A Study of the Features of Internet English from the Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract: As the most commonly used language on the Internet, Internet English has become a new variety of English. Besides the common features it shares with other varieties, Internet English also presents some distinct features in word-formation and lexicon. By analyzing the word-formation and the features of Internet English, people are able to make better use of network resources and achieve effective communication on the Internet.

Key words: Internet English; word-formation; characteristics

1. INTRODUCTION

With the development and popularization of computer technology and Internet, Internet language comes into being. As a popular media, Internet demands a simple and convenient language for people to use in communication. English, as the most commonly used language on the Internet, catches people's attention due to its distinct language features. Generally speaking, Internet English refers to the language used in E-mails, Discussion Groups, Chat Rooms,and WWW Pages, etc. According to R. A. Huson (1980), a language variety is any distinguishable form of speech used by a speaker or a group of speakers. Therefore, Internet English can be regarded as a new variety of English, and besides the common features it shares with other varieties, it also presents some distinct features in word-formation and lexicon. Knowing the regulations and characteristics of Internet English, people can not only enlarge their vocabulary, more importantly, they can make better use of network resources with the language and achieve effective communication on the internet. This paper will first probe into the common patterns of word-formation of Internet English, and then try to analyze the language features of it with a hope to supply some useful information for English learners and users.

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2. COMMON WORD-FROMING METHODS OF INTERNET ENGLISH

In order to have a better understanding of Internet English, first of all, we should know how words of Internet English are formed. Generally speaking, the word-formation of Internet English follows the methods and principles of word-formation of Standard English. However, it has formed some unique characteristics at the same time, which gradually become the major trend in the development of network English. The new words in Internet English have inherited some traditional word-formation methods, such as compounding, derivation, abbreviation and so on. But some nonce words have also come into being, which have been created in particular circumstances, quickly accepted by people and incorporated in modern English. The word-formation methods of Internet English will be analyzed in the following parts respectively.

2.1 Abbreviation

Nowadays the information-intensive society developed rapidly in science and technology, the lengthy and miscellaneous words will inevitably be replaced by brief and concise words. Therefore, abbreviation is the most frequently used word-building means of current network English. It has not merely enriched the vocabulary of English, has provided convenience for English users, it also represents a kind of trend of simplification in English vocabulary. For example, websites usually begin with "www", which is a typical example of abbreviation.

2.1.1 Clipping

In modern times, people tend to be economical in writing and speech to keep up with the fast tempo of the new life style. This is especially true in Internet English. To save time one is likely to clip words that are frequently used, e.g. *bike* for *bicycle*, *auto* for *automobile*, *taxi* for *taximeter cabriolet*. We use *econ*, *gym*, *math*, and *trig* for *economics*, *gymnastics*, *mathematics*, *trigonometry* when we talk about school life. In catering business, we eat *lunch* instead of *luncheon*, have a *burger* instead of a *hamburger*. In technology system, we create *uni* for *university*, *info* for *information*, *Netizen* for *net citizen*, *Netnews* for *network news*, *Sysop* for *systemopreate*, *netiquette* for *network etiquette*, etc. Although some of the clipped forms are not generally accepted by many conservative linguists and scholars, they prove to be effective and popular on the Internet.

Clipping can be classified into the following four types:

   a) Front clipping:
       cause (because) ; copter (helicopter) ; chute (par chute); phone (telephone)
   b) Back clipping:
        hang on a sec (hang on a second); deli (delicatessen); fan (fanatic);
       disco (discotheque);
   c) Front and back clipping:
       cuz (because); flu (influenza)
   d) Phrase clipping:
       pub (public house) ; pop (popular music)

2.1.2 Acronymy

Another common way of making new short words is acronymy. Acronymy is the process of forming new words by joining the initial letters of a phrase. Words formed in this way can be subdivided into initialisms and acronyms depending on the pronunciation of the words (Zhang Weiyou 85). Initialisms are words pronounced letter by letter while acronyms are pronounced as normal words. The following words serve as good examples:

a) Initialisms
   IT (information technology)   WWW (World Wide Web)
ASAP (as soon as possible)   FYI (for your information)
LOL (laughing out loud)   AFA IC (as far as I am concerned)
AAMOF (as a matter of fact)   ASAP (as soon as possible)
BTW (by the way)
OTOH (on the other hand)
b) Acronyms:
NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty organization)
AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome)
BASIC (Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code)
laser (lightwave amplification by stimulated emission of radiation)
sonar (sound navigation and ranging)
N-bomb (nuclear bomb)

2.1.3 Combination of letters and numbers

The most distinctive features of Internet English are its flexibility and freeness, therefore, letters and numbers are frequently used in combination to form a special type of abbreviation. That's to say, we often use a number or a letter to replace one or more letters in a word, in case the number or the letter has the partial tone with its substitute. In Internet English it is common to find that a letter or combination of letters is used to replace words or phrases which happen to share similar pronunciations. For example, *r =are, b=be/bee,c=see,o=oh,oic= (oh, I See),icq= (I seek you), how r u (how are you).* Numbers are often used in the same way, for example, "*before*" is written as "*b4*" in Internet English, because "*4*" has a partial tone with "*fore*". More examples are: *2B (to be), some1 (someone), f2f (face to face), B2B (Business to business), 3W (World Wide Web)* and *4ever (for ever).* Although many people consider this kind of expression as non-standard, it proves to be popular and expressive on the Internet.

2.2 Blending

Blending is the formation of new words by combining parts of two words or a word plus a part of another word, such as smog (smoke + fog). It is a relatively complex form of compounding. There are mainly three kinds of blends in Internet English:

The first type of blends may be the combination of one part of one word and one part of the other word or a word plus a part of another word". For example,

    Netizen= net citizen   netzine=net magazine
    netiquette=Internet Etiquette
    informercial=information commercial   infochannel=informal channel
    autologon=automation logon   technet=technology net
    infocosm=information cosmos   Webster=web master
    computerate=computer literate   buckster=buck broadcaster
    commernet=commercial network

The second type of blends is the combination of a letter of one word and another word. For example,

    e-mail=electronic mail   e-life=electronic life
    e-cash=electronic cash   e-commerce=electronic commerce
    e-wallet= electronic wallet   e-book= electronic book

2.3 Compounding

Compounding has become a more and more important Internet English word-building means, and the seriating of the compound words is one of the main characteristics of word-formation of network English. These words are mostly some professional terms related to computer network. A great part of these terms

are neologisms. They are generally developed from words which have the meaning of "network", such as web, net, computer, internet, online. For example,

        bandwidth   cybernation
        cyber stalker
        hyperaccess   hypertext
        hypertext
        packup   readme
        hotmail   hotwired

2.4 Derivation

As more and more new Internet conceptions come into being, an affix is able to derive many new words, which is easy to understand. Affixation is generally defined as the formation of words by adding word-forming or derivational affixes to bases. This process is also known as derivation. The most productive affixes that are used in Internet English are as follows:

        -ible : compatible executable bootable
         cyber- : cyberspace cyberstart cyberpeport cybercrime
        de- : debug   defrag   delurk
        digit- : digiter   digit head
        hyper- : hyperlink   hypermedia hypertext   hyper access
        micro- : microserf   micromoney   micropayment
        tele- : teleconference telecommute   teleordering
        re- : reboot reassemble   redirect
        sub- : subdirectory   subnet
        -ize : digitize   maximize

2.5 The use of symbols

The appearance of Internet English not only increases the number of English vocabulary but also produces some strange signs, which are usually used to express emotions. Some scholars call these signs emoticons. They are used just because in the virtual world of Internet, most communication is performed through words, in which we can not express our facial expressions or gestures. Therefore, people use punctuations, letters or the combination of signs to make up this. The signs used are fresh and vivid, and can achieve a kind of humor. For example, when people chat on the internet, they often use colon ":" to denote eyes, dash "-" for nose, and "()" for mouth, "T-T" for crying, "∧__∧" for joy, which are vivid and humorous. More examples are in the following (Chen Ying 63):

        :-)   regular smile   :-D   laughter
        :-(sad   :-‖   anger
        :-e   disappointed   :-0   wow
        [ ]   hugs   :@   what

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNET ENGLISH

Just as what we have analyzed, based on the Internet's features of rapidity, efficiency and personalization, Internet English tends to add to its language system more abbreviations, more symbols and more short forms with rich meanings. Internet English is formed out of the special needs of internet communication; therefore, it is characterized by fast innovation and quick spread and has the characteristics of popularity, creativity, brevity and vividness.

3.1 Popularity

The popularity of Internet English is mainly reflected in its word-formation of derivation and compounding, which are analyzed in detail in the previous part. Thus once a net user understands the meaning of the affixes, he or she can infer and grasp a large amount of neologisms derived from them quickly. In this way, Network English become popular and familiar to people very quickly. That is to say, the great use of derivation and compounding makes Internet English popular and easy to understand. Netizens can recognize many new words through their affixes. For instance, *"cyber"* which originally comes from Greek, now it means *"computer, or net"*. *Cyber activist, cyber addict, cyber attack, cyber cop, cyber brain, cyber surfing* and so on are all derived from it. Words combined with it are *e-business*, *e-form*, *e-mail*, *e-service, etc.* Other familiar affixes are: "digit-", "internet-", "-naut", etc. Many compounds in Internet English are also simple to internet users to understand and to memorize. Many new compound words are the combination of a common word and a word which carries a specific meaning. For instance, *"web"*, which originally means "network of fine threads spun by a spider or some other spinning creature", carries the specific meaning of "internet" in Internet English. Therefore users will not have difficulty in understanding words like "web page", "web site" or "web messenger".

3.2 Creativity

Most netizens are usually young people and they have great creativity. The number of Internet English increases by 500 words each year. Oxford Dictionary once wanted to record these new words, however, for its high speed, they failed. Besides those newly-coined words and expressions, the use of signs on the internet to express gestures and emotions can be regarded as a good illustration of creativity.

3.3 Words with metaphorical meanings

In cognitive linguistics metaphor is regarded as a powerful cognitive instrument for our conceptualization of abstract categories and a natural feature of human language. People can map the elements from a concrete source domain onto elements of an abstract, intangible domain. It compares the unknown to the known, the unfamiliar to the familiar, the simple to the complicated, the abstract to the concrete, and science to popularity. In the scientific and technological language, plenty of words are formed through metaphor and Internet English contains many words of network technology and computer science. Therefore we can say that to some extent Internet English is metaphorical in nature. With the help of metaphor, abstract concepts are specified, complicated meanings are simplified and scientific terms are no longer abstract or boring. This has promoted the development and popularization of network technology and computer knowledge to a great extent.

In Internet English, many common words are endowed with metaphorical meanings. For example, the original meaning of window is "opening in the wall or roof of a building, car, etc to let in light and often air", but it is used metaphorically in Internet English to refer to "one of the different work areas on a computer screen", for example, *Windows 98, Windows 2000*. *"Package"* , which originally means an object or set of objects wrapped in a box or in paper and sent or given to someone, refers to a set of different pieces of computer software that are sold together as one unit. *"Virus"*, which originally means a simple living thing that is smaller than a bacterium and can enter your body and make you sick, indicates a program that enters your computer and damages or destroys information that you have stored. *"Memory", "mouse," "navigator", "firewall", "Internet Explorer"* and *"hit"* are all typical examples to illustrate this point.

3.4 Brevity

Most of the time, Internet English is used for instant communication, therefore Internet English must be short and brief and convenient for users to communicate with each other. Brevity is mainly shown by the use of abbreviations. The special network vocabulary often takes abbreviations to simplify the article, save printing space and reading time, thus meeting the requirements of the computer science and high-speed development of network technology. The common characteristics of these vocabularies are that the form is

succinct, the meaning of a word is single, and there is no abundant association meaning. Because of the brevity of Internet English, net citizens have no trouble in memorizing the tedious terminologies and jargons. The speed of input has been improved greatly, which is good for the spread of information. The words of Internet English in BBS and chat rooms are mainly created by young net citizens who are enthusiastic in cyber chat. Since these words are informal and colloquial, many of them cannot be accepted by other fields in the society. But for its brevity, they are popular among net citizens. For instance, BTW (by the way), FYI (fir your information), IMHO (in my humble opinion), bf (boy friend), sp (support).

4. CONCLUSION

The network age is a highly developing world, which demands efficiency and convenience in language use. This paper firstly summarized some patterns of word-formation of Internet English and pointed out that besides some common word-forming methods like derivation and compounding, abbreviation, blending are the typical methods to form Internet words. The use of symbol signs also shows us a brand-new world of vivid language. Then the paper discussed four characteristics (popularity, creativity, brevity and words with rich metaphorical meanings) of Internet English. So we can conclude that knowing the regulations and features of Internet English can not only help us enlarge our vocabulary, but also can help us catch up with the pace of the highly moving society.

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