Study on lexical features of English netspeak from semiotic perspective

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ABSTRACT

The global and advent use of the computer has recently resulted in the emergence of a fresh way of communication—computer-mediated communication, while the widespread of Internet gives birth to a new type of language —Netspeak, which is a new linguistic phenomenon with the spread of the Internet. It is an important and interesting research field in Applied Linguistics. The paper theoretically based upon the theories of Saussure's linguistic signs and Roland Barthes's, carries out mainly the analysis about lexical features of English Netspeak, specifically from the word-formation. It finally sums up that Netspeak is a kind of fresh linguistic variety, and it is quite necessary to have a clear attitude about how to standardize lexical features of English Netspeak, thus promote deep consideration.

Key words: Lexical Features, Semiotic Analysis, Word Formation, English Netspeak
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INTRODUCTION

Since the establishing of Internet in 1982, it has been developing at a surprising speed and swept across the whole world. Into the 2lst century, the Network has penetrated into all aspects of social life, and has changed modern life. Communication and information dissemination of mankind has turned from the initial stage of body language into now the network-era. While the widespread of Internet gives birth to a new kind of language —Netspeak: the language on the Internet which is a new linguistic phenomenon with the spread of the Internet. It becomes more and more popular, which is created by millions of thousands of netizens and widely used in cyber chatting rooms and on BBS. Netspeak soon becomes the main language and the major communicative means online, therefore the Internet is not only changing mankind's life concept, life condition, and also life style. The following figure indicates the development of Chinese netizens from 2005 to 2012. (All data in it come from the 31st Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China Internet Network Information Center)

Fig.1: Size of China Internet users and Internet Penetration rate

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Fig. 1 is about the number of China Internet users and Internet Penetration rate from the year 2005 to 2012. It can be apparently seen that the number of Internet users is on the rise year by year, which demonstrates that the Internet has deeply integrated into human beings' daily life, and become an indispensable part of it.

The influences of Internet upon people display in the following four aspects: firstly, the acquisition of information and knowledge is incomparably faster and more labor-saving than the traditional way of the book-reading; secondly, network has changed traditional ways of interpersonal communication, which offers people an easy access to freely talk, exchange and communication, without time and space limitation; thirdly, network has made e-commerce, online shopping and distant education possible; at last, the Internet offers common ways of entertainment like chatting online, online cinema, online music, online games, which become an essential leisure-way during most people's everyday life. Netspeak has also exerted unprecedented effects upon the original language system, and a great number of neologisms, many new, even strange words and other confused expressions which are common and popular while bring about unavoidable communication difficulties. However, they should not be neglected, since that those expressions and words in Netspeak are not limited on the network but deeply integrating into human's daily life.

Netspeak is not only a language system of signifiers in which sounds serve as the physical shell, but is a special linguistic phenomenon recorded and reflected by the writing system. Thus in terms of semiology, the system of Netspeak is one of mixed signs used for network communication.

Words are the solid foundation of language research. And the influence of the Net on language is mainly reflected on the vocabulary. Since Netspeak can be a language variety, thus the unique lexical features of Netspeak are found mainly in its lexicon 一 the level of language where it is relatively the easiest to introduce innovation and deviation. Based on a large number of words, sentences and conversations collected from the Internet, the author makes a brief analysis of Lexical Features about the Netspeak in English.

The CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH NETSPEAK
The Netspeak in English has distinctive features, as well as the standards of classifications of them. On the basis of traditional means of word-formation, and in combination with the features of the new words in the Netspeak, The classification on English Netspeak is mainly based upon the word-formation which is an important means of vocabulary enlargement, especially for the words on the Internet. The classification on English Netspeak is of great necessity. With respect to Netspeak, compound, clipping, abbreviation, blending, deviation, are the most active.
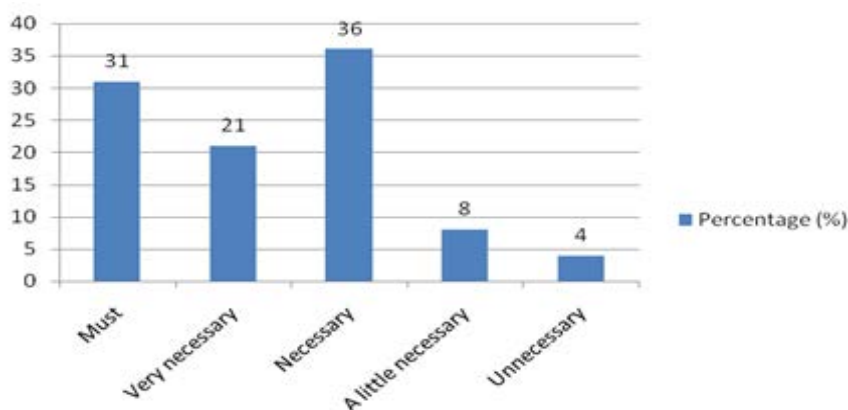

Fig.2: The necessity of the classification on English Netspeak

2.1. Compound
As is well-known to us, the compounding is a process of word-formation consisting of two or more parts to form a new unit. The compounds can be interpreted in a relatively simple and clear way and also can be understood by human beings so easily that they are often applied in technical English. As is similar to the natural language, it is considered as a common device that makes Netspeak productive and creative. Compounds are applied quite often owing to brevity and vividness. Here is a typical example: mouse as a prefix frequently existing in such forms as mouse-click, mouse-pad, mouse-over, and also as a set-structured verb phrase (mouse across, mouse over); moreover, click in click-and-buy, one-click, double-click; web in webmaster, webcast, etc. New words on the Net coined in the way of compounding can be further classified into the following categories.

Table 1: Compounds on the Netliingo

	Noun + Noun → Noun	baseband, bloodware
Compound Noun	Noun + Verb → Noun	Handshake, betchmark
	Adjective + Noun → Noun	Bluetooth, BlackBerry
	Verb + Noun → Noun	checkbox,
	Miscellany	cost-per-click, first-to-market
Compound Adjective	Noun + Adjective→ Adjective	netwise
	Adjective + Past Participle→ Adjective	Hotwired, BlackBuried
	Adjective + Noun → Adjective	broadband
	Preposition + Noun → Adjective	online
Compound Verb	Noun + Verb → Verb	geekspeak
	Adverb + Verb → Verb	Download, upload
	Miscellany	cut-and-paste

From the observation of the meaning of a compound in Netspeak, it indicates that the meaning of a compound is derived from the combined lexical meanings. The lexical meanings of the components are closely put together to form a compound with a meaning people can easily recognize. On the Internet, it is quite easy for people to tell what the compound means by each part of it at most time, which is not necessarily the case in natural language, where the meaning of a compound is not always the sum of the meanings of its parts.

2.2. Shortening
Shortening means producing the words in shorter forms. And in computer-mediated communication, people have to shorten words for the purpose of fast typing. Thus, there are a great number of shortened words, which consist of clipping and blending and acronym.

Clipping
The process of clipping involves the deletion of one or more syllables from a word (usually a noun), which is also available in its full forms. Networds are formed by clipping fall into three types:

Table2: Clippings on the Netlingo

Front clipping	celeb = celebrity; mom = moment
Front and Back clipping	B/C = because; PLS = please
Back clipping	site = website; net = Internet

Blending
Blending is a process of word-formation in which a new word is coined by combining the meanings and sounds of two words, and at least one of which is not in its full form. A blend is only a word formed from parts of more than two parts of words, which are at times morphemes. In English Netspeak, there are five kinds of blending:

Table 3: Blendings on the Wordspy

head + word	ecolonomics = ecology + economics; hydrail = hydrogen + rail
head + head	SoLoMo = Social + location (local)+ mobile
head + tail	carnography = carnage + pornography; phablet = phone + tablet
word + head	cybercafé = cyber + cafeteria
word + tail	ringxiety = ring + anxiety ; sexting = sex + texting

Acronym
Acronyms are merely abbreviations that are seemingly pronounced as if they were independent words. There are some in the following:

Table 4: Acronyms on the Wordspy

	BYOD = bring your own device
Acronyms	MOOC = massive open online course
	LULU = locally unwanted land use
	NEET = Not in employment, education, or training

The three types of word-formation methods — clipping, blending and acronym, are all the processes of shortening which show a typical characteristic of Netspeak to shortening the English Net-words.

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2.3. Deviation

Derivation is generally defined as a word-formation process by which new words are created by adding affixes: a prefix or suffix, or both, to the stem. A relatively small number of words in Netspeak are created through this method. The follow are some examples:

Table 5: Deviations on the Wordspy

Prefixation	hyper-power = hyper- + power
Suffixation	adjective + suffix: bigature = big + -ature
	verb + suffix: openture = open + -ture
	noun + suffix: freemium = freee + -mium

2.4. Emoticons and smileys

A smiley is a sequence of signs on the computer keyboard, which frequently follows after the punctuations. A smiley can tell one what a person really means when he or she does an instant comment. It can be also known as emoticon just because they intend to convey human beings' emotion or feelings. The word "emoticon" is the combination of "emotional" and "icon". It is explained that emoticons are constructed by combining punctuation marks on the computer keyboard to express emotions or semantic feelings such as sadness, happiness, and so on. The following are some commonly used emoticons：

Table 6: Emoticons and Smileys on the Netlingo

：（	Unhappy	?	I have a question
[ ]	Silence	＞---＜	Annoyed
:-{{	Very angry	,!!!!	Talk to the hand
~:-P	Single Hair	:~)	Wondering
0;-)	Angle wink-male	?^	Hook up?
:-Q	Smoking while talking	%-)	Staring at a Screen for 15 hours
:-){	Beard	＝～＝lll	Helpless

From the above, one can quite easily see that smileys are not only to be coined for fun, but also to attract others' attention and to show the tone of an utterance. However, emoticons may not be considered as a method of word formation in a strict sense in English Netspeak.

CONCLUSION

David Crystal in his book Language and the Internet,first created the term Netspeak, which made remarkable accomplishment in English Netspeak research. English Netspeak is a type of language showing features that are unique to the Internet and encountered in all the above situations, arising out of its character as a medium that is electronic, global and interactive" (Crystal, 2006: 20). Since the English Netspeak would be different from any other Netspeak, however, whichever language it is, the nature of Netspeak is the same and as well as the ultimate communicative aim of human beings. For better understanding and easier convenience, netizens will make the English words used on the Internet as economic and brief as possible.

Netspeak has also made unprecedented effects upon the original language system, and a lot of neologisms, strange words and other confused expressions which are common and popular while bring about unavoidable communication problems. However, they should not be neglected, since that the expressions and words in English Netspeak are not limited on the network but integrating into human's daily life.

English Netspeak is a fresh variety of language, which is full of energy. However, there is no systematic about how to use it appropriately and precisely .Therefore, it is quite urgent to decide how to use the most precise language in the most appropriate speaking context and instability of its word-formation. Moreover, to exploit the potentials of the new medium creatively to form new aspect of expression in the future, human beings need to learn quickly to adapt the language to meet the demands of the new linguistic phenomenon.

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