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## **Codemeshing or Linguistic Purity: A Case Study of Wechat Language among Youngsters**

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**Abstract.** What are the specific manifestations of the codemeshing? In Wechat, how is this performance further reflected? What is the modality frequently used by youngsters? What are the characteristics of this modality and how do they realize? How do youngsters treat language? These seemingly simple questions are actually a profound discussion of social and cultural phenomena. This study seeks to solve these problems. The case in this research comes from a group of 23-27-year-old postgraduates of English major, taking the currently widely used social media---WeChat as the research platform, using case studies as research method, and Vygotsky's Social and Cultural Theory as well as the Visual Grammar under the multi-modal analysis framework as the theoretical support, with a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, tries to analyze codemeshing discourse, and conclude with the youngsters' attitude towards language to explore language development issues.

**Keywords.** codemeshing; linguistic purity; Wechat; multimodality; language attitude

### **1. Introduction**

With the rapid development of technology and the verification of communication among people, the way people talks, unavoidably takes the characteristics of diversification as well. Wechat is an application that combines text, voice, images, emoticons, hyperlink, video, etc. and thus gained wide popularity all over the world. According to the annual report of 2020 released by Tencent, until the end of 2020, the amount of Wechat monthly active user was 1.225 billion, a 5.2% increase than 2019. In addition, more than 120 million users posted moments, 360 million users read public articles and 400 million users used applets every day in 2020. As a contemporary mainstream social media application, Wechat allows all forms of languaging and there exists all kinds of linguistic codes. In light of Wechat, there are currently a group of youngsters with 3 males and 21 females aged from 23 to 27 who actively use Wechat for communication. The reason they use Wechat is the convenience for their daily life and freedom of expression. In the process of using Wechat, one that worth mentioning is the phenomenon of codemeshing, which frequently happens but is easily ignored. Owing to the occurrence of codemeshing, the world of language is refreshed and has wider space to explore. This research mainly focuses on characteristics of youngsters' languaging and how does this kind of languaging influence youngsters in the process of multimodal codemeshing.

This research is composed of seven parts. The first part is about the background, aim and significance of this research. The second part is some concepts and literature that provides

research from previous studies so as to offer a basic understanding about this research, which are code, code-mixing, code-switching, codemeshing, linguistic purity, youth language as key elements of this research. The third part is theoretical framework and research design. In this research, we mainly adopt the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Visual Grammar (VG) under the branch of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) proposed by Kress as supporting theories. The fourth part is research design in which philosophical paradigm, research methodology, research instruments, samples&data collection, research questions, ethical approval are included. The fifth part is data and multimodal codemeshing discourse analysis which includes the combination of codemeshing and multimodal discourse in Wechat. The sixth part is a brief interview concerning youngsters' attitude towards language. The last part summaries results of this research and draws conclusions.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 About Code, Codemixing, Codeswitching and Codemeshing**

In the communication of people who speak different languages, the interaction of different languages causes code-mixing to occur between and within the languages concerned. Codemixing refers to the mixing of two or more languages or language variants in a language communication. Language variants can be either languages, dialects, styles, or they can refer to individual phonetic, grammatical, or lexical items without emotional overtones. However, language variants can be misinterpreted as variants of the standard language, many sociolinguists in turn adopt the neutral name of language code, abbreviated as code, used interchangeably with language variants.

Codeswitching is a code-adjustment or a phenomenon that a speaker with bilingual background who alternate between two or three languages when the context and purposes of communication changes. Different scholars have given different classifications for code-switching. Many scholars have recognized that it is a natural product of bilingualism and multilingualism. The difference between code-mixing and code-switching is that the former happens at the level of lexical, while the latter takes place at the level of sentence or discourse. Codemeshing refers to the coverage of all varieties or styles of daily-used language. Jeroen Gevers (2018) argues that code-meshing is basically homologous with the term translanguality, which comes from the term translanguaging that covered a wide range of fields of research, like pedagogy, art, music, daily and special-used communication, etc.. Ryuko Kubota (2020) also treats code-meshing with the same as translanguaging, plurilingualism, etc.. Even one term "code segregation" come into being, trying to replace the meaning of codeswitching. It seems that the use of codemeshing enjoys more preference than codeswitching. Sánchez Martín (2013) holds the view that codemeshing applies more on the discourse level while code-switching the syntactical level, codemeshing is pragmatically more suitable for written communication. Michael-Luna and Canagarajah (2007) explains that code-meshing is an act of resistance against the so-called 'standard' language. The phenomenon of codemeshing is frequently discovered and analyzed in the context of teaching, writing, which is comparatively formal (Alyssa G. Cavazos, 2017). Studies so far give less attention to language users in the context of social media languaging like QQ, Wechat, etc. that is not that formal. Therefore, this research intends to fill this gap.

### **2.2 About Linguistic Purity**

There have been several studies about the purity of language, among which two systematic ones are Srinivas (1952)'s study of Coorgs, as well as Harper (1964)'s study of the Havik Brahmins. Both of them studies in a way of analyzing and constructing a semiotic system based

on the study of the purity of semiotics. Besides, in her book *Purity and nature*, Mary Douglas(2003) argues that humans have different classification systems in different domains and pollution is something that is not in a certain classification system. Therefore, purity and pollution are relative. Susan S. Bean(1981) does a structural semantic analysis of both linguistic purity and pollution, offers a semiotic framework for linguistic and non-linguistic codes as symbols of culture. Through the study of United Arab Emirates(UAE)'s linguistic landscape, Wafa Zogbor, Sarah Hopkyns & Peter John Hassall (2018) finds that English and Arabic is a binary representation of linguistic purity and lacks complexity and dynamics.

### **2.3 About Youth Language**

LEPPÄNEN, SIRPA (2007) studies youth language in electronic hip-hop lyrics, game session, fan fiction, weblogs, argues that their language is full of creativity and is a way of constructing identity. Smith-Hefner, Nancy J. (2009) examines an informal Indonesian youth language and finds that it is the representation of Indonesian youth's desire for the sense of belonging in society. The studies now focus on the linguistic forms and functions of youth language, however, there are few research on how their language evolve and how they treat their language.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This research chooses Sociocultural Theory(SCT) proposed by the famous psychologist Lev Semnovich Vygotsky (2012) (Vygotsky in short henceforth) and the Visual Grammar(VG) under the branch of Multimodal Discourse Analysis(MDA) proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) as theoretical framework.

Once the human being is integrated into cultural products, activities and concepts, lower biological functions are reorganized into new, unique human mental systems. It is customary to refer to this as sociocultural theory in the field of second language acquisition. The theory focuses not on the generalized social or cultural environment in which individuals live, but on the important role that sociocultural factors play in the learner's unique cognitive development process. That is, SCT emphasizes that human cognitive development is the result of the interaction between the mechanisms within the individual and the sociocultural environment. The process of second language acquisition is the process by which learners use psychological tools (e.g. language) to carry out social communication activities and regulate their cognitive abilities.

Since the 1980s, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory has gradually become one of the active theoretical schools in the field of foreign bilingual acquisition studies. There are four basic concepts contained in this theory, which are Mediation Theory, Internalization Theory, Zone of Proximal Development Theory and Activity Theory. The Mediation Theory is at the heart of the whole theory. One of the ideas is that the interaction of the individual with the external world is not direct, but indirectly mediated by physical tools or symbolic/psychological tools created by human historical culture (e.g. language). Vygotsky also argues that language is the most universal and powerful cultural artifact that humans possess, and that humans use it to mediate relationships with the world, others, and themselves. Through the use of language, people try to connect with the outside world and express their thoughts, opinions and attitudes. Therefore, the SCT is applicable to this research.

About language attitude, Crystal (1994) argues that language attitudes are the representation of one's feelings about language they or other people use and are strongly influenced by cultural environments in which social and political factors play an important role.

The concept of linguistic purity is actually a reflection of language attitude and has deep historical and economical background.

Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) proposed by Halliday is the foundation of discourse analysis. After that, rapid development of modern society fastened the occurrence of multiplied modes of communication, from texts to images, pictures, sounds, emoticons, videos, audios, and so on. Thus, attention is not only paid to textual language, but also other modality potentials. At the beginning of 1990s, Kress and Van Leeuwen became the initiators of the theoretical framework of VG. Like three functions in SFG, VG also contains three aspects of meanings: representational, interactional, compositional meaning. The “representational” meaning means that symbols can represent the relationship between the world and an object, it includes narrative process and conceptual process. In detail, the narrative process includes actional, verbal, reactional and mental process. The conceptual process includes classificational, analytical and symbolic process; the “interactional” meaning is the reflection of the viewers, the image makers and the objects that the images refer to. Four aspects are included in the interactional meaning: “contact”, “social distance”, “perspective”, “modality. “Contact” means the relationship between the one who utters and the one who receives discourse. There are three scales of intimacy in “social distance”: close-up, medium and long-shot. Horizontal and vertical perspective are composed in “perspective” that in a way reflects the readers’ attitudes to the images; the compositional meaning is achieved by information volume and salience; “modality” represents the authentic degree. Kress argued that the image is distributed from left to right, top to down, centre to margin and known to unknown.

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, the construction of meaning is realized in four levels: the discourse level, the design level, the production level, the presentation level. The first two level is achieved by language, the third and the fourth level is achieved by modern technology. Due to the limited resources, this research only focus on the first level, that is, the discourse level.

#### **4. Research Design**

A content analysis will be conducted from the perspective of MDA. This research mainly focus on the phenomenon of codemeshing in one of the modalities among text, voice, images, emoticons, hyperlink, video used by youngsters. In this part, philosophical paradigm, research methodology, research instruments, samples & data collection, research questions, ethical approval will be included.

This research adopts the interpretivist philosophical paradigm that regards knowledge of the world as inevitably affected by the observer. More specifically, the perception of a complex world is achieved by studying the experiences and perspectives of the people who live in it, and it is the researcher’s task to understand, interpret and reconstruct these concepts and meanings through scientific means and language.

This research adopts the method of case study, both descriptive and explanatory. It is descriptive since the aim is to describe the phenomenon of codemeshing within the context of Wechat. At the same time, it is explanatory since we explore the inner characteristics of this phenomenon and how does it realize through what kind of approach, as well as how do they treat this phenomenon or language. This research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. The quantitative ones include the frequency of modalities youngsters used in Wechat communication(text, voice, images, emoticons, hyperlink, video, audio). The frequency of modality usage is statistically recorded. At the same time, the qualitative ones come from participatory observation and unstructured interview that used as the tool of research.

In this research, the samples were collected from a group of Chinese youngsters aged 23-27, 3 males, 21 females. The participants were postgraduates of English majors of the Jiangsu University of Science and Technology who actively use Wechat for one-to-one communication, group chatting, as well as posting moments. They come from different provinces, take one elective course from Japanese, French and German. That is to say, all of them were multilinguals, meaning that they are able to communicate in at least three languages. There were three males and twenty-one females. The qualitative data collected for the research were the online group chatting records and postings on Wechat moments with a longitude of two months. The reason why we choose online discourse is that we are able to break the confinement of time, space, and the collection of most part of data in this research is more convenient than offline communication. This research shows the participants' usage of language that reflects several characteristics of their languaging and their language attitude towards multimodal codemeshing or language.

By case study of youngster's language in the context of Wechat at the content level, the author attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the specific manifestations of code-meshing?
2. In what way does code-meshing become remarkable? What is youngsters' highest frequency of modality usage? What are the characteristics of this modality and how do they realize?
3. How do youngsters treat language?

Concerning ethical approval, this research ensures the participants' identity and privacy in any research. Therefore, participants' personal information will not be told or known by any third party. All of the messages will be kept confidentially.

## **5. Data and Discourse Analysis**

Since participatory observation is used as a major tool for qualitative analysis in this research, it's important to observe, record and analyze the authentic content of communication in Wechat. According to the research questions put forward above, the author carries out the observation for two months.

Youngsters, in pursuit of communicative purposes and unique effects, tend to break through the constraints of the traditional code-style and deliberately go beyond the framework of code-specific norms to subtly borrow, assimilate and integrate other codes, resulting in the phenomenon of code-meshing. The phenomenon of codemeshing, which is discussed in this research, refers specifically to words that are generated by youngster's exposure to multiple cultures in an online context and that permeate their daily lives. Specifically, the phenomenon of code-meshing has the following specific manifestations.

The first type is the blend of two languages. In terms of word composition, most of these words are made up of a combination of two languages; in terms of characteristics, they are simple, clear and fashionable, responding to the fast pace of life, but also closely related to the most popular things of the day, and are particularly popular among young people, like “你有freestyle吗”, “出了bug”, “打call”, “we are伐木累”, “母胎solo”, “duck不必”, “C位出道”, etc..

The second type is homophonic words which includes arabic numerals as writing symbols, words in a language as writing symbols, as well as the mixture of numbers and words.

Languages used in Wechat are characterized by a duality of vivid creativity and clutter. One important reason for this is the flexible use of rhetorical devices that allow new words to

be added and old words to give new meaning. Harmonic sounds and metaphor are considered to be the two most prevalent forms of word construction in Wechat.

The first sub-type is arabic numerals as writing symbols. In the language of Wechat used by youngsters, arabic numerals are an important signifier that can be used to express meaning by means of harmonics, metaphors, etc..The phenomenon of harmonicization of ordinary words with arabic numerals as writing symbols is called the network digital harmonic phenomenon. For example, “778” means someone tries to find something to eat, “886” means goodbye, “8147” means someone is asking for another’s forgiveness.

The second sub-type is words in a language as writing symbols. For example, “ICQ”is the harmonic sound of “ I seek you”, “CU” is the harmonic sound of “see you”, “LOL” is the harmonic sound of “laugh out loud”. The number of words that correspond to a language with such harmonics of one language is not extensive in Wechat, both because the two languages may belong to different linguistic families and because the construction of such words requires a certain degree of linguistic competence and knowledge.

The third sub-type is the mixture of numbers and words. In the use of WeChat language, words which consists of a mixture of numbers and letters is highly subjective, with harmonics and acronyms being the main features. For example, “I服了U” means “I’m convinced by you or your act”, “U1S1”means “to be honest”, “F2F” means “face to face”.

The third type is an acronym for one language instead of another. For example, “thx” means “thanks”, “nmsl means “never mind the scandal and liber”, “Vtuber means “Virtual YouTuber”, “Vlog” means “video log”.

The fourth type is a mixture of words and symbols in a language. For example, “T\_T” means “with tears running down”, “U\_U” means “not in a good mood”, “QAQ” means “sad”.

Besides, the multimedia discourse in new media is increasingly taking shape. Whether one-to-one communication or group chat, moments, youngsters frequently use multiple media such as video, audio, text, images, voice, emoticons, hyperlink, etc. to realize multimodal representations of their discourse. In contemporary WeChat communication, the multimodal use of discourse mainly relies on video, audio, text, images, emoticons and so on, supplemented by the phenomenon of codemeshing, to connect people’s visual and auditory, so that the communication is more remarkable.

In order to better understand the situation of multimodal codemeshing, the author records the youngsters’ frequency of modality usage. After 60 days, 1125 effective Wechat corpuses were collected.

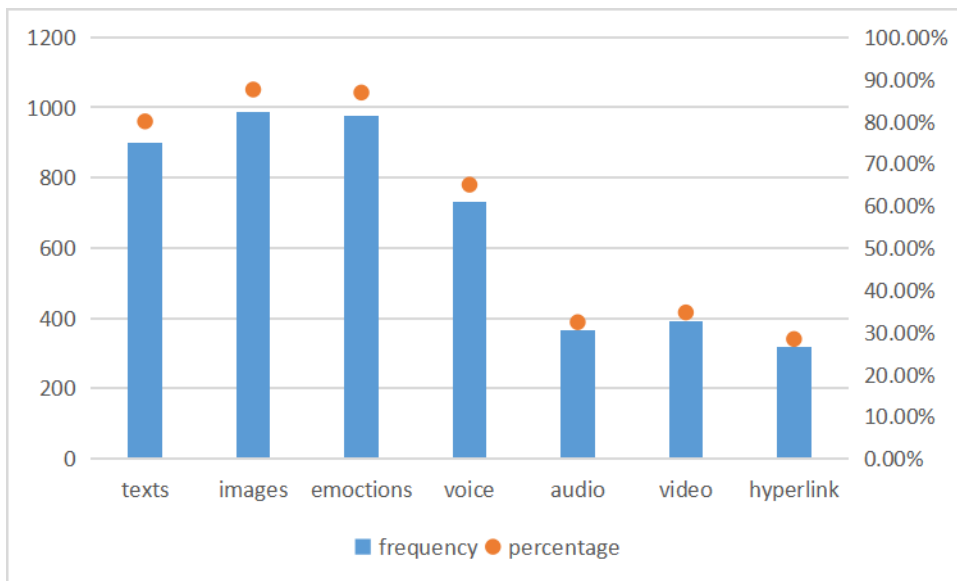


TABLE The frequency of modality used in Wechat communication

By multimodal analysis of Wechat communication, the features and functions of each modality are presented. From table, we can see the statistical modality frequency. The image modality occupies the largest part in communication. Because of the space limitation, we just analyze the image modality and other modalities are suggested to be analyzed in a further study.

Compared with pure textual modality, the image modality is more vivid and expresses more information. It has several characteristics.

First, it is ideographic. With the help of text, the image enhances the function of text and describes information in detail, this often happens in moments when someone expresses feelings about something in the form of photographs.

Second, it is grammatical. That is to say, this modality can be analyzed by the VG proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen.

In the representational meaning, a “vector” is a sign of an image which is formed by a sharp diagonal line. In the actional process, “vector” actions as a verb. From the corpus collected, the author finds that images contain actional process. The image below represents “cheer up”.



In the reactional process, participants gaze with each other’s eyes directly. Thus, the

FIGURE 1 为大大打call！！

“vector” is composed. The people below in the image is staring at someone.



FIGURE 2 你有freestyle(即兴说唱)吗

In the mental and verbal processes, it is a little bit difficult for us to find direct connection between image and the words on the image, but the sentence itself is continue reflecting what the participants are saying or thinking about, see the image above.

The interactional meaning contains four aspects: “contact”, “social distance”, “perspective” and “modality”.

By “contact”, there are mainly two kinds: “demand act” and “offer act”. A vector is accomplished when one participant asking for something from another participant. For example, it is obvious that the image below means someone is asking for help from other people.



ball ball你了帮我一下吧

FIGURE 3 ball ball你了帮我一下吧

The establishment of “social distance” is realized by shooting methods of the image. The “close-up” distance indicates that there exists an intimate relationship between participants, usually realized by showing participants’ head or shoulder. The “medium” distance is the indication of formal and impersonal relationship, and the “long-shot” distance represents non-intimate relationship. The image below shows the intimate relationship between participants.



We are 伐木累

FIGURE 4 We are 伐木累

By perspective, we mean that someone will have a sense of symbolic power, depending on whether he/she looking up or down. The image below means the one being looked at is superior than the one who looks.



look up on 大佬

FIGURE 5 look up on大佬

The “modality” means the authentic degree of an image. Generally speaking, color saturation is positively correlated with the modality of the picture. Take the image below for example, the image below on the left side is less realistic than the image on the right side.



FIGURE 6 I服了You(left and right side)

## 6. A Brief Interview about Language Attitude

In the above part, we mainly used visual grammar to analyze the language of youngsters in Wechat, recognizing the usefulness of visual grammar in explaining the influence of cognition on one's behavior (embodied in language).

Language attitude refers to one's evaluation of the value of a certain language. One's attitudes towards language have a very important influence on the development of language in the future, because he or she is the user and transmitter of language, once language loses its value and meaning, it is bound to die out. In this process, youngsters are playing an significant role. The phenomenon of multimodal codemeshing in Wechat communication has opened up a new era for people to communicate. For the better use of Wechat, we need to understand what youngsters really think through a random, short and unstructured interview. Here are some opinions.

"As far as I'm concerned, code-meshing has little difference with code-mixing. They are terms with the same nature. In order to develop a language better, it's more important for the country to formulate appropriate policies." (Nancy's narrative)

"The so-called code-mixing, code-meshing, etc. are representations of language innovation in different periods. No matter how language develops, it's important to keep and follow some regularities, instead of allowing for totally free development." (Candice's narrative)

"Codemeshing may be the advanced version of code-mixing, maybe with more changes on lexical, syntax, grammar, etc. I think we should hold an open attitude towards language development, try to use and make more creative words as possible as we can." (Sophia's narrative)

"Why not use non-verbal language to communicate? To be honest, I feel uncomfortable when staring at the screen and typing several meaningless verbal languages. It's quite unnatural. I mean, why not communicate face to face?" (Oscar's narrative)

"The development of language should be in a balance, that is to say, it cannot be allowed to go unchecked, nor can it be forcefully interfered with. Only by the localized policies and approaches can one language in harmony with others." (Vivian's narrative)

## 7. Summary and Conclusion

This research uses the mixed methods to investigate the inner characteristics of phenomenon of code-meshing itself, its representations in the image modality, which is the most frequently used modality among youngsters in this research, as well as how these representations are understood through the medium of language, which relates to sociocultural linguistics. However, due to limited space and other resources, this study only briefly analyzed the image modality, other modalities are hoped to be further studied.

Language is a powerful tool. It has various forms, codes, develops richer meanings with the help of multimodality. As the advancement of globalization, the development of language will continue to be in a mutual state, instead of independently. And the so-called “purity” of language is relative. By the use of language, people try to connect with the outside world and express their thoughts, opinions and attitudes.

**Notes:** Due to limited space and because the “compositional meaning” of images is not quite remarkable in Wechat communication, this study only briefly analyzed the “representational meaning” and “interactional meaning” of the image modality.

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