviations and acronyms, smileys and emoticons that are characteristic of online documents and communication.

The second and third categories of views are limited. Netspeak is far beyond a set of conventions for writing one language. Although there is not a systematic linguistic frame for Netspeak yet, Netspeak does have its own vocabulary, rules governing its use and linguistic features unique to the Internet, which have made it more a variety of language rather than a set of conventions for writing any kind of language. Netspeak is also not a mere collection of idioms, slang and abbreviations. Indeed, a large number of various idioms, slang and abbreviations found in Netspeak have been one of its most remarkable features. However, it is not the only linguistic feature of Netspeak.

Although Netspeak is still in its initial stage, it has been drawing more and more attention from all fields of society. The

study on Netspeak has become one of the hottest topics in linguistics. Some scholars have conducted researches on Netspeak from the aspect of social linguistics, some have investigated Netspeak from the perspective of discourse analysis, while others have illuminated the norms to regulate Netspeak. Netspeak has provided linguistics with new study materials.

1.1.2 Nature of Netspeak

With regard to the nature of Netspeak, scholars at home and abroad have expanded the discussion primarily from two angles: one is the stylistic features of Netspeak; the other is the social attribute of Netspeak.

American linguists Davis and Brewer point out that the Netspeak which is written and read on the screen and keyboard has many features of spoken and written language. Chinese scholars Liu Haiyan believes that Netspeak is a specific social dialect, a specific functional style and a special way of expressions, which is between spoken and written language (Liu Haiyan, 2002). Liu Naizhong and Ma Lianpeng think that it is a new social dialect, its own features of network society and culture can be mapped in the language using (Liu Naizhong, Ma Lianpeng, 2003). Lv Mingchen points out that the physical form of Netspeak is based on the electronic media. Due to the particularity of the media, network formation is different from the communication features of spoken and written language. Netspeak is a special genre which is neither