

Interpretation of the Formation of Internet Neologisms and Their Translation from Pound's Perspective of "Language Energy"

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Abstract

Pound's perspective of "language energy" maintains that with energy and the "electricity" between words, words of new combination will generate new meanings. Internet neologisms are semantic variants under network environment, whose emergence are the results of the continuous development and movement of their energy. Interpretation of the energy changes and translation methods in the process of the generation of internet neologisms from the perspective of Pound's "language energy" will contribute to the understanding of contemporary people's way of thinking and the general law of people's cognition of the world. Under the guidance of Pound's philosophy, translators should fulfill their subjectivity in the process of translation and translate the connotation of internet neologisms beyond the form of language accurately.

Keywords: language energy, internet neologisms, translation, translators' subjectivity

1. Introduction

One of Ezra Pound's outstanding contributions to translation studies is the concept of "language energy". Pound believes that language itself contains "energy". "According to Pound's explanation, the vigor of language refers to the new relationship that words generate with other words in a certain structure and a given place and time, so as to obtain new quality, which leads to the language 'vigor'. He also maintains that 'electricity' can be transferred between words which can mutually produce some quality" (Guo, 2000). Through various means of combination, words can produce new meanings and energy, such as to enable neologisms emerge in an endless stream; which is called the "language vitality". With the rapid development of information technology, the computer network is becoming more and more popular among people, which provides a carrier for network language and internet words to be produced and widely used. Besides, it makes network language and internet words gain powerful vitality, as well as enrich the network language vocabulary. Here in this article, the internet neologisms mainly refer to those popular informal words or symbols created, spread and accepted by netizens, which gain tremendous energy in internet world. Although some of them are also used in daily life, their origin and popularity are closely related with the internet. From the angle of Pound's "language energy", the article interprets the formation processes of new network words and their translation from the aspects of old words bearing new meanings, words coinage and imitation of words.

2. Literature Review

Pound's concept of "language energy" was initially put forward when he criticized Rodin's poetry in 1910. He said that "Rodin's belief that energy is beauty, holds at least this fact, namely, that all our ideas of swiftness or easy power of motion, and we consider ugly those lines which connote unwieldy slowness in moving." (Cavalcanti, 2010). "According to Pound's theory of 'language energy', language has its own vitality, which can adapt to various environments. The vitality is the energy of language" (Liao, 2002).

Pound further defined "language energy" in "Serious Artists", "we can believe that what really matters in art is a kind of energy, an electricity-like or radioactive wave, a power that can be linked and integrated, which is similar

to flowing water, gushing out from the golden sand, flowing away quickly, and you can think of it as any image” (Pound, 1913).

According to Edwin Gentzler’s masterpiece *Contemporary Translation Theories (Revised Second Edition)*, we could clearly see that before Pound put forward the concept of language, “his theoretical writings fall into two periods: an early imagist phase that, while departing from traditional forms of logic, still occasionally contained abstract concepts and impressions; and a second late imagist or vorticist phase that was based entirely on words in action and “luminous” details, in which the importance of the thing being represented recedes and the energy or the form language takes in the process of representing becomes more important. In his evolution from imagism to vorticism, Pound’s thoughts about translation played a central role. Pound’s emphasis was less on the “meaning” of the translated text or even on the meaning of specific words. Instead, he emphasized the rhythm, diction, and movement of words. Unconscious associations, reverberations of sounds within words, and patterns of energies were used to re-energize in twentieth-century English the ‘original’” (Gentzler, 2008).

Pound doesn’t emphasize the meaning of text or individual word in the process of translation. On the contrary, he stresses rhythm, choice of words and the meaning of words in the context, which is what he says words are in motion. Pound holds that “three or four words together, can emit great vitality. Those words have special vitality, which is the traditional strength, the power of national awareness for centuries. In fact, Pound stresses the intertextual meaning of words” (Guo, 2000).

Theoretically for Pound, Chinese characters represented not meanings, not structure, but things, or more importantly, things in action, in process, things with energy, their form. Words, according to Pound, were always seen in a network of relations” (Gentzler, 2008).

To sum up, we can see that the language is alive, and under some specific contexts, language can stimulate unlimited “energy”. With this powerful language vitality, new words have constantly emerged, and increasingly enriched people’s life. The emergence and formation of some internet neologisms depends on the familiar words. Association and imagination inspire the netizens who borrow the formation of the old words, giving them new meanings and connotations. Through the “movement” of the words, these new words generate more energy compared with the old words. Internet neologism not only embodies people’s contemporary way of thinking, but also reflects the general laws of the world. Therefore, understanding the formation of internet new words from pound’s point of “language energy” will help the translators to achieve better translation effects and reach the translation target.

3. Embodiment of Language Energy in Formation of the Internet Neologisms

As a new form of language, internet terms constantly impact the traditional way of language expression. With powerful vitality, new words are experiencing rapid development under the influence of a new communication media – internet. The energy contained in formation of the internet neologisms will be analyzed in the following part from three main aspects of their formation mechanism, that is, existing words bearing new meanings, word coinage, and parody of words.

3.1 Existing Words Bearing New Meanings

Although some of the internet words have originally existed in vocabulary, the meanings of these words have been greatly changed under the background of rapid development of network culture. General speaking, words acquire new meanings in the course of usage, which is the result of the constant movement of the “energy” in words.

Pound emphasizes the relationship between meanings of the words. Pound’s theory of translation requires the translators to keep the context, so that they can not only understand the words’ explicit meaning, but also get the implicit meaning in different forms of language expressions, which is the new meaning presented in the new language environment during the process of translation. “All words have two kinds of usage: orthodox and idiomatic usage... In history context, semantic connotation enables us to see the language energy more clearly” (Liao, 2002). “The history context” here refers to the atmosphere that meaning is produced, particularly to the objective external environment out of a language, including factors like communication object, communication style, or social occasions of communication. They connect and complement each other, constituting specific communicative environment in one way or another, so as to provide the condition for the production of language energy. For example, Chinese word “shānzhài (山寨)” means “somewhere in the mountains defending with the fence”, also refers to “the mountain area with villages”(Modern Chinese Dictionary, 1998). However, the accepted meaning of “shānzhài (山寨)” (copycat) (*Chinese Translators Journal*, 2011) on internet concerns copying, imitating, and thus the previous meaning of the word gets expanded, characterized by anti-authority,

deconstruction, and anti-intelligence. It is the development of the energy contained in “copycat” that makes the old word bear new meanings. New communication environment creates the conditions for the term “copycat” to obtain new energy. The translator here correctly understands the new idea of “copycat”, the interpretation of “cat” is “an insulting word for a woman who you think is unkind or unpleasant” (Yang, 2003). “Copycat” thus is the true representation of such a group of evil people. The original “energy” conveyed in this term has been vividly translated into the target language, and the translation version is flexible and accurate.

Besides, another popular internet neologism used by Chinese netizens “dǎjiàngyóu (打酱油)” (I am just passing by; no comment) was traditionally interpreted as someone who takes the bottle into the store for the soybean sauce and the grocer will give him the amount he needs, which is called “dǎjiàngyóu (打酱油)”. But against the network background, when people do not want to talk about politics, taboo or sensitive topics, or something that has nothing to do with themselves, and they are not even willing to know, then they will reply like this, which is equivalent to “pass by”. Here the translator fully understands its meaning, and translates it into “I am just passing by; no comment”, digging out the inner energy, so the translation is pretty accurate and appropriate.

3.2 Words Coinage

“We should note how words are used in specific historical environment, especially in a new or unconventional way. It is the ‘innovation’ nature of the words to create new connections with other words at any time under any circumstances that enable the language to convey energy” (Liao, 2002). With the development of society and the emergence of new things, the existing words are unable to meet the needs of people’s expressions, therefore, those words release their “energy” once again, and thus new words emerge as the times required. Synthesis is a major way to form Internet words, including “composition” and “additional derivation”.

3.2.1 Composition

1) Internet neologisms compounded by letters and numbers

Internet neologisms compounded by letters and numbers are not much, however, the anomaly of the combination precisely reflects the “energy” of language and its flexibility. Such as: cu2morrow, 3q, 4U, of which a normal way of thinking is unable to explain the consisting rules. cu2morrow means “see you tomorrow”, “see you” is a homophone of “c” and “u”, and “2” takes place of the first syllable of “tomorrow”. 3Q is “thank you”, the number 3 pronounced as “san” in Chinese, which is used to replace the first syllable of similar English sound [θæŋ] of thank you. 4U is “for you”, with 4 and u sharing the same pronunciation with “for” and “you” respectively.

2) Internet neologisms compounded by letters, numbers, Chinese characters and English letters or words

Internet neologisms compounded by letters, numbers and Chinese characters are gaining strong momentum, and will experience greater development, which manifests the “innovation” nature of language and its powerful vitality. For instance, through the internet, we often see “小 (xiǎo) case” (a piece of cake), “I服了(fú le) U”(I got to hand it to you). Such modern expressions combining with Chinese characters and English letters or words used as slangs adapt to the informal language style on the internet. They are easy to pronounce and remember, which can bring a special effect with more energy comparing with pure Chinese or pure English. Just as Guo Jianzhong (2000) points out, that the new relationship that words generates with other words in a certain structure and a given place and time, can help the language obtain new quality, which leads to the language ‘vigor’.

3) Internet neologisms generated by homophonic words

There are numerous homophonic words in internet new words. Take traditional homophonic words as example, 霉女菌男(美女俊男), 斑竹(版主), 共眠(共勉); homonymic words from numbers like 9494 (jiùshìjǐùshì) meaning that’s it in English, the 1314520 (yīshēngyīshìwǒàinǐ) meaning I love you forever; 8147 (búyàoshēngqì) meaning don’t get angry; homonymic words from English words like “yī mèi er (伊妹儿)” (e-mail), “wēn dōu sǐ (瘟都死)” (windows), “hōng bèi jī (烘焙鸡)” (homepage), “tù bà (兔爸)” (toolbar), fēn sī (粉丝) (fans). In the above examples, homonym makes full use of the connection between sound and meaning, and enables a word to bear double meanings. Words get new energy in the particular language environment of internet, bursting forth infinite charm, through which the homophonic words can achieve the humorous or ironic effect, or even reflect the speaker’s unique language style. With the price increase of some common goods, several homophonic words which are created correspondingly are quite popular on the internet, like suàn nǐ hěn 蒜(算)你狠, dòu nǐ wán 逗(逗)你玩, píng shén mǎ 苹神马(凭什么). Such words imply the surprising and abnormal price of garlic, bean, and apple in a certain period of time. Using the homophonic character, these phrases create an effect of pun. The original phrase is meaningful with a surprising or ironic tone. The energy of such popular internet neologisms is

fully reflected and increased through replacing one key character or some characters to indicate the item people want to emphasize.

3.2.2 Additional Derivation

Additional derivation can be divided into two types according to the position of affix, i.e. prefix and suffix, which is also one of the important ways of forming the internet words. Under the guidance of a prefix or suffix, it will be able to form a new word, if a word or a phrase is pulsed in the corresponding position. Word will show its great vitality with certain regularity of recombination, and be active as spread on the internet with its unlimited “energy”.

1) Prefix. Take words beginning with the prefix of “luǒ (裸)” for example, luǒguān (裸官) (naked official), luǒjī (裸机) (bare mobile phone), luǒhūn (裸婚) (bare-handed marriage); and words beginning with “bèi (被)” like bèicízhi (被辞职) (be said to have resigned), bèidàibiǎo (被代表) (be said to be represented), bèijiùyè (被就业) (be said to be employed), bèi zēng zhǎng (被增长) (be said to have increased).

2) Suffix. Such as words take “kè (客)” for the suffix: hēi kè (黑客) (hacker), shǎn kè (闪客) (flash maker), pīn kè (拼客) (partaker), wēi kè (威客) (witkey); words ended with “nán (男)” like niúfènnán (牛奋男) (Promising guy), jīngshínán (经适男) (budget husband; economic man), yǐnán (乙男) (subman).

In the above examples, either words taking “luǒ (裸)” or “bèi (被)” as a prefix or “kè (客)” or “nán (男)” as a suffix, both reveal a fact that there are rules to follow the words’ “energy”. In specific cases, the “energy” will be released according to certain rules, resulting in the effect of expressiveness and flexibility. Making use of the existing affixes, numerous new words can be created, simultaneously accepted and adopted by people. Such words enrich human being’s vocabulary while vitalizing the language expression with more energy.

3.3 Parody of Words

Parody of words is to create new words in accordance with the existing word format. “Parody of words is a highly creative way of word formation by replacing the individual morpheme that already exists in the vocabulary of the traditional language to form a new word” (Yuan, 2008). Parody of words retains the original energy of words to some extent, as a result of which the new words will be more easily accepted by the public. Parody of words can not only enhance the infectivity of network language, but also achieve the humorous or satirical effect, so that the language energy will get into full play. For example, “open-collar workers” imitating the term “white-collar workers” refer to the people working at home office. They usually work at home through the connection between work unit and the computer terminal to do remote work; some do their jobs completely at home with collar open or even no clothes. Additional examples include “netizen” coming from “citizen”, “bèn yú xiān yóu (笨鱼先游)” imitating the original idiom “bèn niǎo xiān fēi (笨鸟先飞)”, used to describe someone who is slow need to make an early start. Such parody motivates the vigor of the language while retaining the energy of the original terms. It reflects the flexibility of language manipulation. During the process of imitation and transfer, energy in language is given full play.

4. Discussion

Edwin Gentzler pointed out, “Pound’s ‘theory’ was based upon a concept of energy in language, the words on the page, the specific details, were seen not simply as black and white typed marks on a page representing something else, but as sculpted images-words engraved in stone... the translator was seen as an artist, an engraver, or a calligrapher, one who molds words” (Gentzler, 2008). It is not difficult to see that Pound’s theory of “language energy” endows the translators more freedom, emphasizing the translator’s subjective role. “Pound’s translation ideas are completely built on the interaction cornerstone of the translator’s life substance and the life substance of the source text, and the content of translation is the harmonious combination after passionate encountered of the two life substances” (Zhou, 2011). Under the guidance of the concept of language energy, the translator should correctly master what the expressions actually mean, so that its connotation embodied in the form of language can be released, leaving a person with much reflection and infinite aftertaste.

Based on the above analysis and discussion, it can be clearly seen that Pound’s view of “language energy” highlights the translator’s subjective role. In order to reflect the translator’s subjective role in the translation process in a better way, the translators should follow the following three translation principles of internet neologisms.

4.1 Understand Word Meaning Accurately, and Explore the In-Depth “Energy” Contained in Words

“Pound maintains that it’s not to deliberate the individual word in the translation process, but to make translators’ own feelings come to the role of original author, then the original way of thinking and feeling can be

condensed and epurated, and transferred into the target language” (Guo, 2002). That is to say, the translator should not only see the surface structure of sentence but to dig out its deep meaning in the translation procedure through the context. While pursuing the language style, the translators should also pay attention to the expressiveness of the original text, only in which way can the translators improve the effect of language expressiveness. Such as the eye-catching network neologism “shén mǎ dōu shì fú yún (神马都是浮云)” (everything is nothing but fleeting cloud). “fú yún (浮云)” (fleeting cloud) first comes out of Confucius’ “bú yì ér fù guì, yú wǒ rú fú yún (不义而富贵, 于我如浮云)” (Wealth and ran attained through immoral means are to me as empty as fleeting clouds). However, due to its historical background and other reasons, this word has been almost forgotten by modern people. When the “energy” in the word “fú yún” is gradually exhausted, Rongrong, a netizen of Tianya website utters “everything is nothing but fleeting cloud” and soon get quoted by millions of other netizens, as a result of which, the word “fú yún” gets back to life, regenerating tremendous “energy”. “fú yún” (fleeting cloud) not only vividly describes the facts that things go away sooner or later, and reveals the truth that nothing is eternal. It manifests the language energy when words used in a “new or less conventional way”. In the English version of “fleeting cloud”, “fleeting” means “lasting for only a short time” (Zhou, 2009), which reflects the fleeting state of things, is a perfect translation version.

4.2 Grasp the Translation Scale, and Be Flexible and Innovative

The translation quality of internet neologisms depends on how well the translators grasp the translation scale during the translation process, and try to be flexible and innovative. When dealing with the imitation words, the translator should pay close attention to the energy association between original words and new words, so as to make the translated words get more energy. Take the following words with the suffix of “zú (族)” as examples: “líng pà zú (零帕族)” (stress-free type, stress-proof type), “yīn hūn zú” (pseudo-singles) (Huang, 2011, p. 94). Based on the explanations from the Chinese-English Dictionary, “zú (族)” has several meanings: ① Clan ② a death penalty in ancient China, imposed on an offender and his whole family, or even the families of his mother and wife ③ race, nationality ④ a class of things with common features or attribute (The Chinese-English Dictionary, 2010). The explanations of ③ and ④ are the most widely used ones. Whereas, the term we discuss here actually refers to “a class of people share certain attributes”. As to the two neologisms we discuss here, direct translation based on the surface meaning is undoubtedly incorrect, instead we should make a comprehensive analysis of its “energy” in the specific language environment to get the implied meaning for accurate translation. The “líng (零)” and “pà (帕)” in “líng pà zú (零帕族)” can be understood as Arabia number “0” and the unit of pressure “Pascal” respectively. “líng pà (零帕)” means there is no pressure. “líng pà zú (零帕族)” refers to a group of people engaged in various sectors, in the face of all kinds of pressure from life and work, can still be positive and optimistic. The translation version “stress-free type”, or “stress-proof type”, is a faithful and accurate one, during the translation process of which, the translation scale has been dealt with properly, with the energy successfully transmitted from the source language to the target language. For another example, “yīn hūn zú (隐婚族)” (pseudo-singles) refers to those who have got married legally, but they would like to conceal their marriage in public. The English prefix “pseudo” is used to form adjectives and nouns that indicate that something is not the thing it is claimed to be. “yīn hūn zú (隐婚族)” is someone who is claimed to be single for particular purposes but actually not single, therefore, “pseudo” implies the intent to disguise their marital status. The translation as “pseudo-singles” is flexible but accurate in meaning, while showing the connotation and energy of the word.

4.3 Highlight the “Energy”, and Do Not Rigidly Adhere to the Language Form

It’s unwise to overemphasize the importance of a word’s superficial form when translating internet neologisms, otherwise the translation will be obscure, not to mention to get the true meaning of the source language. “Network words have a strong sense of entertainment and banter, during the translation process of which, flexible dynamic correspondence should be in pursuit, instead of going in for mechanical semantic correspondence” (Wang, 2011). For example, people call computer beginners as “cài niǎo (菜鸟)”, a popular internet neologism from Taiwan dialect referring to a novice. The geographical limitations do not hinder the language energy to take into full play. Instead, it “goes across the Taiwan Strait” with its timeless charm and a new “face” to get widely popularized by millions of internet users throughout the mainland. According to its literal meaning, if translated as “vegetable birds”, it would be ridiculous and obviously wrong. Against the background of internet and this linguistic environment, it is not difficult to get it translated as “green hand, beginner, newcomer, and freshman”.

5. Conclusion

Upon the research of internet neologisms, we can realize the huge energy contained in language. With its powerful “energy” and vitality, network language increasingly enriches our vocabulary. In the background of internet age, the unceasing appearance of network words is vivid and impressive. New specific background constitutes a new communication environment, so that the words in the specific context would burst forth infinite energy. It thus requires the translator to take full advantage of his or her subjectivity role in the translation process, to be an “artist” by adopting flexible method to make his or her art works presented to the rest of the world in the most perfect image.

In the network world, network language is incredibly active, although some internet vocabulary may suffer a fast-growing and quick-vanishing situation, like “a flash in the pan”, and become a history in the language development stage. Nevertheless, with the development of the times, various languages will be mutually influenced; network language is on its way to internationalization. It’s not hard to predicate that the Internet neologisms will, as the saying goes “No prairie fire can destroy the grass. It shoots up with the spring breeze blows”, continue to receive new energy, as stars twinkling over the sky of internet language development.

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