

A Default Semantics Study of the Chinese Network Buzzwords “Let’s Make It”

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Keywords: Default semantics, Network buzzwords, Cognitive linguistics

Abstract: Default Semantics providing a new bridge between the theories in linguistics, especially between pragmatics and semantics, lays a foundation in the interpretation of utterance meaning. The present study seeks to interpret the utterance meaning of the Chinese network buzzwords “Gan jiu wan le” (translated as “Let’s do it” or “Let’s make it”) focused more on the mechanisms of defaults in language communication and the default features of utterance interpretation.

1. Introduction

Kasia Jaszczyt, professor of Linguistics and Philosophy of Language at the Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge, proposes the theory of Default Semantics in 2005, which was published in the book *Default Semantics : An Introduction*. The theory is a new approach in the interpretation of utterance meaning, which solved the difficulty of ambiguous difference as to the research focus among the theory of semantics, pragmatics and syntax [11].

The network buzzwords, which are used by netizens when chatting or communicating online, is a newly developed kind of form of language. It has a concise and vivid form, which includes pinyin, or acronyms of English words. It was first developed among the netizens to improve their communicating efficiency or was used to realize certain needs. Meanwhile, the short video platforms, such as Kwai, Volcano video, Tik Tok, etc., which are quite popular among not only the youngsters, but older ones in China. Kinds of network buzzwords are coming out and getting increasingly popular every day or even instantly.

This is a qualitative study and the author seeks to explore and interpret the buzzword “let’s make it” under the theory framework of default semantics.

2. Default Semantics

2.1 Merger Representation

Default Semantics, which was first proposed by Kasia Jaszczyt, is a new way in discourse interpretation which is based upon the research focus of the cognitive linguistics. This theory has successfully been applied in the interpretation of how human being can understand so rapidly and efficiently others’ utterance, which in turn ensures the successful ongoing of conversations or polylogues [6]. (to refer to figure 1 Utterance interpretation)

Default Semantics combine semantics and pragmatics together which are treated on the same meaning level. The pragmatic information works as the content of truth value conditions. And on this level of meaning, the primary meaning, realized by means of merger representation, and secondary meaning are working together. The compositionality is the principle of comprising merger representation, which include word meaning and sentence meaning (WS), conscious pragmatic inference (CPI), cognitive default (CD), and social-cultural default (SCD).

WS, CPI, CD and SCD are the truth value conditions of merger representation, and the four parts are on the same level of importance with no difference. The process is dynamic, which means that concepts in human mind influences the meanings, and meanings are not only derived from concepts, also the contexts which are ever-changing probably. The four parts, including WS, CPI, CD and SCD, are dynamic and interrelated, which means that the addresser and addressee can interpret the

utterance meaning naturally and instantly. Jaszczolt points out the compositionality or merger representation of meaning in her framework, which means that in default semantics, all the relevant information should be taken into consideration when interpreting the communication content.

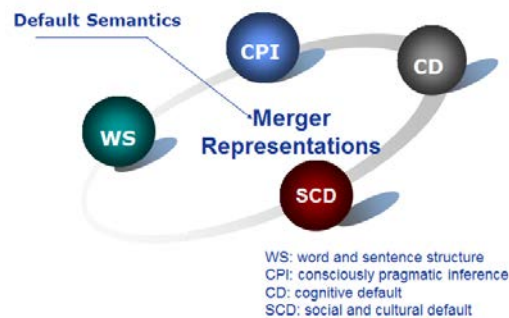


Fig.1 Utterance Interpretation

2.2 Communication Intentions

Jaszczolt classifies the communication intentions into the cognitive defaults. And the three kinds of intentions in communication, including the communicative intention, the embedded informative intention, and referential intention are proposed in Default Semantics. The communicative intention means that addresser and addressee communicate about something and produce the relevant communicative information to promote the communication. The embedded informative intention means the information itself which are embedded in the addresser's utterance. The last one, referential intention refers to the objects and eventualities in the content that the addresser and addressee communicate.

At the same time, Jaszczolt points out that the intending in communication can be weaker or stronger, and therefore, the default interpretations can be weaker or stronger also. Hence, when explaining the meaning of utterance, the strength of intentions in communication should also be taken into consideration. The cognitive defaults are closely related to human being's thinking model, which has the features of unconsciousness, spontaneity, etc. [11]. The cognitive defaults are manifested by intention, which can be distinguished with regard to the degrees. The communication intentions have the degrees of strongest, stronger, weaker, and weakest intentions. The strongest intention is the one which the addresser intends to convey, and he or she unconsciously omits some information. For example:

Speaker A: Where did you go during the holiday?

Speaker B: Boracay, the Phillipines. It's so amazing, and I enjoyed it so much!

The meaning interpretation process can be complicated since it is related to psychology and mental activities. Speaker B's understanding of utterance is activated by "Boracay, and the Phillipines", since speaker A and B are friends and share the common understanding of the things around them. Not all the related information will be conveyed in the utterance or the communication content, but omitted consciously, and which are also known by both the addresser and the addressee. The sentence "Boracay, the Phillipines. It's so amazing, and I enjoyed it so much!" can be interpreted, to some extent, fully as :

"Boracay<the White beach>, <palm trees>, <clear and clean water>, <snorkeling>, <and maybe the sunset and sailing boat>, the Phillipines<southeastern country>, <tropical area, >. <a developing country> It's so amazing, and I enjoyed it so much! <city tour>, <massage>, <lying on the beach>, <having a glass of wine>".

The list can be continued. The addresser intentionally omits the parts in the brackets, and thinks that the addressee understands the omitted parts. Or the addresser holds that the addressee can recover what he or she has not conveyed in the utterance. "Boracay, the Phillipines. It's so amazing, and I enjoyed it so much!" is the information that the addresser most intends to convey.

3. Research Design

The present study seeks to explore the interpretation of the famous network buzzwords “let’s make it”(Gan jiu wan le) under the framework of Default Semantics which is proposed by Jaszczolt. This is a qualitative study, which is also based on cognitive linguistics and the information embedded in the buzzword itself. The discussion is to be done revolving around the four components of merger representation, namely word meaning and sentence meaning (WS), conscious pragmatic inference (CPI), cognitive default (CD), and social-cultural default (SCD).

4. Discussions

In this part, the network buzzwords “Let’s make it” are to be interpreted from the perspective of default semantics revolving around merger representation and communicative intentions. Examples are to be cited in order to explore the utterance meanings.

4.1 Word Meaning and Sentence Meaning (Ws)

The network buzzwords, usually between three to six words, belong to web language or online language. They reflect the hot topics in people’s everyday life or online, which have the features like wittiness, conciseness, humor, etc. The buzzwords can get huge popularity online and even in everyday communication, because of the effectiveness in meaning transferring, and convenience in spreading.

The Chinese network buzzwords, “Gan jiu wan le”, can be literally translated into “Let’s do it” or “Let’s make it”. It is often used in the online live chatting rooms like Kwai. The host in the chatting rooms always say “Gan jiu wan le” when they ask the online viewers to give them likes or to vote for them. They hope the viewers, especially the followers to help them win the competition between the host himself or herself and the other host, and they hope the viewers and follower will not ask for why or hesitate when voting.

4.2 Conscious Pragmatic Inference (Cpi) and Cognitive Default (Cd)

Jaszczolt stands in line with Recanati, who proposes that the meaning of an utterance seems to be arrived at by the hearer without any conscious process of inferencing. The reference of pronouns, the use of default meanings, etc. are all arrived at without any evident conscious inferencing. This theorization is against the conversational implicatures. The anti-inferentialist, as mentioned by (Recanati, 2002), holds that the communication is automatic, unreflective. “Normally, the hearer believes what he is told, or at least, he gets the information that p when he is told that p. Only when there is something wrong does the hearer suspend or inhibit the automatic transition which characterizes the normal cases of linguistic communication. On the anti-inferentialist view, then, communication is as direct as perception[4].

By cognitive default, Jaszczolt intends to mean that the defaults are pertained to the way human thinks. Hence, it has to do with the theory of cognition. Intentionality, as has been mentioned in 2.2, is about the mental states, which have contents in it. According to Jaszczolt, language presents the mental states like belief, fear, which are externalized. The intentional metal states, or the mental states which have contents, include want, need, and expectation. The intentional acts can be about mental objects, real objects or whole states of affairs (eventualities) [4].

By saying “Gan jiu wan le”, the host unreflectively thinks that the viewers will vote him or her. As mentioned in 4.1, the host has the mental state of desiring to win the kinds of competitions in the online chatting rooms. It is full of expectation, and need. By say it, the host hopes that the buzzwords may encourage the viewers to vote more and also be indulged in the competition, or to boost the morale. In other words, it performs the pragmatic functions of encouragements. He or she thinks the buzzwords will make the viewer do something that they want them to do. The intentionality is usually stronger compared with other utterance, and it can be seen that when the hosts are in the live chatting room, they are always excited or even aggressive in the competition to set off the atmosphere of competition, and it is done always with the high pitch of sound along with

“gan jiu wan le”.

4.3 Social-Cultural Default (Scd)

Salient interpretations, which means that the utterance content does not require conscious pragmatic inference, are rather common. It is a natural process in the conversation or polylogues between the addresser and addressee. The addressee interprets the utterance in one way rather than the other because he knows this is the case, and it is instantaneous, and a natural flow of mind. At the same time, the addresser and addressee may share a common ground of stereotype, or common understanding of life, experience, or even knowledge. To say social-cultural defaults, Jaszczolt means that the default interpretations are caused by cultural stereotypes or social stereotypes.

“Gan jiu wan le” is usually part of the utterance “Lao tie, gan jiu wan le” and, in English it can be translated into “my brothers, and sisters, let’s make it”. The stereotype is within the focus of psychology and cognitive fields, which are not the main focus of the present study, but it can be put easily here that in the short video platforms, the stereotype for most hosts and viewers is that they are families, and they should do the things together to achieve the goals like winning the competition. And the so called right way of behaving or thinking is to help each other immediately if they are close friends or families. One thing for pity is that “There is no clear answer to this question and the only way to provide an answer would be to have access to the content of thought.” [4]. There is no such common criterion for the analysis of the content of thought, since it is so complicated. But the collectivism of typical Chinese people’s stereotype is quite obvious here, since it means that they should work together to defeat something or make contribution to the family. Therefore, the addresser and addresser can share the common ground, or the social-cultural defaults that they should win the competition together.

5. Conclusions

Merger representations reflect the fact that information from various sources contributes to the overall meaning of an utterance. The default semantics provides a new approach when interpreting the utterance meaning, and the present study is basically a new try in interpreting the network buzzwords under the framework of default semantics. For the limit of time and experience and also the limit of a quantitative study which is based on a large volume of data, the present is only a qualitative study and a try in this relatively new field. The future study should be directed towards the study of the pragmatic functions of utterance and the interpretation of the utterance meaning which is based upon the theory of Default Semantics.

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