

# A Lexical Pragmatic Study of Network Buzzwords: Taking Rock & Roast 5 as an Example

Zhiruo Zhu

Shandong University, Jinan 250100, China.

---

**Abstract:** Network buzzwords and stand-up comedies have been analyzed by linguists separately from different aspects. But few studies explored network buzzwords from the perspective of lexical pragmatics. Inspired by Wilson's theory of Lexical Pragmatics, this study investigated the application of network buzzwords in Rock & Roast 5 to explore the distribution of pragmatic narrowing and broadening and further analyzing some classical examples while trying to draw the conclusion regarding the shared value and knowledge needed in the process of understanding these words. Specially, the case study selected 50 network buzzwords and both quantitative and qualitative methods have been adopted to analyze these words. The study found that, in network buzzwords, nouns and metaphors are the most common types in pragmatic narrowing and broadening respectively. Meanwhile, it identifies the general functions and the shared knowledge required for different forms of pragmatic enrichment in stand-up comedies. Implications are manifold that this study helps enrich the practice of lexical pragmatic theory and facilitates people to learn more about the process of understanding network buzzwords combining with relevance theory. It also sheds light on how to involve in the shared value embedded in buzzwords among the young group and how to avoid misinterpretation.

**Keywords:** Lexical Pragmatics; Pragmatic Enrichment; Stand-Up Comedy; Network Buzzwords

---

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, stand-up comedies have sprung up quickly in China with the rapid development of the Internet. Among them, leading ones like iQIYI's "I Can I BiBi", Tencent's "Rock & Roast" and Youku's "Mars Intelligence Agency", all have powerful effects among young people. This newly emerged entertainment helps release the pressure of nowadays fast-paced life and share strong sympathetic values satisfying the young's taste.

The huge popularity of Chinese stand-up comedies has attracted many scholars' attention. They try to explore the underlying reasons behind the success from perspectives like Mass Communication, Linguistics and Science of International Politics. Among these lines of research, studies involved in the field of linguistics pay much attention to the text, analyzing discourse by applying theories such as Principle of Politeness, Cooperative Principles, and Humor Effect. However, there are few studies focusing on the lexical level in stand-up comedies, network buzzwords in particular. As stand-up comedies develop and gradually form their unique culture, in this process, numerous buzzwords have been created or subtly applied, and then spread, finally achieved attracting increasing flow and inspiring hot discussions.

In view of this, the present study aims at investigating the application of network buzzwords from lexical pragmatics by taking Rock & Roast 5 as an example, which has analyzed through connecting the context, the logical information and encyclopedic knowledge in the communication, and then revealed the shared value presented in those words. With these objectives, deeper discoveries on the enrichment of lexical encoding and decoding can be better explored, which can help fulfill the application of lexical pragmatics in linguistics, and supplement the future transmission of Chinese stand-up comedies.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Lexical pragmatics is a new branch of linguistics. Lexical-pragmatic processes such as narrowing, broadening and metaphorical extension are originally studied in isolation from each other when the theory was first put up in 1998 by Blutner, while later relevance theorists (Wilson & Sperber, 2007) applied the Relevance Theory to lexical pragmatic research to make it a unified approach. So far, lexical pragmatics has been mostly applied in English Teaching, Translation or Advertising Strategies, leaving huge space for further exploration. As a thought-provoking theory researching into concepts and word meanings, it plays a significant role in conceptual categorization and cognition.

Taking Wilson's theory as the theoretical foundation, this study analyzes the selected network buzzwords from Rock & Roast 5 by focusing on lexical pragmatic enrichment while using relevance theory as interpretation framework. In understanding the contextual meaning of words based on their linguistically encoded sense, more efforts need to be made to think through the pragmatic process.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods with reference to corpus. The initial step involves identifying network buzzwords, of which the selection standard refers to those words with high recognition on websites of Baidu and Weibo. Following the data collection process, a statistical analysis and logical classification were conducted.

In the collected network buzzwords, narrowing of above types occurs 23 times in total. Pragmatic broadening appears more often, reaching 31 times, in which metaphor occurs most often.

Table 1 Types and Frequency of Pragmatic Narrowing

| Pragmatic Narrowing | Frequency | Total |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| Pronouns            | 5         | 23    |
| Nouns               | 9         |       |
| Verbs               | 6         |       |
| Adjectives          | 3         |       |

Table 2 Types and Frequency of Pragmatic Broadening

| Pragmatic Broadening | Frequency | Total |
|----------------------|-----------|-------|
| Approximation        | 2         | 31    |
| Category Extension   | 9         |       |
| Hyperbole            | 4         |       |
| Metaphor             | 16        |       |

#### 3.2.1 Pragmatic narrowing

Typical examples are presented for further analysis of the narrowing of nouns and verbs:

(1) 脱口秀女王 Queen Mother of Rock & Roast (Wang Siwen)

In example (1), Queen mother is a title limited to a specific comedian Wang Siwen, who has participated in stand-up comedies for more than 8 years and has won many awards. Out of favor and compliment, the fans gave her this unique title. The nouns are narrowed down to a definite referent either to a person or an object. People who are involved in this process of understanding lexicon are drawn closer the distance by acquiring the same background knowledge.

(2) 量子纠缠 Quantum entanglement (it is used to describe some people who were so tightly entwined)

In example (2), this buzzwords should be taken literally to understand its meaning. This word in the context actually refers to the image of two people hugging together like amorous couples. In real life, few people know the word "quantum entanglement", only to find it sound familiar for this word was once reported in a theory winning Nobel Prize. The familiarity here is made full use of and then endowing a new meaning. When people hear it, they need to respond to it quickly according to the context and their knowledge. Generally speaking, these deviants frequently happen for different purposes and they are generally close to the encyclopedia meaning with delicate design to call on the target audiences' interest and attention. Due to the vagueness or ambiguity caused by this lexical deviance, the audiences are required to involve more efforts in relevance transformation, thus leaving deeper impression and long-lasting memory.

#### 3.2.2 Pragmatic Broadening

Below are the examples for analyzing the broadening of hyperbole and metaphor:

(3) 绝绝子 Marvellous/breathtaking

In example (3), the used superlative words in hyperbole achieve pragmatic broadening. The usage of superlative expressions shows such a strong feeling that the audiences will instantly get the meaning without much efforts. These words usually come with obvious tones and vivid actions. In example (3), the speaker said it with a thumb and a big exaggerated smile. Rendering the atmosphere is distinctly important for the stand-up comedians on the stage. Making people laugh is their primary job, thus preparing a good environment can help

do the warm-up. Exaggerated words and behavior in most situations can achieve comparatively positive effects. Apart from that, when speaker uses hyperbole, it can more sharply and deeply reveal the core value that he or she wants to convey, and at the same time strengthen the listeners' ability to imagine and associate things. People do not need much efforts to understand the words specifically but more likely to remember the tones, the words and the gestures altogether for a long time.

#### (4) 职场小于号

Translation: the less-than sign in the workplace (people in the workplace who always flatter the boss like the less-than sign opening to the boss)

In example (4), the speaker compares the toadies in the workplace to the less-than sign by first setting up a vivid example and adding analogies and metaphors to describe certain groups of people. The sign depicts those snobbish ones who take advantages of subtle words and evasions and even try to find a scapegoat for the managers and bosses. By relating to the less-than sign with those people, people get the similarity and the irony. The distance between the audience and the speaker is shortened. Once the metaphor is understood, a common sense will be formed and good impression will be left on the speaker. Metaphorical mapping bears semantic and pragmatic functions. The metaphors in stand-up comedies achieve great effects and they are the main subject for achieving humor. It also achieves the economy of language with just necessary relevance association.

## 4. Conclusion

This study tries to make a systematic and comprehensive illustration of pragmatic enrichment in the given context. Based on the collected network buzzwords, the thesis mainly discovers the distribution of pragmatic narrowing and broadening and explains the specific word meanings in their respective contexts through the process of pragmatic enrichment. The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

First, according to the data, it is shown that the nouns in pragmatic narrowing appear most commonly while metaphors are used most frequently in pragmatic broadening.

Second, through a qualitative analysis, this study explains some typical examples to conclude the effects of pragmatic enrichment in stand-up comedies. These effects can be roughly concluded that they mainly focus on humor, self-mock, irony, attention-trigger, memory strengthening and anti-pressure.

Last, in the communicative context, the semantic meaning of a word deviates from its own coded or archetypal meaning, which, in return, the audience needs to make pragmatic adjustment based on the current cognitive concepts so as to understand the meaning of the word after pragmatic expansion.

This study tries to make up for the gaps of the application of lexical pragmatics to some extents. It supplements the interpretation of network buzzwords' dynamic meaning in stand-up comedies and discovers the functions of pragmatic enrichment such as arousing attention and emotions, strengthening memory, creating humor and so on. Moreover, this paper provides systematic ways for the target audiences to learn about the process in understanding the buzzwords and help to avoid misunderstandings or derogatory usage in the future.

## References

- [1]Adetunji, A. (2013). The interactional context of humor in Nigerian stand-up comedy. *Pragmatics*. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA), 23(1), 1-22.
- [2]Filani, I. (2015). Discourse types in stand-up comedy performances. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 3(1), 41-60.
- [3]Fischer, K. (2000). *From cognitive semantics to lexical pragmatics: The functional polysemy of discourse particles*. De Gruyter.
- [4]Greenbaum, A. (1999). *Stand-up comedy as rhetorical argument: An investigation of comic culture*.
- [5]Wilson, D., & Carston, R. (2007). *A unitary approach to lexical pragmatics: Relevance, inference and ad hoc concepts* (pp. 230-260).
- [6]Ling Y. 2010-2019, the network buzzwords research [D]. Central China normal university, 2022.
- [7]Wang J. A conceptual integration analysis of metaphorical Humor in talk shows. 2015. Zhejiang University, MA thesis.