RESEARCH ARTICLE

RESEARCH ON THE SPEECH COMMUNITY OF XIAO ZHAN'S FANS ON MICROBLOG

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Abstract

Super topic, one section of Sina microblog, is more and more popular among fans nowadays in China. Under the guidance of the theory of speech community, this thesis regards the Super topic of Xiao Zhan's fans as a speech community, discusses the characteristics of the communication language used by Xiao Zhan's fans, and digs out the factors influencing this speech community. This thesis supplements the research on fans' communication language used on social platform and forms a deep understanding of speech community.

Key words: fans; communication; microblog; speech community

1. Introduction

Sina microblog is a kind of broadcast social media used by users for sharing, spreading and obtaining real-time information. According to iiMedia Research, the number of social users of China Mobile reaches 862 million in 2019, and the monthly active users of microblog reaches 523 million, which is the third most used software, second only to Wechat and QQ. Among the users of microblog, the number of fans is the largest. The basic function of microblog platform is to share, praise and comment information. In addition, there are also a list of most searched hashtags, a list of hottest topics and a community of Super topic on microblog. These sections can give fans the convenience of interacting with idols and other fans online as well as knowing the latest information of idols in time, so it is popular among fans now.

Among all of the sections in microblog, Super topic is the most used by fans, which refers to some virtual communities formed by fans and classified by different themes. Fans with a common interest can form one Super topic, where they can freely express their opinions and communicate with each other. At present, the most obvious characteristic of fans' communication on Super topic is the common use of the distinctive expressions created by themselves, which contain special meanings in some specific contexts.

So far, one Super topic of a famous Chinese idol named Xiao Zhan has a total of 7.6 million fans and 6.02 million influence power, ranking first in the list of the domestic idols. Xiao Zhan, an actor and a singer, is one of the most popular male idols in China nowadays. On June 27, 2019, the TV series, *The Untamed,* was broadcast in Tencent video platform

with the leading actor Xiao Zhan. Until September 2019, the broadcast volume of this TV series had exceeded 200 million per day, with a total broadcast volume of more than 5.2 billion, making it the hottest TV series last summer. Therefore, the speech community of Xiao Zhan's fans is representative and worthy of research.

2. Research background

Speech community is one of the important concepts in sociolinguistics, first proposed by Bloomfield in 1933. In the book, *Language*, Bloomfield defined this concept as a speech community in which a group of people interact with each other by means of speech. Although different scholars have different definitions of speech community, most of them believe that there are four important factors in speech community, including location, the shared language, direct or indirect interaction and a sense of belonging. Besides, people's language choices in each speech community are influenced by the gender, social status, occupation and so on.

The language used by fans on social platforms is a new phenomenon rising with the development of social media in recent years, so there is relatively little research on this filed. The domestic researches mainly focus on the fan's language from the linguistic level, and lack of the research on social factors. Based on the perspective of language variation, Mo Yanfeng takes Chen Chusheng's fans language as an example and divides the vocabulary they used online into ten categories according to the constitution method (Mo Yanfeng, 2010). Lei Yiming, Liu Yong and Huo Hua collect and analyze the new words in microblog corpus, and propose a new word discovery method (Lei Yiming, 2017).

Compared with existing research, this thesis regards the Super topic of Xiao Zhan's fans as a speech community, collects the posts posted by these fans in Super topic from September 2020 to September 2021 as the data, classifies their language from both lexical and sentence level, analyzes its characteristics and explores the social factors influencing this speech community.

3. Speech community of Xian Zhan's fans

3.1 Classification of shared language

Different from other idols' Super topics, the language used by Xiao Zhan's fans in their Super topic is closely related to their idol-chasing activities as well as Xiao Zhan's experience. These creative and widely used expressions belong to their shared language in this speech community. In the following part, this shared language will be discussed from two perspectives: lexical and sentence.

3.1.1 Classification from lexical level

In this Super topic, the words frequently used by fans can be divided into four categories, including homophonic words, abbreviations, loanwords and old words for new meaning.

The homophonic words are mostly used by these fans when they address themselves and their idol. Xiao Zhan addresses his fans as"小飞侠"representing   kind of spirit pursuing for victory and never give up. Later, out of the consideration of humor, Xiao Zhan's fans address themselves as"虾", which is a kind of cute animal with the same pronunciation of "侠". Then, based on the address form, "虾", more and more forms representing different characteristics of fans have been created, for example, "肥虾 refers to those fans who are relatively fat, and "澳洲龙虾"refers to those fans who are really rich. In addition, these fans also create some homophonic words to address Xiao Zhan. Because Xiao Zhan was born in Chongqing, his pronunciation of retroflex sound is not standard. In one of his interviews, he read "战"wrongly as"赞". After that, his fans begin to address him as"肖赞"、"小赞"、"萧盏"and so on. In addition to humor, Xiao Zhan's fans also use some homophonic words in their Super topic in order to blur key information in a post, such as using the homophonic words "羊骨" to replace "养蛊", which refers to a way to destroy the idol's career by wantonly spreading some fabricated information or rumor. Specifically, the act of"养蛊" is made by those malicious people who first increases the expectations of the fans for their idol by making up and advocating a lie that their idol will gain a rare opportunity, such as participating in a film by a famous director or

becoming the spokesperson of famous brands, but finally makes these fans feel extremely disappointed when they find that their idols fail to gain the opportunity. Gradually, the idol may become less attractive to his fans. At the same time, because the microblog users can also find out all the related posts when they search for the keywords, they can also read all of the fabricated information containing the words"养蛊" when they retrieval these two words, so the negative effects may spread from fans to more users. Therefore, Xiao Zhan's fans often use the homophonic word"羊骨"to replace"养蛊"while posting in order to reduce the negative effects of the rumors both on the fans and their idol Xiao Zhan.

Two main types of abbreviations is mentioned here, one is the combinations of the initial letter, and the other is the shorten form of the phrases. There are some combinations of the initial letter, such as "xfx" which is the abbreviation of the Chinese phonetic alphabet "xiao fei xia". Besides,"反黑"is the abbreviation of the phrases"反对黑粉". Here, the concept of "黑粉" needs to be explained."黑粉"refers to those anti-fans who spread harmful comments and even use insulting language to maliciously discredit idols, so "反黑" means to oppose these people by collecting their harmful comments and complaining to microblog management in order to make these anti-fans get the corresponding punishment. Since Xiao Zhan has received great attention in a short period, there are many criticisms on him, some of which are personal attacks. Therefore, complaining about these comments is a huge task for Xiao Zhan's fans to do to maintain their idol positive image on microblog platform. Thanks to the simplicity of these abbreviations, Xiao Zhan's fans can improve their typing speed and communication efficiency by using them. Now, these abbreviations gradually become the conventional communication language among the fans of Xiao Zhan.

Loanwords refer to those words absorbed from other languages, and the most commonly used loanwords by the fans in Super topic of Xiao Zhan are related to the chase-idol culture originated from South Korea and Japan. It is said that Chase-idol culture first originated in South Korea, because

those fans in there were the earliest organized and large-scale groups providing financial and labor support to their idols. Later, chase-idol culture also prevailed in Japan. In Xiao Zhan's Super topic, when the fans want to express their support and love for Xiao Zhan, their most used expression is"为你打call". Here, the expression"打call"is a loanword which is borrowed from Japan's Chase-idol culture. "Call" is a kind of activity firstly used by Japanese fans in some concerts in order to cheer up their idols. Specifically, "Call" includes many body movements, such as dancing with music, clapping, waving hands, and chanting the names or slogans of idols in a rhythmic way. After this kind of activity spread to China, its connotation has been developed from the simple offline support to all kinds of activities expressing fans' love for their idols. In this speech community, these fans always use the expression "为你打call"in their posts to show their support when the TV series acted by Xiao Zhan or the songs composed by Xiao Zhan is going to be released. Another expression fluently used by Xiao Zhan's fans is "花路", which is borrowed from a Korean expression"꽃길"."꽃길" is firstly used by a South Korea idol named Jin Shizhen when she won the first place in a talent show in 2016. Now, Xiao Zhan's fans borrow this expression to express their expectations and wishes for their idol in his career.

Fans also enrich the meanings of some words in order to fit their idol chasing behavior in a new situation. In Xiao Zhan's Super topic, Xiao Zhan's fans reinterpret some old words based on their and their idol's experiences, and one typical example is the expression"野人"."野人" originally refers to those who have lives in desolate areas for a long time and have not integrated into human society, but Xiao Zhan's fans give it a totally new interpretation in their Super topic. Those who post daily on microblog about boycotting Xiao Zhan's works and sponsors address themselves as "雪花" which can form avalanches in the future, but Xiao Zhan's fans, as the hostile camp, do not want to use such a positive term to address their enemy. Therefore, they use the word "野" to replace "雪" which are similar in pronunciation, implying that these resisters are just like monsters. Now, it is common for Xiao Zhan's

fans to use "野人" in their posts to refer to those resisters.

3.1.2 Classification from sentences level

From the sentence level, the communication language of Xiao Zhan's fans is tend to be exaggerates and colloquial.

The posts posted by fans in Xiao Zhan's Super topic are basically the praise, and most of them are the exaggerated praise, including the praise of Xiao Zhan's appearance, the TV series he acts and the songs he sings. These fans tend to show the advantages of Xiao Zhan, and ignore the disadvantages, so their speech community is full of positive content. In addition, these fans even use exaggeration to highlight Xian Zhan's advantages when expressing their praise for him. According to the data, the frequently used exaggeration includes "哥哥的美貌是真实存在的吗"、"再看亿遍"、"内娱颜巅". It can be found that these fans tend to use exaggeration especially when they want show their praise for Xian Zhan's appearances. Through this exaggerated praise, these fans can fully express their love for Xiao Zhan and their excited mood.

The colloquial sentences posted by Xiao Zhan's fans are mainly manifested in the use of modal particles, reduplicated words and dialects. Xiao Zhan's fans always use modal particles to express their surprise and happiness. The mostly used modal particle word by Xiao Zhan's fans in Super topic is "啊", such as "啊！哥哥今天好可爱啊！"and "啊！哥哥出来了！"， which can show the fans' surprise to Xiao Zhan's participation in a live program as well as their affirmation for his clothing style. Besides, the reduplicated words are used in Super topic by these fans to create a kind of lovely image. One example is the repeated use of the word "呜", such as the sentence "呜呜呜，被可爱哭了". Xiao Zhan's fans, especially female fans, use such sentences in their Super topic is not a kind of mistake, but a try to create a lovely and naive image. What's more, some sentences containing dialects make the communication among Xiao Zhan's fans' on Super topic become colloquial in that these sentences are just like the conversations happened in daily life. When fans want to express the meaning of looking, they tend to use the word "瞅"in sentences which is a word of Sichuan dialect , and when fans want to express the meaning of chatting, they also tend to use "唠嗑"in sentences which is a phrase of Northeast dialect. Although these fans don't know each other in real life, they can not only shorten their psychological distance, but also make their communication be more interesting by using such simple and easily understood dialects.

3.2 Characteristics of the speech community

According to the classification of the most used words and sentences by Xiao Zhan's fans, their shared language used in this speech community can be summarized into the following four characteristics, including the limitation of language use, the strong purpose of language use, the positive features of language content and the arbitrariness of language form.

This shared language in Super topic can be used only in specified context. This kind of language used by fans contains the these fans' unique idol chasing behavior and are closely related the microblog platform. It can only be understood by fans themselves who have experienced these events, and even the idol himself may not understand all the creative expressions. Therefore, fans one the same super topic can use their shared language to communication, but they neither use it in other platforms nor use it when communicate with other people in case of causing misunderstanding.

This shared language used by Xiao Zhan's fans is for two clear purposes. On the one hand, fans want to get the latest information of their idol through the communication and interaction with other fans by posting and commenting on Super topic. On the other hand, fans want to deepen their identification and image as their idol's supporters to other users by using their expressions created by themselves.

The content of their shared language is almost positive. Fans tend to use positive words in communication rather than using derogatory and filthy words, and to praise their idol rather than

criticize, because they want to deepen the positive image of themselves and their idol in people's eyes.

Their shared language is also arbitrary in that whether the vocabulary or the sentences are basically relatively concise and short without fixed structure restrictions. These vocabulary and sentence structures are created freely by fans' own preferences, which makes the language of communication on their Super topic be more colloquial.

3.3 Factors influencing the speech community

In the speech community of Xiao Zhan's fans on microblog, these fans voluntarily and actively use this shared language in communication. As for the reasons for this phenomenon will be discussed in detail in the following parts, including the sense of self-identity, the sense of group identity and the need for shaping the idol's positive image.

The first reason for the fans to use this shared language is the need for identifying the self-identity. Everyone is an independent individual, and the recognition of his or her different identities is called individual identity or self-identity. Here, self-identity refers to the fans' recognition of their identity as a certain idol's supporter. Through the use of this shared language in a particular speech community, these fans can find that their way of expression is consistent with that of the group, so they can feel that they have already integrated into the group and have become a part of it. In addition, when a fan's post containing the shared language is praised, commented and forwarded by other fans in the Super topic, this fan will feel that her self-identity has been recognized by the group, therefore, he or she can feel a strong sense of belonging and fulfillment. By identifying the self-identity in the speech community, these fans can find a sense of belonging, pride and self-confidence in the communication, and even more enjoy the communication.

Apart from the self-identify, the fans also want their group as a whole to be recognized by other users and the whole society, which is the belonging for group identity. As analyzed above, the old words for new meaning created by Xiao Zhan's

fans contains their and their idol's unique experiences. Therefore, their use of this shared language can highlight the differences between their group and other idols' fans, show their unique characteristics, and let other users on microblog know them as much as possible. In addition, through the use of this shared language, fans can also create a kind of positive, lovely and naive image, which can indirectly show the positive influence of their idol on them and let more people in the society recognize them.

Thirdly, the basis for fans to constitute this speech community is their common interest, that is, the love of their idol. Therefore, in older to let more people know and appreciate their idol, they try to shape the positive image of the idol. To achieve this purpose, they get a consensus to use positive words as much as possible in the process of communication, and take homophonic words to replace some key words in order to reduce the influence of harmful information.

4. Conclusion

With the development of Internet technology, fans' activities to express their support for their idols are gradually transferred from offline to online. In Super topic of Xiao Zhan's fans on microblog, they often use their creative expressions and terms to show their identity. Over the time, a number of online speech communities have been formed, which is the special speech community of fans.

By analyzing the posts posted and commented by fans in Xiao Zhan's Super topic, it can be found that the basis for their speech community is their shared language. The mostly used words can be divided into four categories, including homophonic words, abbreviations, loanwords and old words for new meaning, and the sentences can be classified in to exaggerated types and colloquial types. On the whole, the characteristics of their shared language includes the limitation of language use, the strong purpose of language use, the positive features of language content and the arbitrariness of language form. The factoring influencing the formation of the speech community are to seek a sense of identity, including self-identity and group identity, and to create a positive image of the idol. Therefore, the

shared language makes the fans' group be more united and stable. However, due to the accelerating pace of fan's language updating and the large number of corpus, the analysis of this thesis may not be comprehensive, so the further research is needed.

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